

June 11, 2001

Ralph A. Wolff  
Executive Director  
Western Association of Schools & Colleges  
985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100  
Alameda, California 94501

**RE:** Response to WASC Final Report of Evaluation Team  
Date of Comprehensive Visit: April 3-6, 2001

Dear Ralph:

With a deadline of just one week, it is impossible to offer a detailed response to the Final Report from the WASC Evaluation Team for the meeting of the Accrediting Commission on June 21. We shall therefore take this opportunity to make some preliminary remarks about the Report and the process that produced it, and we will provide a more extensive response later after the campus has had time to consider the Report and its recommendations.

In general, the WASC process of review, represented in part by the Final Report, was at best a mixed experience for UCI. Our interaction with the Evaluation Team was generally positive and productive once they arrived on our campus. Evaluators met with a wide range of faculty, staff, students, and administrators, and the team seemed genuinely interested in identifying the strengths of our campus pertaining to the themes designated for review. In areas where they felt we needed to improve, most evaluators were supportive and encouraging, rather than merely being critical. Most of the Final Report reflects this general spirit of collegiality, and we appreciate the extent to which the specific recommendations are compatible with current campus practices while identifying areas in need of improvement. Particularly helpful are those recommendations that encourage our recent efforts to coordinate all levels of planning on our campus and to centralize that process where appropriate; other recommendations have already generated discussion about ways to integrate assessment more systematically into our reviews of academic programs and into more general planning decisions.

Not all of the Report is so helpful, however. We are most concerned about the remark on p. 7, where the Report acknowledges our claims to have a diverse student body only "so long as one understands 'diversity' literally and not as a term meant to indicate the presence of historically under-represented minorities" (p.7). It then goes on to claim that the team found "little consciousness about and sensitivity to the needs of multiple, diverse groups at UCI" (p.16). At UCI, we do in fact understand the term "diversity" to include all of the ethnic and racial groups present on our campus, not just those considered "underrepresented." We strongly object to the Report's implied dismissal, for example, of the extraordinarily broad and significant contribution of our Asian students and faculty to the intellectual and cultural diversity of our campus. Of course we must do better at increasing the number of historically underrepresented students and faculty, but the assertion that we are somehow unaware of or insensitive to these groups is misleading and offensive. It is also contradicted by the fact that this year we were more successful at recruiting underrepresented students than any other campus in the UC system. We are therefore especially grateful that elsewhere in the Report our efforts on this front are recognized and appreciated: "The team wishes to make special mention of the extra efforts to increase the diversity of the undergraduate students. UCI is meeting its goals for diversity as witnessed by a 48% increase in the admission of underrepresented minority students for the Fall 2001 class" (p.37).

Some aspects of the process leading up to the Report were also problematic. We certainly share the evaluators' sense that an ideal "accreditation exercise useful for mature, top-quality institutions has yet to be found" (p. 2). We hope that the new procedures will be more consistently productive than the one we followed, and that they will render most of our specific problems with the process moot. Nevertheless, some of the problems we experienced with the process of review deserve comment, if for no other reason than they help explain some of the questions raised by the Final Report.

Among the more specific problems we encountered, the first and most significant was a failure on the part of WASC to provide adequate guidance and advice during the review process prior to the comprehensive visit, despite our repeated requests for advice, direction, or at least examples of what was expected. Once we began a dialogue with the evaluators, the review became more productive, but by then it was too late to revise the self-study to reflect our better understanding of its intended purpose and the expectations of its audience. Thus, from our perspective, the difference between what the evaluators criticize as weaknesses in the self-study, and the strengths of the actual practices they found once they arrived on our campus, is not so mysterious, and it must be attributed in part to inadequate direction and leadership by WASC itself.

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Some of that confusion and misperception might have been alleviated if more of the evaluators had come from institutions that more closely resemble UCI. Some difference in experience and perspective can be helpful. Unfortunately, wide disparities in our institutional missions and experiences led many of us involved in the review on both sides to approach the process with very different assumptions and expectations, at times without even being aware that the differences existed. At our request, WASC did add two members to the team to help address this issue, but the principle of peer review, understood in terms of institutional parity, should guide the composition of any team from the beginning. That would help prevent misunderstandings, and it would enhance the credibility of the process.

Sincerely,

Ralph J. Cicerone  
Chancellor

c: Michael Clark, ALO  
Michael Gottfredson, EVC