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July 10, 2013

John L. Hennessy
President
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-2061

Dear President Hennessy:

At its meeting June 19-21, 2013, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to Stanford University February 20-21, 2013. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by the University prior to the visit, the institution's May 28, 2013, response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2010. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with Provost John Etchemendy, Vice Provost Stephanie Kalfayan, Professor of Political Science Judith Goldstein, and Professor of Electrical Engineering Brad Osgood. Their comments were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

Stanford adopted a sequenced approach to the accrediting process, using the Proposal (2008), the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report (2010), and the Educational Effectiveness Review Report (2012) to describe and conduct a series of research investigations grouped into three areas (variations in educational environments; away from the home campus; assuring fundamental skills) that span critical undergraduate programs (introductory seminars; sophomore college; undergraduate research; honors college; overseas studies; Stanford in Washington; writing programs; foreign language programs) and that address two overarching themes (the small college experience in a research university; educating students for global challenges). In addition, in its institutional EER report, Stanford described the findings of a detailed transcript analysis of undergraduate students' course-taking patterns and presented the results of a comprehensive longitudinal study of the Class of 2012 from students' first year through graduation. Parallel to these investigations was the work of the task force on the *Study of Undergraduate Education at Stanford University* (SUES), begun in 2010 and completed in 2012, charged with articulating an updated set of goals for undergraduate education and the strategies to achieve them.

The team was extremely impressed by Stanford's "remarkable pace of innovation in undergraduate education" and deemed the investigations "extraordinarily useful" as examples of "consequential inquiry." As a result of these investigations, Stanford modified existing programs (such as adding new writing

courses in the major; and shifting from a required number of courses to standards-based criteria for assessing language proficiency), but also demonstrated the wisdom to leave many high performing programs as they are. The team observed that, "the recommendations of SUES and the results of the WASC investigations should in tandem drive far-reaching changes to further improve undergraduate education."

The Commission's letter of March 7, 2011, commended Stanford for its thoughtful use of the accrediting process to examine ways to enhance the educational experiences of undergraduate students, for its advancement of undergraduate education, and for its dedication to continuous improvement. The same letter also asked Stanford to complete its efforts at building the assessment of undergraduate student learning into all departments. The EER team determined that, in the interval between the CPR and EER, Stanford's "progress has been remarkable" in addressing this recommendation. All departments have completed the assessment cycle that includes creating a program mission statement, developing student learning outcomes, identifying assessment methods and measures, selecting valid and reliable instruments, developing rubrics to measure student learning, planning for dissemination and use of assessment results, and analyzing and interpreting assessment results to make changes and improvements, as needed. The team concluded that Stanford's departmental assessment activities are "comprehensive and intelligent." The Commission commends Stanford for this outstanding accomplishment.

Overall, the team concluded, based on the CPR and EER reports and the visits, that, "Stanford is … committed to a spectacular education for all its students, is a model for the country, [and is] by any measure an institution of exceptional quality and one of the finest universities in the world." The Commission concurs.

According to the team, Stanford demonstrated ample evidence of:

- A highly developed and effective system of program evaluation for academic and student services units.
- Ongoing use of student data to make improvements in teaching and learning.
- A redesigned general education program that is broadly interdisciplinary and grounded in science and the humanities.
- Major investments in undergraduate financial aid that have led to expanded educational opportunities to enroll more students from low- and middle-income families.
- Active, rigorous and critical engagement in strengthening the educational experiences of undergraduate and graduate students.

The Commission especially commends Stanford for the following:

Promoting student success. Stanford reports consistently high undergraduate retention rates (98%) and overall six-year graduation rates (95%). Graduation rates by ethnicity and gender are generally similar (92% to 97%, depending on cohort) with the exception of Native American students (83%, N= 65). Beyond retention and graduation rates, Stanford has demonstrated a campus-wide commitment to high quality student learning and success. For example, the team observed that Stanford's specialized undergraduate programs have positively impacted students' skills ("ability to synthesize ideas, apply theories and engage in deep questions"), "scholarly habits," and "intellectual ambitions."

Establishing a culture of assessment. Stanford has developed a comprehensive system of assessment that is faculty-owned, outcomes-based, and informs decision-making at all levels of the university. According to the team, Stanford's approach to assessment adheres to the intent of the Standards, creates opportunities for reflection, and leads to results that are used "to make changes to improve undergraduate programs." The team learned how three different departments revised courses and curricula based on program review and outcomes assessment. Program review has begun to dovetail with outcomes assessment, which is crucial for the long-term sustainability and institutionalization of the assessment process. The team concluded and the Commission concurs that Stanford has "a remarkable assessment program" that is "grounded in the culture of the university."

Institutionalizing quality assurance processes. Stanford has demonstrated a commitment to ongoing self-reflection, self-evaluation, and assessment for the purposes of educational improvement. Far from resting on its laurels, Stanford continues to rethink programs and curricula in ways that reflect openness to change and exemplify continuous improvement. Academic programs, departments and schools, as well as academic support and student services units undergo regular scrutiny using a review system the team called "thorough and complex" and "rigorous and multi-pronged." Stanford has created, as the team noted, "a culture of educational effectiveness research at the level of the individual department and the university as a whole." The Commission commends Stanford for completing over the last six years a very thorough and thoughtful examination of virtually all aspects of the undergraduate experience.

The Commission endorses the commendations and observations of the EER team and wishes to highlight the following areas for continued attention:

General education. The SUES report examined breadth requirements and recommended a revitalized system of general education focusing on seven skills that represent the institution's distinctive character and traditions and that are deemed essential to an undergraduate education at Stanford. These skills include: esthetic and interpretive inquiry; social inquiry; scientific analysis; formal and quantitative reasoning; engaging difference; moral and ethical reasoning; and creative expression. Stanford has defined learning outcomes for its general education curriculum, has put in place a faculty oversight committee, and will continue with its rigorous

review of the curriculum, making changes as needed and appropriate. The Commission endorses Stanford's efforts to assess this curriculum. (CFRs 2.2, 2.6, 2.7, 4,4)

Research investigations. The Commission also endorses Stanford's efforts to continue to follow up, as appropriate, on findings from its own research investigations: continuing to track the Class of 2012 through regularly scheduled alumni surveys; working to expand opportunities for more Stanford undergraduates to participate in programs away from the home campus; aligning faculty and student expectations about the scope and nature of undergraduate research work; and delving more deeply into transcript analyses with additional lines of inquiry. The Commission believes that Stanford's traditions of thoughtful inquiry, data-driven self-reflection, and continuous improvement, combined with focused follow-up on its investigations into undergraduate learning, will ensure that a culture of innovation and educational effectiveness prevails in the future. (CFRs 2.10, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of Stanford University.

2. Schedule the Offsite Review for spring 2022 and the Accreditation Visit for spring 2023.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Stanford University has addressed the two Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness in an exemplary manner, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the 2008 Standards of Accreditation.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Stanford University'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 Stanford web site and widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement. The team report and the action letter also will be posted on the WASC website. If Stanford wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WASC will post a link to that response.

Please note that the Criteria for Review cited in this letter refer to the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation.* The *2008 Handbook* continues to be available on the WASC website at www.wascsenior.org. The next comprehensive review will take place under the Revised Standards of Accreditation and institutional review process defined in the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation.*

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work over six years that Stanford University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC 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 feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/gc

cc: Harold Hewitt, Commission Chair
Stephanie Kalfayan, ALO
Steven A. Denning, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Members of the EER team
Barbara Gross Davis, WASC Staff Liaison