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Mary Ellen Petrisko

July 7, 2014

Dr. Kurt Krueger  
President  
Concordia University Irvine  
1530 Concordia West  
Irvine, CA 92612-3299

Dear Dr. Krueger:

At its meeting June 18-20, 2014, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) considered the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit (AV) to Concordia University Irvine (Concordia). The Commission also had access to the self-study report prepared by Concordia prior to the Offsite Review (OSR), and to any supplemental materials requested by the team following the OSR. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and Peter Senkbeil, Associate Provost and ALO. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

The Commission expresses appreciation to Concordia for its willingness to be part of a group of eight institutions to pilot a new institutional review process in advance of the 2013 approval of the new *Handbook of Accreditation*. In this pilot, institutions were asked at an early stage to focus on several anticipated new components which had not been required previously by WSCUC in this form. Because no samples were available prior to the pilot, Concordia became a leader in addressing such areas as the "meaning, quality, and rigor of degrees" and the achievement of graduation proficiencies, thereby providing possible exemplars for use throughout the WSCUC region. The ALO Workshop at this year's ARC featured Concordia's early work in these areas related to its self-study for reaffirmation.

The team expressed appreciation to Concordia for a "clearly written and presented" report that demonstrated candor and honesty. The team found the institution to have addressed each of the required components appropriately, noting in particular several strengths and helpful suggestions for further improvements in their findings, which the Commission supports.

The Commission also supports each of the commendations contained in the team report and wishes to highlight the following areas for special recognition.

**Meaning, Quality, and Rigor of Degrees.** The Commission commends Concordia for development of a coherent connection between the institution's mission and its eight undergraduate institutional learning outcomes. The outcomes have become the center of a relatively new and highly creative core curriculum focused around the institution's faith-centered mission. In developing the outcomes, Concordia became one of several WSCUC institutions to utilize Lumina's Degree Qualifications Profile and AAC&U's VALUE

rubrics, two effective resources for help in defining the meaning of a degree. The team found that the new curriculum growing out of this work has “caught the imagination of students who are invited into a dialogue about epistemology, faith, and responsible citizenship” that is “both rigorous and effective.”

**Co-curricular Assessment.** While Concordia has improved all areas of its assessment program since the last accreditation visit, the team found the assessment being done of co-curricular outcomes to be “remarkable” as methods to verify that co-curricular outcomes are tied directly to academic goals. The Commission notes in particular that this linkage, as verified by the team, “carries the potential for a fully integrated level of assessment that is exceptional.” Some of this potential results from the reorganization of assessment from being a marginalized activity to one that is fully integrated across the university through an Educational Effectiveness Committee reporting directly to the Provost. The university has also hired one individual to unify institutional research functions.

**Student Success.** The team found that Concordia has “an exemplary commitment to student success” that will be sustainable beyond just preparing for an accreditation visit. The Commission commends the university for creating a thoughtful process for defining and assessing student success that has now become embedded into the infrastructure of the institution and is applied on an on-going basis. The team found that this commitment has also resulted in improved faculty morale, greater communication within and between departments on campus, and stronger decision-making by administration in strategic planning.

The Commission endorses the two recommendations of the team, which deal with continued financial improvement and long term financial planning.

**Financial Improvement and Planning.** The Commission commends the remarkable turn-around in financial indicators at Concordia. In 2008, when the general economy was at a low point, the university experienced a net loss of \$5.4 million, the largest loss in its history, but by 2012 enjoyed a \$3.7 million operating surplus, which was its best-ever financial result. The careful planning and diligent work across all sectors of the campus that produced this result included the sharp increase in enrollment among traditional students and in the university’s eight regional centers, which reached out to an adult population; the growth in online and hybrid courses; the reduction in faculty and staff followed by prudently increasing the number of employees when times got better; reorganization of the Business Office; and adoption by the Board of new policies designed to promote conservative financial management. The Commission supports the team’s recommendation that emphasis continue to be placed on improving key financial ratios and cash reserves to restore full financial health.

The greater financial concern found by the team relates more to two longer term challenges. Some of the increased enrollment results from increasing the student discount rate from 39.5% to 43.3%, which will drive the overall tuition rate up in upcoming years if this trend continues. The present enrollment growth will be able to support some of these increased costs, but a greater problem will occur when the traditional campus in Irvine reaches the maximum number of students allowed by the city in four to five years, which will then put pressure on the institution to have even greater growth in its graduate and adult degree completion programs. As the team notes with concern, “There is also a tendency for the resource (primarily personnel) costs related to growing programs to lag the growth of those programs, so that when enrollment (and related revenue) eventually levels out, expenses continue to grow as those resources try to catch up and achieve a level of right-sizing with respect to the enrollments.” Given these factors, the Commission strongly endorses the team’s recommendation that multi-year financial forecasts need to be

created by Concordia going out five to seven years, which will then drive the strong strategic planning process. (CFRs 3.4, 4.7)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the reaffirmation team report and reaffirm the accreditation of Concordia University Irvine for ten years, through June 2024.
2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the Offsite Review in fall 2023 and the Accreditation Visit for spring 2024.
3. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2020.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Concordia University Irvine has satisfactorily addressed the 2008 Standards and Criteria for Review in effect for this review, and has successfully completed the multi-stage review conducted as a Pilot 1 institution under processes anticipated in advance of approval of the 2013 *Handbook of Accreditation*. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is encouraged to continue its progress, particularly with respect to student learning and success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Concordia's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the Concordia's web site and widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the action letter also will be posted on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Concordia undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while assuring public accountability, and we are grateful for your continued support of our process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko  
President

MEP/ro

cc: Harold Hewitt, Jr., Commission Chair  
Peter Senkbeil, ALO  
Craig Olson, Board Chair  
Richard Osborn, WSCUC Staff Liaison