July 13, 2010

Hamid Shirvani
President
California State University, Stanislaus
One University Circle
Turlock, CA 95382

Dear President Shirvani:

At its meeting on June 16-18, 2010, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to California State University, Stanislaus (CSUS) on March 2-4, 2010. The Commission also reviewed the Educational Effectiveness report submitted by the University prior to the visit, the institution’s April 29, 2010 response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2008. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and James Strong, provost and VPAA; Russell Giambelluca, vice president, business and finance; and Diana Dematruulis, vice provost, academic affairs and ALO. The updates and additional information you provided and your observations were helpful.

The EER team, whose five members had all been on the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team some 18 months earlier, were able to observe an institution still engaged seriously in self-reflection and demonstrating improvement in student learning, even since the CPR visit. It was evident to the team that the institution’s preparation for the review was both insightful and broadly deployed. The team heard many campus members speak of the value of the self-study process and of their intentions to retain for reflection and action the various structures created for the WASC review.

The institution demonstrated significant progress in each of the three areas of focus arising from the CPR visit: the direct assessment of learning in general education; support for graduate education; and definitions and policies related to faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity. CSU Stanislaus remains an institution committed to the primacy of teaching, including a strong emphasis on undergraduate research, all of which appears to be directly linked to the institution’s noteworthy retention achievements. As noted in the team’s report, “with a six-year graduation rate of 50%, CSU Stanislaus performs better than 96 percent of the 176 CLA undergraduate institutions” participating in the Collegiate Learning Assessment. The institution is commended for setting higher achievement targets and taking initiatives to improve, and is urged to maintain these initiatives.

The Commission found the seven commendations described in the team’s report to be both salient and substantial and joined the team in affirming their positive impact on the mission of the institution. Additionally, the Commission highlighted a number of areas for continuing institutional attention:

Assessment of Learning. The Commission noted that a substantial infrastructure for assessment of learning has been established, including for general education and graduate education, and that CSUS has created appropriate linkages between assessment findings
and systematic program review. However, in view of the team’s findings that the use of direct assessment methodologies is still uneven across the various academic disciplines, the university is advised not to relax its efforts to deploy these critical methodologies more broadly throughout all departments. Such efforts should continue to include the co-curricular units of the institution as well. (CFRs 2.2, 4.4)

**Program Review.** The University has made noteworthy progress in designing and adopting systematic program review for all departments, including using both regular, multi-year cycles and annual updates. In order to build on these key strategies, the institution is urged to take the additional steps of regularly finding external benchmarks for key achievement data, bringing external reviewers into the program review process, and monitoring implementation of follow-up action plans. (CFRs 2.7, 4.4 – 4.8)

**Leadership and Governance Issues.** The Commission acknowledged that the EER was conducted at a particularly challenging time for the institution. The institution faced the impediments of state-wide budget cuts for the CSU system; it joined system-wide expressions of concern regarding the budget; it dealt with recent high turnover of academic leadership; and it needed to trim some student-related services. These held the potential to distract the institution from its evident commitments to student success. The Commission is chiefly concerned that, concurrent with these other issues, the long-simmering tensions between faculty and the senior administration have risen to levels of potential disruption to academic operations. Furthermore, the institution’s formal response to the team’s report, submitted to WASC on April 29, 2010, while providing general endorsements and role definitions for the concept of shared governance, neither acknowledged the current crisis nor identified specific strategies by which it might be successfully addressed. When combined with the potentially destabilizing impact of ongoing budgetary constraints, including the possibility of reductions in tenured faculty, these matters are of grave concern. While the Commission joins the team in being careful not to ascribe blame to either faculty or administration for the divisive environment that characterizes the campus at this time, it does, however, view the administration to be primarily responsible for fostering a climate of trust and for designing the initiative and circumstances that will provide for a resolution to this problem. The Commission therefore expects immediate, inclusive, and productive endeavors to create a climate of collaborative and effective governance at CSU Stanislaus. (CFRs 1.3, 3.11, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6. 4.8)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the team report and reaffirm the accreditation of California State University, Stanislaus.
3. Schedule a Special Visit to the institution for fall 2011 to ensure substantial progress in matters related to leadership and governance as described in this letter.
4. Request an Interim Report in spring 2015 focusing on continuing progress on assessment, program review, and leadership and governance, as identified in this letter.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California State University, Stanislaus has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the multi-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress and be prepared to respond as expectations of institutional performance, especially with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning, further develop under the application of the 2008 Handbook of Accreditation.
In accordance with Commission policy, copies of this letter will be sent to Chancellor Charles Reed and the chair of the CSU Board of Trustees 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 them. Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/rw

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
    Diana Demetrulias, ALO
    Herbert L. Carter, CSU Board Chair
    Charles Reed, CSU Chancellor
    Members of the EER team
    Richard Winn