

July 17, 2014

Dorothy Leland
Chancellor
University of California, Merced
5200 North Lake Road
Merced, CA 95343

RE: WSCUC Interim Report, Spring 2014

Dear Chancellor Leland:

At its meeting by conference call on July 16, 2014, a panel of the Interim Report Committee (IRC) convened to consider the Interim Report submitted by UC Merced on March 1, 2014. The panel reviewed your Interim Report and the Commission letter of June 24, 2011.

The panel appreciated the opportunity to discuss the report with Thomas Peterson, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor; Elizabeth Whitt, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education; Christopher Kello, Interim Dean of the Graduate Division (outgoing); Marjorie Zatz, Dean of the Graduate Division (incoming); Daniel Feitelberg, Vice Chancellor for Planning and Budget; Jane Lawrence, Special Assistant to the Chancellor; Valerie Leppert, Professor and Chair of Graduate Council; Dejeune Shelton, Executive Director of the Academic Senate; Donald Barclay, Interim University Librarian; Susan Sims, Chief of Staff to the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor; and Laura Martin, Accreditation Liaison Officer, Coordinator for Institutional Assessment. The conversation was very informative and helped the panelists better understand the progress the institution has made in addressing the areas cited in the Commission letter.

The panel was very impressed with your Interim Report: it was well structured, thorough, self-reflective, and thoughtful. The panel also appreciated the candid assessment of UC Merced's current status, both in the report and on the conference call. There was much to praise including: the new MOU, which will help UC Merced reach 10,000 students by 2020; an impressive institutional commitment to assessment; an engaged and active Academic Senate, working in partnership with the administration; systematic efforts to gather, analyze, interpret and use data to improve teaching and learning; a promising ABET visit with a decision expected in mid-August; a balanced budget and other financial indicators that indicate a positive trajectory for financial sustainability. UC Merced is to be commended for these considerable accomplishments.

The June 24, 2011, Commission letter identified several areas of concern: the challenging fiscal situation at that time; the need for further progress in institutionalizing and sustaining program review and assessment of student learning; and the need for increased attention to student success. The 2014 Interim Report Committee noted meaningful and significant progress in each of these areas.

- a. Financial sustainability.** The panel appreciated the detailed information provided about the university's financial situation and noted the steps that have been taken to ensure UC Merced's continued financial stability. Under difficult financial conditions during the shift to state disinvestment in public education, UC Merced has made remarkable progress. The MOU with the UC Office of the President ensures continued special funding of Merced through 2020. UC Merced's Capital Plan recognizes the need to pursue alternative methods to deliver capital projects and the panel was impressed by how UC Merced has approached its growth plans—with analysis and careful consideration of funding options to maximize use of limited resources. (CFR 3.3)

- b. Enrollment plans.** Student enrollments are critical to UC Merced's fiscal stability. Enrollments have continued to grow and are projected to reach 10,000 students by 2020. In terms of expanding graduate enrollment, the panel was pleased to hear how UC Merced carefully analyzed its current situation; identified needed changes, such as better recruiting packages and multi-year offers of financial support for doctoral students; and set specific targets for growth—15% year over year growth—to measure success. (CFR 3.3)
- c. Assessment and program review.** The institution has substantially strengthened and institutionalized its assessment and program review processes and has used the results to make improvements. UC Merced has augmented its assessment staff in ways that embed assessment into the fabric of the institution, by placing staff at the local level, instead of centrally. The panel commended UC Merced for its growing culture of assessment, especially for encouraging faculty to document their assessment efforts as they build their personnel cases for merit and promotion and for encouraging reviewers of faculty cases to take into account assessment activities. The panel was also pleased to learn about the extensive reviews and assessment activities that have taken place in the co-curricular and administrative arena. (CFRs 2.2, 2.6, 2.7, 2.11, 4.1)
- d. Student success.** The panel commended UC Merced for its diligence in analyzing and interpreting student data to identify who succeeds and who needs additional support. UC Merced's student population may come from less well-prepared educational backgrounds, and the panel praised Merced for its considerable efforts in helping all students succeed, including implementing a system whereby all sophomores meet with an academic advisor to prepare an academic plan that places students on track to graduate. (CFRs 2.10, 2.12, 2.13)

After discussion of the progress that has been made by UC Merced in addressing areas cited by the Commission, the panel acted to:

1. Receive the Interim Report with no further follow-up required.

The panel, again, reaffirms the hard work and important steps that UC Merced has taken to address the issues that were the focus of the Commission letter. The Interim Report Committee looks forward to the institution's continued progress.

I am available to help in any way that I can. If I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gross Davis, Ph.D.
Vice President

cc: Laura Martin, ALO
Members of the Interim Report Committee