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July 7, 2006

Richard R. Rush  
President  
California State University, Channel Islands  
One University Drive  
Camarillo CA 93012-8599

Dear President Rush:

At its meeting on June 22-23, 2006, the Commission considered the report of the WASC Capacity and Preparatory Review Team that visited California State University, Channel Islands (CSUCI) on March 6-8, 2006. The Commission panel also had access to the report prepared by CSUCI for this visit. During their deliberations, the panel found it helpful to speak by conference call with you; Theodore D Lucas, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; and Dennis Muraoka, Special Assistant to the President for Institutional Effectiveness. Your comments were useful in understanding the institution's achievements and challenges.

The Commission notes that CSUCI has been engaged in accreditation-related activities consistently since its opening. The University was granted Candidacy for Accreditation by the Commission in February 2005; planning for this accreditation review began almost immediately thereafter. In this context, the team that arrived on campus in March 2006 was pleased to find the University vitally engaged in accreditation processes. As reflected by the team, CSUCI has largely embraced the WASC processes and values for its own sake rather than merely for compliance with external requirements. This approach toward the value and use of accreditation standards and processes for self-reflection and improvement appears to have served the institution well.

The team found much to commend at CSUCI. The excitement of creating a new institution "out of whole cloth," with freedom to be innovative, still pervades the campus and provides an energizing counterbalance to the exhausting work of having to build virtually every structure and process for the first time. The significant level of faculty involvement in these efforts, and the respect with which the institution regards its senior leadership, were noted often by the team and warrant Commission commendation as well. The team praised CSUCI,

as a distinctive place of exceptional quality within its defined mission impressed and concerned the Team. The passion,

commitment, and tireless energy of the members of this special academic community are apparent—even tangible—in every aspect of our observations. If the Team were grading for effort, this group of people would get an A+. . . Given what is happening at CSUCI—and needs to happen—we were, and remain, in awe (Team Report, p. 44).

It should be noted that the expression of concern in the preceding quotation relates to the team's apprehension about how the enormous level of creative energy that has been invested to this point can be sustained in the years ahead. Though it appears to the team that the driving vision and values that have shaped the institution have been largely embedded into the culture of CSUCI, they are also aware of the risks of exhaustion and of the temptation \* for efforts to relax once external drivers have become more distant. The Commission urges the institution to develop strategies for ensuring that the commendable commitment and creativity commended now will be found five and 10 years hence.

As required by WASC, the institutional report for the Capacity and Preparatory Review for Initial Accreditation was organized around the Standards. It also included a well-organized response to issues brought forward from the Candidacy review. The team found that the institution had taken previous recommendations seriously and had made notable progress in addressing them. Based on the institution's report and the team's on-site analysis and verification, the Commission commends a number of notable achievements at CSUCI:

**Managing Rapid Growth.** With enrollments scheduled to grow by 400% in 10 years, and current enrollments already running 30% ahead of projections, CSUCI has already demonstrated a remarkable ability to stay ahead of a wave of new students and to create an exceptionally innovative and comprehensive academic experience. Beyond student enrollments, this growth is also reflected in the recruitment and orientation of significant numbers of new faculty and staff, the creation of new academic programs, and the transformation of physically attractive, historic (though not academic) buildings into a congenial campus. Creating attractive faculty and student housing, forging alliances with many community resources, and building effective administrative and academic infrastructures represent some additional aspects of this rapid growth that appear to have energized the spirit of the community.

**Living the Mission.** The team found an impressive degree of articulated unity surrounding the distinctive mission and character of CSUCI. There is a high degree of acknowledgement that key values, such as civility and respect, openness to diversity, collaboration in creation and problem solving, the tireless pursuit of excellence, and even "interdisciplinarity," are all regular and expected parts of the campus conversations. The Mission Statement has touched persons in all stakeholder categories and has been instrumental in focusing what might otherwise have become frantic and disconnected. Many link the mission to their sense that CSUCI exemplifies high degrees of ethical practice, civil discourse, respect for common humanity in both formal policies and informal conversations, and the emphasis on cultural diversity and multiculturalism in planning and practice across the institution.

**Student-centeredness.** When given the opportunity to post anonymous email comments to team members, students used the occasion to express, in all cases, "overwhelmingly positive" comments about the quality of the faculty and academic programs and the sense that the institution was committed to meeting their needs. The team found students eager to share their excitement about being in a place that had planned comprehensively and effectively to encourage their learning.

**Academic/Student Services Collaboration.** To a degree seldom experienced elsewhere, team members found a very effective collaboration between the co-curricular and the academic units of the institution. Student services units fully participate in setting and assessing student learning outcomes. In particular, the use of a Co-curricular Portfolio has had a striking impact on students as they have become more aware of, and intentional about, those learning outcomes that happen beyond the classroom. When combined with a skilled advising staff that has engaged with more than 75% of all students, extensive service learning opportunities aligned with academic goals, dormitory-based learning communities, learning-oriented multi-cultural activities, and a widely integrated whole-person wellness plan, the campus practices the notion of integrated learning at a remarkable level. Student services units hold themselves to the same rigors of self-assessment and program evaluation as are practiced among the academic units, obtaining key performance data upon which to make decisions about improvement. The Commission commends this collaboration as a promising practice to share with other institutions in the region.

**Faculty Commitment.** The team observed that the quality and spirit of the CSUCI faculty begins with the innovative and aligned recruitment protocols in which numbers of applicants are brought together for performance-based interviews. In this context, competencies and concepts such as collaboration and interdisciplinarity are observed by current faculty. Successful applicants (a small percentage of the large numbers seeking employment at CSUCI) are thus welcomed into a justifiably proud cadre of faculty with similar values. The team report is replete with observations about the extraordinary commitment and talent of the faculty, and about their tireless efforts in creating *ex nihilo* a new kind of academic institution. Knowing how critical the role of competent and dedicated faculty is to the continued success of the institution, the Commission joins with the team in commending the CSUCI faculty for its commitment, expertise, and accomplishments.

**Support for Faculty.** Both faculty and administration reported exemplary commitments on the part of the institution in support of professional growth and development activities for faculty. As illustrated by the effectiveness of the Office of Faculty Development, the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, and library resources specific to these goals, faculty are significantly supported in their engagement with new pedagogy, institutional service, participation with professional associations, and in research and creative activities. These activities are also viewed as appropriately linked to the institution's RTP policies and practices. The stability of the CSUCI faculty since the founding of the institution attests to the supportive environment.

**Academic Innovation.** Part of the excitement associated with the founding of a new institution, as expressed by both students and faculty, stems from the institution's freedom

to launch curricula in novel directions, as may be prompted by the emerging expectations of a globally integrated world. The team saw the concept of "interdisciplinarity" as a defining characteristic of the CSUCI academic vision, that holds tremendous promise that is already being partially realized. Linked with funded endeavors of the Center for Integrative and Interdisciplinary Studies, this academic stance is supported by scholarly efforts to enhance the understanding and practice of learning that not only cross over but also integrate theory and application of learning among the disciplines. When combined with integrated service learning in many courses, students can further strengthen linkages between their classrooms and the surrounding communities. The Commission commends the degree to which these academic innovations are coming to fruition in powerful ways at CSUCI.

**Assessment of Learning.** The institution has, from the beginning, endeavored to ground its academic programs by defining stated learning outcomes for students at the course, program, and institutional levels. While still a "work in progress," this demanding discipline is being further supported by extensive faculty development workshops on competencies and strategies related to assessing those outcomes and using assessment data to improve learning. The team noted that vigorous discussions continue on campus regarding the alignment of specific courses with program and institutional learning outcomes, and on the most appropriate means for assessing outcomes in a truly interdisciplinary manner. The Commission commends these activities, and urges CSUCI to bring them to an even higher stage in time for the Educational Effectiveness Review (see Recommendations to follow).

**And others . . .** The team report shines a bright light on many other notable institutional achievements—a well run library with staff who are appreciated for their vision and helpfulness, construction of a stunning new library complex, an inclusive and dynamic strategic planning process that draws input from multiple sources, a remarkably mature and productive University Advancement office that already displays aspects of a model operation, a well maintained physical plant that is becoming visually attractive at every turn, the creation of the Martin V. Smith School of Business and Economics, the multicultural and foreign language graduation requirements, and (once again) respected executive leadership that somehow manages to stay intimately connected with all aspects of the institution. For all of these reasons and more, the team report inspires confidence in the future of this young institution.

The team report also identified a number of areas deserving continuing attention as the institution prepares for the upcoming Educational Effectiveness Review—and beyond. These have been framed within the team report as Recommendations, some of which anticipate consideration by the CSU System Office and the State as they plan for the future of CSUCI. The Commission urges consideration of these recommendations. In addition, the Commission draws attention to these areas for attention as the institution prepares for the next stage of review.

**Consistent Student Achievement.** As more data are available on the culminating achievements of its own graduates, the institution needs to be able to demonstrate the extent to which all categories of students are consistently achieving designated learning outcomes. By increasing engagement with actual evidences of student learning, faculty need to be able

to determine that students are achieving at a level they deem appropriate to the degree being granted. By making reference to disaggregated achievement data, the institution should be able to express a clear picture of each component of its diverse student body. Such "achievement portraits" should be able to include the experience of transfer students and be able to identify areas that may need improvement for each segment of the student population.

**Program Review.** The institution also needs to demonstrate that it is implementing purposeful, coordinated, and effective program reviews. At the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review, CSUCI will need to formalize its approaches for identifying, obtaining, and evaluating essential student achievement data and demonstrate it is using such outcomes information to formulate action plans to improve learning. The several departments, committees, and centers with responsibilities in this area need to clarify the roles and procedures of each in order to achieve a greater sense of focus in the multiple forms of assessment activities. The institution's Program Review process should include a strategy for evaluating the effectiveness of the review process itself. Program reviews should plan to include co-curricular and service units as well.

**Interdisciplinarity.** In order to optimize a distinctive characteristic of the CSUCI educational experience defined as "interdisciplinarity," the institution should demonstrate significant progress in developing reliable interdisciplinarity assessment strategies and instruments. These strategies should be able to both validate achievement of, and inform decisions about improving, outcomes in this area of learning. Such efforts would likely include a higher degree of specificity in the definitions of the intended outcomes. These assessments should at least lay the foundation for aligning criteria for faculty performance reviews associated with rewards and promotions.

**Strategic Resource Funding.** In keeping with the "Special Comment and Recommendation #5" in the team report, the Commission urges CSUCI leadership to engage with CSU System leadership and other state-level decision makers regarding strategic funding for the institution. While recognizing that the institution holds a finite level of control over this outcome, the Commission urges that there be efforts to find ways to ensure the continued development of the University during these critical founding years and the special needs of this start-up period are recognized. .

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Capacity & Preparatory Review team and continue Candidacy of California State University, Channel Islands.
2. Continue with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review for Initial Accreditation on March 14-16, 2007.
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 a recently adopted Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the Chancellor and the Chair of CSUs Board of Trustees in one week. It is the Commission's expectation on disclosure 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 about the content of this letter or the action of \*  
the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff  
President and Executive Director

RW/brn

cc: John D. Welty  
Dennis Muraoka  
Members of the team  
Richard Winn