March 7, 2012

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

Dear President Shirvani:

At its meeting February 22-24, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that visited California State University, Stanislaus (CSU Stanislaus) on November 7 and 8, 2011. The Commission also had access to the institution’s presentation for this visit and your response to the team report. It appreciated the opportunity to discuss the report with you and James Strong, provost and vice president for academic affairs; Dennis Shimek, interim vice president, faculty affairs and human resources; and Halyna M. Kornuta, associate vice president for academic affairs and accreditation liaison officer. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

The Commission’s action to reaffirm the accreditation of CSU Stanislaus in 2010 was accompanied by concern regarding ongoing tensions between the senior administration and faculty. Expressions of mutual mistrust, reported by both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review teams, were found to pose a serious threat to the otherwise effective educational programs at the institution. As the problematic nature of these relationships appeared not to have been ameliorated by the time of the reaccreditation decision, the Commission called for a Special Visit to explore progress in addressing this concern. While not ascribing blame to any parties, the Commission did ask the administration to take the initial steps toward seeking resolution. In addition to this primary area of focus for the Special Visit, the institution also was asked to provide an update on its progress in assessment and program review.

The Commission commends CSU Stanislaus for its excellent work in assessing student learning. As documented by the team, the faculty is deeply engaged in assessing learning, and program review at the University reflects best practices.

The Commission endorses the recommendations of the Special Visit team and wishes to emphasize the need for continuing attention to the development of an effective working relationship between the administration and faculty. The institution’s report and the team’s on-site review reveal a number of purposeful initiatives on the part of the administration, and efforts by selected faculty members. The institution’s report also delineates a thoughtful research project designed to assess the impact of these initiatives on the climate of trust among the stakeholders. As observed by the team and documented in the institution’s own candid report, the outcomes have been modest at best, resulting in a shared recognition that much difficult work lies ahead.

The Commission recognizes that these endeavors are concurrent with, and thus impacted by, other factors affecting the institution, including severe budget cuts, labor negotiations, organizational restructuring, and differing leadership philosophies. In this context, the goal of protecting CSU Stanislaus’s productive educational environment becomes even more critical. The Commission especially supports “the good and courageous work of tenured
faculty on the Ad Hoc Trust Restoration Committee," which was singled out by the team as exemplifying a productive path forward. The outcomes from this initiative could provide a foothold on which other campus efforts might gain traction and become productive. The Commission commends the actions that have been taken and urges in the most explicit terms that these and related initiatives must not be relaxed.

The Commission particularly urges your office to play a leadership role in modeling collaboration and creating an atmosphere in which courageous conversations about divisive issues can be had with safety and mutual respect. Continuing support for, and participation in, the Ad Hoc Trust Restoration Committee could well be one expression of this effort. These difficult conversations must address historic points of tension, including the role of the faculty in strategic planning and the formalization of faculty policies dealing with retention, promotion, and tenure (RPT). In this regard, faculty must fully engage with the administration to address the challenge of establishing RPT policies that are institution-wide and include rigorous requirements that reflect good practice in higher education. (CFRs 1.3, 3.3, 3.8, 4.1)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report.

2. Request a Special Visit in fall 2014 to evaluate progress in addressing the issues that were the primary focus of this visit, especially shared governance and the campus climate, as well as progress on shared roles in strategic planning and in the formulation of retention, promotion and tenure policies.

3. Continue with the scheduled comprehensive review in the spring of 2019.

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 about this action or the contents of this letter.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/rw

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
Halyna Kornuta, ALO
Herbert Carter, Board of Trustees Chair
Charles Reed, Chancellor
Members of the Special Visit team
Richard Winn