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PRESIDENT

Mary Ellen Petrisko

March 6, 2015

Dr. Philip Pumerantz
President
Western University of Health Sciences
309 East Second Street College Plaza
Pomona, CA 91766-1854

Dear President Pumerantz:

At its meeting February 18-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted the visit to the Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) October 22-24, 2014. The Commission also reviewed the university's August 2014 Special Visit report and exhibits submitted prior to the visit and your response to the team report, dated January 9, 2015. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you, Gary Gugelchuk, Provost, and Fadi Khasawneh, Chair of the Faculty Senate, at its meeting in February. Your observations were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

The Commission requested that there be a Special Visit to the institution in spring of 2013 and, subsequently, a further Special Visit in fall of 2014 to focus on two specific issues: 1) creating an effective faculty governance model; and 2) enhancing a culture of evidence and quality assurance. In addition, the university was asked to complete the Compliance Checklist.

The July 10, 2013 Commission letter following the March 2013 Special Visit stated that the Commission expected to see tangible progress in implementing a model for faculty leadership at the university level that includes, for example, an efficient senate and committee structure, clear systems for peer review, ownership of institutional learning outcomes and their assessment, setting curriculum and academic standards, participation in new program development processes, maintenance of general academic policies and procedures and participation in planning.

Further, the July 2013 Commission letter indicated that additional steps were needed regarding a better alignment of program review findings with planning efforts and budgetary allocations, improvements in the assessment plan for institutional learning outcomes, more aggressive calendaring of assessments in co-curricular units and greater clarity in tracking of assessment results and shared best practices across the university.

The Commission urged Western U to provide strong evidence of progress by the time of the Special Visit and thus demonstrate that quality assurance processes are producing data, reflection, action plans, and budgetary support for identified improvements that contribute to the university mission.

Overall the team concluded that WesternU has been “responsive” to past Commission expectations and has made “commendable progress” in systematic quality improvement and establishment “of a culture of collaboration, communication, and participation... between the faculty and the administration.”

During its time on campus, the team found much to commend:

Senate and committee structure and system of peer review. The visit highlighted changes designed to improve the efficiency of the Senate and enhance the timeliness of its activities. An extensive reworking of the Faculty Handbook, including key revisions to the Assembly voting procedures and quorum requirements, has, as the team noted, “empowered the Academic Senate to act, develop and implement policy, and conduct business on behalf of the Assembly.” In addition, the creation of three new standing committees of the Senate reflects the expanded scope of work in overseeing academic endeavors. With regard to peer review, a university-wide Promotion and Tenure Task Force has been established to foster consistency in college practices and to ensure conformity with the university’s educational mission. However, the work of the Task Force, according to the team, “is still in the nascent stages,” with implementation set for July 2015. The team reported that throughout the visit faculty provided evidence that the institution’s “cumulative efforts with respect to governance have resulted in real change.” Overall, the team concluded that the university “has engaged thoughtfully in creating a more effective Academic Senate to share in governance.”

Program review. The team noted that WesternU “has been diligently working on creating a culture of evidence that moves beyond the requirements of specialized accrediting agencies and licensure passage rates used in the past.” The university has developed new criteria for program review, as well as a new handbook and new review procedures, including review of the internal self-studies, accreditation reports and other external evaluations, and program action plans by the Senate’s Academic Standards and Policy Committee. For programs without specialized professional accreditation, the external review is conducted by a university-appointed external review team. As the team observed, “...the stringent requirements of many of the specialized bodies accrediting WesternU’s programs continue to lend themselves to constant and continual quality improvement and curricular revisions based on evidence of student learning.” Additionally, the institution has begun to implement a structured approach to the comprehensive review of its co-curricular programs. The team commended the university for being “very responsive to ensuring better alignment of program review findings with planning efforts and budgetary allocations.”

Assessment of student learning. The team concluded that the “university’s methodology of assessing student learning is an area of institutional strength.” Programs have developed many mechanisms to ensure accurate assessment reporting and the integration of approaches, analysis,

and application (closing the assessment loop). The team reported that, although new, “the university’s plans for assessing the institution-level learning outcomes appear to be well considered and promise to be effective.”

Strategic planning and budgeting. The team observed that “the new planning process is much more engaging of faculty, and it seems quite strong to the new faculty who have recently come from other institutions.” According to the team, the faculty expects to have input into strategic initiatives by ranking budget priorities within their recommendation process. Rankings will depend on the development of multi-disciplinary partnerships among programs, feasibility, revenue generation, and alignment with the science/caring/humanism mission. Overall, the team concluded “that shared governance in planning, interaction of faculty with administration, and connections between planning and budget are evolving, have occasional growing pains, but demonstrate a positive trend.”

The Commission endorses the commendations and recommendations in the Special Visit team report and identifies the following areas for attention and further development before WesternU’s Comprehensive Review scheduled for the fall of 2016.

Continue developing faculty participation in shared governance. The Commission expects WesternU to continue developing its Academic Senate structure and operations, with attention to: 1) reviewing and clarifying the roles, responsibilities and titles of the three Senate standing committees to ensure alignment of intent with committee practice and to eliminate unnecessary duplication; 2) increasing faculty engagement in reviewing academic policies and setting academic standards across colleges; 3) formalizing ways for increased and systematic faculty input into priorities for resource allocation; and 4) establishing a process for university-level review and approval of revisions to the curricula. In addition, WesternU is expected to evaluate the effectiveness of its new Senate structure and make changes, as appropriate. (CFRs 3.7, 3.10)

Continue academic and co-curricular program reviews. It will be important that, by the time of its next comprehensive review, the institution complete sufficient academic and co-curricular program reviews, assessments of learning, and other indications of quality so as to have sufficient evidence of institution-wide quality assurance. (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 2.11, 4.1)

Clarify WesternU’s policies. The Commission expects WesternU to continue to develop, review and improve its policies and procedures, with special attention to: 1) peer review of faculty; 2) faculty appointments and contracts, including multi-year contracts; 3) performance review of and succession planning for senior administrators (including the CEO); and 4) board governance. (CFRs 2.9, 3.2, 3.9, WSCUC Policy on Independent Governing Boards)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit report.

2. Confirm the scheduled Offsite Review for fall 2016 and the Accreditation Visit for spring 2017.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the governing board in one week. The Commission expects 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 these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Western University of Health Sciences undertook in preparing for and supporting this Special Visit review, especially since it followed so closely on another Special Visit only a year earlier. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while assuring public accountability, and we thank you for your continued participation in this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko
President

MEP/bgd

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Gary Gugelchuk, Provost and ALO
Richard A. Bond, Board Chair
Members of the Special Visit team
Barbara Gross Davis, WSCUC liaison