



December 18, 2007

Jolene Koester
President
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330

Dear President Koester:

At its December 12, 2007, meeting a panel of the Proposal Review Committee considered the Institutional Proposal from California State University, Northridge, for its next reaffirmation of accreditation review. Members of the panel asked me to express their appreciation for your participation in the telephone conference call, and for that of your colleagues Harry Hellenbrand, Provost, Vice President Academic Affairs; Jennifer Matos, Faculty President, Professor of biology; Elizabeth Say, Dean of Humanities, Steering Committee co-chair; Michael Neubauer, Professor of Mathematics, Steering Committee co-chair; and Cynthia Rawitch, Associate Vice President, Undergraduate Studies and ALO. Your collective responses to panel questions and comments were helpful in assisting them to understand your institutional context and the approach of your proposal for the comprehensive review.

In acting to accept the proposal and the timeline for review, the panel commended the University for its well-written and thoughtful presentation. In particular, the panel found the description of the institutional context to be very clear, engaging, and revealing of an historic commitment to improvement. The selected themes flow consistently from the history and vision of the institution. The panel observed that the structures and resources related to improvement appear to be embedded in the organization. It is clear that the WASC review is aligned with anticipated improvements across the entire institution and is also aligned with the planning of the CSU System. Significant progress has been made in setting and assessing Student Learning Outcomes since the previous WASC review, indicative of their broad implementation across the institution.

The panel also noted evidence of engagement with all major stakeholder groups in the development of the proposal, both to validate the selected themes and to solicit the input of major categories in setting the goals of the review. The institution shows evidence of strong capacity; even in a time of financial constraints from the state budget, CSUN appears to know how to prioritize and deploy the finite resources it has.

985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100
Alameda, CA 94501
PHONE: 510.748.9001
FAX: 510.748.9797
E-MAIL: wascsr@wascsenior.org
INTERNET: www.wascweb.org

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The panel would like to offer the following guidance in the interest of focusing the University's subsequent research and analysis and to make the work of the review teams more effective as they undertake the review.

The Steering Committee should continue its work by refining the three themes – in particular, by showing how each of them is in fact threaded across both the CPR and the EER. This task may be aided by preparing a matrix that identifies the focused research questions under each theme, the methods that will be used to obtain the needed information for each researchable question, and the manner in which the findings (i.e., the “deliverables”) will be produced for each, then spread these categories across both reviews. The research questions it then forwards to each of the related Research Tasks Forces (RTFs) will be more clearly aligned with the overall themes and will sustain inquiry across both reviews. The RTFs should then be encouraged to weigh their research question against the WASC Standards and CFRs to ensure that both the institution and the site teams are evaluating the institution against these criteria.

The RTFs should also be given an appropriate scope of freedom to narrow and prioritize their large number of research activities in the service of doing fewer things well rather than doing too many things superficially. The themes are ambitious and hold great potential but risk over-extending the energies of the institution over the lengthy period of the review process. The panel wishes to commend the institution for the very sophisticated methodology it envisions for conducting this self study.

The proposal now becomes the framework for the accreditation review process and represents a plan of action and commitment by the institution. The proposal will be shared with the visiting teams for both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review, and with the Commission following each review. It is understood that adjustments in the activities undertaken under the proposal will be made as implementation occurs. Major changes to the proposal, such as in the direction or focus of institutional activities for the accreditation review process, are to be approved in advance by Commission staff. The timeline for the review will remain with the Capacity and Preparatory Review in spring 2010 and the Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2011. As you prepare for your Capacity and Preparatory Review, please plan to attend the upcoming CPR workshop held during the WASC Academic Resource Conference (ARC) in April.

We wish you well and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Ingrid Walker
Assistant Director

Cc: Cynthia Rawitch, Associate Vice President/Undergraduate Studies, ALO
Proposal Review Committee