

June 27, 2003

Larry Vanderhoef
Chancellor
567 Mrak Hall
University of California, Davis
Davis, CA 95616

Dear Chancellor Vanderhoef:

At its meeting on June 19-20, 2003, the Commission considered the reports that were prepared by the Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review teams that visited the University of California, Davis on December 4-6, 2002, and March 11-14, 2003. The Commission also had access to the University's Proposal, the institutional presentations for the two reviews, and the University's response to the integrated report following the Educational Effectiveness Review, dated May 23, 2003. Your participation and that of the two University co-chairs of the review, Vice Provost Patricia Turner and Professor Joe Kiskis, was appreciated. The dialogue was helpful in understanding more fully the impact of the University's self-review and the team reports.

The University of California, Davis' Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Review reports were transitional reviews conducted under the *2001 Handbook of Accreditation*, with UC Davis' Proposal reviewed and accepted by staff, and the Educational Effectiveness Review scheduled to follow the Preparatory Review by one semester. The University used a presentation format of narrative essays with extensive accompanying links to data, reports, studies, and other documentation linked to the UC Davis website.

In conducting the Preparatory Review, the University described resources, structures, and processes and reflected on a number of challenges. The Presentation delineated the significant strengths and considerable assets of the University. The visiting team noted that UC Davis benefits from the prestige of the University of California system and the substantial support of the state of California. UC Davis was found to function with clear and

explicit purposes, high levels of integrity and fiscal stability, and a commitment to quality teaching and learning. In the Educational Effectiveness presentation, the University chose to use the special themes model to organize its self-study and, in so doing, focused primarily on two selected areas: undergraduate research and educational technology. Both have been areas of evident strength for the campus, and the presentation described many creative initiatives, considerable resources, and the serious attention given to each of these areas. At the same time, the format of the Educational Effectiveness report tended to focus more on description and less on inquiry and self-analysis leading to substantive recommendations for improvement.

The Educational Effectiveness team report noted a campus environment that is student-centered, with a climate of openness and teamwork “that is rare in large public or even private universities.” The partnership of student affairs and academic affairs was cited as an example of collaborative working relationships on campus, and other examples were commented on in the team report. The report characterized UC Davis as being a university that has “consciously high academic standards that are clearly self-reflective.” There is evidence that good teaching is assessed systematically and supported with ample resources. The Commission commends the University on providing a rich, rigorous, involving, and supportive environment for its students.

The University has a longstanding record of outstanding accomplishments and impressive strengths. Its size, and the organizational structure and resources required of a “multiversity,” means that the University is an institution with significant complexity. Given this complexity and the tradition of decentralized administrative functioning, the team highlighted two overarching challenges for the University that will enable it to solidify its strengths more effectively and assure that its effectiveness extends systematically across the campus. The first challenge is for the University to become more articulate about the skills, abilities, and knowledge it expects of its graduates. The University has laid a strong foundation this year with its draft of University-wide educational objectives and its “20/20 Strategic Vision Statement.” These documents will assist the University in coordinating and prioritizing its many initiatives.

The second challenge is for the University to align its considerable institutional research activities to become more knowledgeable about what students are actually learning and to build results of this assessment into the new strategic planning process so that improvement strategies might be identified, prioritized, targeted, and funded. Again, there is a foundation with the draft “20/20 Strategic Vision Statement” metrics. The team believed, and the Commission concurs, that attention to the widespread articulation of learning goals and the incorporation of the results of

student-learning assessment into the strategic planning process would have significant value in enhancing the well-established excellence of the University.

A number of other reflections and recommendations were offered by the evaluation team in both of its reviews. The Commission endorses these recommendations and, in addition, highlighted the following areas for institutional consideration:

Planning and Improved Coordination. The Commission commends the University on its progress in addressing the planning challenges described in the last visit and the 1997 Interim Report. The University-wide planning process has been reinvigorated under the new Provost with new committees and structures. The Preparatory Review team report noted that the Academic Plan is guiding annual budget decisions and providing coordination and growing synchronization for institution-wide decision-making. There is evidence of cross-campus communication and collaboration in these processes.

The team commented that the new planning process gives the University the capacity to align multiple initiatives and ongoing practices and build synergy between them. With the process and structures now in place and the planning process evolving, there is opportunity to think strategically about connecting and prioritizing various initiatives for the improvement of student learning. The team's recommendation termed this "connecting the pieces": aligning the many initiatives underway to create a more cohesive internal action agenda.

Many of the planning documents reviewed by the team were new and still in draft stage, and the University will need to review the new core planning documents, such as the university-wide educational objectives and the "20/20 Strategic Vision Statement" to ensure that they include important areas such as undergraduate research, information literacy, and general education. As suggested by the evaluation team, designating priority and providing resources for these areas could have a significant impact on the improvement of the educational experience of students.

Student Learning and Assessment. The University has a strong foundation for assessing and improving student learning: committed faculty, strong institutional research capabilities, an evolving planning process, and appropriate structures for faculty dialogue within a highly collegial academic environment. In addition, significant attention is paid to the quality of classroom teaching and the effectiveness of individual courses. Less evident, however, is the attention paid to the cumulative learning of students to assure that University and programmatic learning objectives

have been achieved at the time of students' graduation. The visiting team noted that while there are some notable centralized surveys, self-reports of learning, and topical studies, assessment of student learning is not yet part of campus academic expectations. The University has not yet integrated disparate data into systematic evidence that is aligned with its most important questions about effectiveness, nor has it developed a framework for raising such questions, although the planning process holds the promise of doing so.

The plans for incorporating student-learning assessment into all program reviews are just unfolding. The team noted several recent initiatives to discuss learning objectives and assessment and research in faculty governance structures and administrative teams, with the Chancellor's Fall Retreat being the most notable of these opportunities. Expanding such cross-departmental conversations where information about approaches and results is shared, current efforts are evaluated, and ongoing initiatives are coordinated and integrated, would permit the University to know whether the kind and level of learning that it would like to occur is in fact happening. Many team suggestions bolster UC Davis' approaches to assessing and improving student learning: Incorporate assessment of student learning systematically in all program reviews (now in the planning stages), use campus-wide student survey data more effectively in program review, employ trend and benchmark data more extensively, integrate SARI and other research and services more effectively across campus; and coordinate better analytical talent and information. The Commission urges UC Davis to consider these ideas as possible approaches to enhance its efforts in this important area.

Special Themes of Undergraduate Research and Educational Technology. In its Educational Effectiveness Review, the University chose two consequential and cross-cutting topics. UC Davis has undertaken an extensive array of initiatives in the theme areas of undergraduate research and technology that have made possible significant educational and scholarly advances. The University has benefited from its decentralized approach to innovation in these areas yet, at the same time, the team points out that it would be valuable for Davis to determine how best to coordinate and communicate such initiatives to extend their usefulness and create more powerful synergy across the University.

The Commission recommends that UC Davis give careful consideration to the eight summative team recommendations to further University distinctiveness and achievements in these two areas, understanding that cost implications may hinder full development of some. With regard to undergraduate research, the team found a

“clear commitment” to advancing undergraduate research “as a campus priority” and a number of strong programs designed to achieve this goal. The team urged the University to consider how research should be incorporated into the undergraduate experience of a premier research University and to articulate the research skills and abilities that the University expects of a UC Davis graduate. Consideration of this issue would enable UC Davis to align and map a sequence of research offerings, provide students with purposeful, progressively more challenging and integrated educational experiences, and establish greater distinctiveness and recognition for its provision of research opportunities for undergraduate students.

With regard to educational technology, the team report noted the increasing impact of technology on both the content and delivery of the curriculum, and commended UC Davis on the support it provides to faculty who wish to use technology in their courses. Similar to undergraduate research, the team recommended that the University develop more formal expectations for technology and information literacy, connect them to the University’s learning outcomes expectations for students, and incorporate evidence of their achievement into the University’s strategic planning and budgeting processes.

General Education. The Commission understands that general education has been a longstanding issue over the last decade within the University and in the relationship between the Commission and the University. The team reports for both the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews noted developments such as the provision of a general education philosophy statement in the Catalog, educational objectives for general education, a more cohesive general education structure, additional general education courses, and a standing faculty senate committee that is responsible for the general education program. The development of the General Education Scholars Program and the course clusters are also noteworthy advancements. The Commission notes that in the University’s response to the team report that general education objectives have also been incorporated into a number of non-general education courses and projects. The Commission commends these strong efforts and the progress that has been made to improve the University’s overall approach to general education.

At the same time, the visiting team noted that the University is still unable to demonstrate student achievement in its stated general education objectives, core learning abilities, and competencies. In adopting the new Standards of Accreditation, the Commission rewrote the Standards to provide for greater flexibility in approaches to general education. It did, however, retain the expectation that all students will

graduate with significant general education experience as represented by Criterion for Review 2.2 and its accompanying Guideline. In addition to identifying specific outcomes or elements of the general education program expected of all baccalaureate graduates, the Guideline for 2.2 reflects the underlying values held by the Commission regarding the need for general education to be a substantial experience represented by the normative expectation of 45 semester units or their equivalent and the need for the program to be integrated throughout the curriculum, including at the upper-division level.

The team report described the current policy (now under review) that allows students to double count courses taken under the breadth, writing, and diversity requirements and expressed the team's concern that it is theoretically possible for a student to graduate with only six courses, or 24 quarter units, chosen carefully to double count requirements. The team report states "Even recognizing that general education skills and knowledge are not acquired solely and exclusively in general education courses, no member of our team believes that UC Davis graduates should enter their careers with as few as 24 general education units. Moreover, we would be surprised if such students were as well prepared as their peers, or as prepared as they need to be." Further, in the Commission Panel discussion, members of the Commission expressed their concern that a UC Davis student could theoretically graduate without taking a single math class or, in another scenario, without a single science course. The absence of these content areas from a student's transcript would undermine the intent and underlying philosophy of general education.

While UC Davis has made substantial progress in addressing general education, it bears the responsibility of demonstrating that its graduates consistently achieve the learning outcomes appropriate for a general education program through the various approaches it has taken, and that the proportionality of general education is reflected in students' actual experiences, even by alternative means from the current general education program. The Commission has consciously chosen to focus on general education at this level of depth in its action because the principles involved are more than meeting a specific metric of required credit hours, general education represents a core Commission value for all accredited institutions and directly related to the meaning and quality of the baccalaureate degree.

The Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm the Accreditation of the University of California, Davis.

2. Schedule the Preparatory Review in fall 2012 and the Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2013. The Proposal for the two-stage review is due on May 1, 2010.
3. Request that eight (8) copies of a progress report be submitted by November 1, 2006. The report should describe the progress made by the University in addressing the issues raised in this letter about general education, the implementation of the new planning process and guiding documents, and the systematic assessment of program and University learning objectives. Enclosed is a memorandum providing guidance on the format and content of a progress report.

In taking this action, Commission confirms that the University has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness and has successfully completed the multistage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress and be prepared to respond as expectations of institutional performance, especially with respect to Educational Effectiveness and student learning, further develop under the application of the Standards of Accreditation.

In accordance with Commission policy, we request that you send a copy of this letter to President Richard C. Atkinson.

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

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

RW/brn

cc: James R. Appleton
Patricia Turner
Members of the team
Elizabeth Griego

Enclosure