July 6, 2007

Dr. Paul Zingg
President
California State University, Chico
400 West First Street
Chico, CA 95929-0110

Dear President Zingg:

At its meeting on June 20-22, 2007, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team that conducted the visit to California State University, Chico (CSU Chico) on March 7-9, 2007. The Commission also had access to the Capacity and Preparatory Report prepared by the University prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you. Your comments were most helpful.

The framework for the visit was based on previous Commission recommendations and on the outcomes stated by the University in its Institutional Proposal. The Commission letter of June 27, 1996 cited a number of recommendations for institutional engagement and improvement. These recommendations included, among others, the need for the following:

- Strategic budgeting and performance indicators supporting the transition to a learning-centered environment;
- Institutional support for the use of technology as a distinctive element of a CSU Chico education;
- Continued efforts to build a multicultural and multiracial community and provide a diverse student body with the “Chico Experience;”
- Good leadership and communication among all constituencies in the process of implementing objectives.

The Institutional Proposal attempted to address many of these issues through a number of initiatives to improve and advance the institution by focusing on:

- Critical success factors for each of the strategic priorities in the Strategic Plan;
- Campus-defined institutional performance indicators;

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• Campus process of academic program review;
• Student engagement at a residential campus;
• Innovative use of technology in the delivery of the General Education and major curriculum.

In visiting CSU Chico, the team found “a vibrant and healthy institution with many admirable qualities.” It commended the University for its “strong community and the remarkable commitment of the faculty, staff, and administration to student success.” The team was impressed with the strategic plan and with how it is “integrated into important aspects of university function, such as allocation of resources for new initiatives and review of faculty for tenure and promotion.” It also commended the University for its “strong, collaborative, and experienced staff, which is committed to providing superior support systems that promote engagement and student success,” and for its students who “feel strongly about their role as active citizens within the Chico community” and who “take great pride in their ability to work in teams.” The team applauded the quality of civic engagement at the institution and the University’s role as a “major force in economic development, the arts, and support of K-12 education” in the “North State.”

The Commission endorsed the findings and recommendations of the Capacity and Preparatory Review team and urged CSU Chico to give them full consideration. In addition, the Commission highlighted several areas for the institution to address at the time of its next review:

**High Quality Learning Environments: Academic Programs, Faculty and Staff Resources, and Assessment of Student Learning.** CSU Chico has developed a good process for academic program review and the assessment of student learning. However, according to the team, “evidence of the degree to which program assessment and learning outcomes assessment is taking place is inconsistent.” The establishment of the All-University Responsibility for Assessment [AURA] Committee has been a positive development, but there is a concern that there is a “lack of widespread progress on analysis and interpretation of data” and a “lack of evidence that data are routinely used for programmatic improvement.” This will need to be remedied by the time of the Educational Effectiveness (EE) Review, by which time there is an expectation that assessments of the University’s General Education Program, the First-Year Experience Program, and all degree programs will be well underway, with evidence of student learning outcomes and effectiveness presented. The visiting team also found that the University “needs to find ways of identifying and committing resources to the program assessment initiative in order to support that initiative and to implement the inevitable changes that will emanate from” the various assessment endeavors.

Thus, while the Educational Effectiveness Review will focus on educational results and effectiveness, it will also be important for the University to demonstrate that it has put into place the infrastructure for ongoing, comprehensive and systematic assessment of student learning, that support is given for faculty and staff to develop the capacities to assess and use data effectively, and that students are also engaged in this process.
High Quality Learning Environments: Superior Support Systems for Students. As was mentioned above, the visiting team was impressed with CSU Chico’s student support systems and staff. It probed the meaning of the “Chico Experience” and recommended that the institution “invest in a unique opportunity to build first-year learning community programs by carefully articulating the aspects of the Chico Experience that enhance student affinity for the community and that support academic success.” The team also supported the partnership between Academic and Student Affairs as beneficial student success. Furthermore, given the overwhelming numbers of students who live on campus, it called for formalizing the “linkage between the curricular and co-curricular” in the residence halls to provide a “truly distinctive residential learning community.” It also called for a “long-range deferred maintenance plan and refresh plan for the residence halls” and a “housing master plan ... compatible with the University’s enrollment plan....” The Commission expects that a housing master plan, with a timeline for developing additional housing and strategies for working with the off-campus community on housing-related issues, will be a component of the Educational Effectiveness Review.

The lack of diversity in the student body [as well as among the faculty and staff] continues to be a problem facing CSU Chico. As the team reported, some progress in this area has been made, and the University has made diversity a major priority. Nevertheless, “there are still significant concerns about the climate in the community, and recruitment and retention of minority students, faculty, and staff.” The team recommended that the University “consider articulating the need for increased diversity as more than merely equitable access, as important as that is; it is critical for the education of all of CSU Chico’s students, since interaction with a community of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives is intrinsic to the comprehensive university experience and essential for success in an increasingly multicultural and globalized society.” Evidence of continued attention to and success in the area of diversity will need to be an integral component of the EE Review presentation.

Learning-Enabling Resources, Integrated Technology, Information Management Systems, and Off-Campus Programs. According to the visiting team, CSU Chico has “achieved many successes in the integration of technology” into academic life. “In addition, information technology is helping to provide more effective linkages between academic and other administrative functions on campus ...” However, as in other areas, “performance measures for information resources and technology at CSU Chico will need to be refined for the Educational Effectiveness Review.” Additionally, it will be important for the campus to document that, in terms of student attainment of learning outcomes, “online and other distance modes are the educational equal of face-to-face learning on campus.”

Serving the Needs of the North State. There is abundant evidence of the significant activities of the University within its North State service area. Areas of institutional endeavor run the gamut from student engagement and intellectual and educational engagement to economic, artistic, and environmental engagement. Especially noteworthy are endeavors in the area of
student service learning and civic engagement. However, the visiting team was struck by the fact that these latter activities, though happening “at a level that would be the envy of most campuses,” do not appear to have an overall focus. This lack of focus led the team to ask a number of questions: “Why doesn’t Chico identify these activities as a hallmark of a Chico education? Would it not be possible to show highly positive learning outcomes from these experiences? Does[n’t] it make sense to encourage even more students to participate?” These are excellent questions and ones for which answers should be sought as part of the preparation for the Educational Effectiveness Review.

**Strategic Planning and Resource and Data Alignment: Towards Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability.** CSU Chico has structured a well-developed strategic plan with priorities that are embedded in everything the institution does. As importantly, the strategic plan does influence resource allocation decisions throughout the institution. The University, however, needs to establish performance indicators related to each of the priorities of the strategic plan, and to implement an assessment plan demonstrating successes in meeting anticipated outcomes. The results of this assessment endeavor should be presented as part of the institution’s Educational Effectiveness Review.

The team felt that the University had not yet developed a “true culture of evidence through a university-wide strategic management plan.” It urged the campus to “improve the manner in which it attests to its achievements” throughout the academic, co-curricular, and non-academic arenas of the institution. All of the major divisions of the University would profit from comprehensive program review and from a more organized approach to data gathering, analysis, and use of findings and conclusions for programmatic and institutional improvement. Implementation of the Enterprise Knowledge Management Initiative, being developed as a system to use technology to support the assessment of student outcomes and institutional effectiveness, would be a concrete and extremely beneficial step in this direction.

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review team and continue the accreditation of California State University, Chico.

2. Proceed with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review in spring 2009. The Institutional Presentation is due 12 weeks before the review.

3. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the issues raised in this action letter and the major recommendations of the Capacity team report in its Educational Effectiveness Report. This may be done by referencing where these responses are in the Table of Contents or in an addendum to the Report.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to Chancellor Charles Reed in one week. It is the Commission’s expectation that the team report and this action letter will be widely
disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution’s response to the specific issues identified in them.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: John Welty
Charles Reed
Arno Rethans
Members of the team
Richard Giardina