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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 10, 2013

Sharon D. Herzberger
President
Whittier College
13406 East Philadelphia Street
Whittier, CA 90608

Dear President Herzberger:

At its meeting June 19-21, 2013, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to Whittier College March 12-15, 2013. The Commission also reviewed the Educational Effectiveness Review report submitted by Whittier prior to the visit, your response to the EER team report, dated May 13, 2013, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2011. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and Charlotte Borst, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, and Kate Wiley who serves on the Board of Trustees. Your comments were very valuable in helping the panel understand Whittier and its work on this reaccreditation review, and in informing the panel's deliberations.

Whittier College's institutional proposal outlined three themes, tied to its mission and core values, for this comprehensive review: (1) building community; (2) enhancing culture and diversity; and (3) promoting undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity (URSCA). Overall, Whittier effectively used the institution's internal evaluation and review processes to focus its attention on gathering, analyzing and interpreting data to make changes in these areas. The team concluded that throughout the reaccreditation process and the investigation of its themes, Whittier "did a good job of establishing a culture of evidence and continuous improvement."

The Commission's action letter of February 24, 2012, highlighted three major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: strengthening strategic planning; improving assessment in the law school; and creating a dedicated institutional research function. Whittier has made significant strides in each of these areas.

The *Whittier College 2015: Positioning Plan* (Whittier's preferred nomenclature for strategic plan) identifies four interrelated goals: to perfect a learning-centered approach for undergraduate education; to strengthen and spread Whittier's reputation; to shift the institution's business model; and to create a physical environment for learning and living to complement teaching. Specific "Hallmarks

of Success” are designed to measure achievement of these goals by 2015. The team noted that “substantial work” has been undertaken since the CPR to develop the Positioning Plan, which speaks to key institutional priorities during “a period of significant change for higher education.”

According to the team, the law school has made “considerable progress” in assessment since the CPR: program learning outcomes have been developed; assessment of these outcomes is well underway; syllabi contain student learning outcomes; and the faculty is making use of formative assessment in their courses. Especially noteworthy is the improvement in bar passage rates: 70% in July 2012. The team concluded that law school faculty members “have begun to develop a culture of assessment and evidence-based decision-making and have increased their knowledge of assessment practices dramatically.”

In terms of a dedicated institutional research function, the Commission is pleased to learn that Whittier whole-heartedly supports the notion of a new position in institutional research and that the search process is underway with an appointment expected sometime in summer 2013.

The Commission endorsed the commendations throughout the team report and wants to highlight the following areas that are especially worthy of praise:

Assessment and program review. Whittier has established key committees and “robust” processes in the areas of assessment and program review that provide, according to the team, “ongoing systems to demonstrate quality assurance” for academic and co-curricular programs. The team commended Whittier’s “substantial progress in embedding assessments in continuous evaluation and improvement at both Whittier College and Whittier Law School.” Every department has been engaged in assessment and program review at some level. Based on the evidence, the team concluded that, “Whittier College has put in place a strong infrastructure for educational effectiveness” and the “institution will be able to sustain its efforts for the foreseeable future.”

Student success. Through a variety of programs, Whittier has placed special emphasis on supporting students in the crucial first year and helping them persist through graduation. Whittier’s overall retention rate is above 80%, and its graduation rates range from 62% to 72% depending on cohort and transfer status. As the team noted, “Whittier has developed a solid body of research and findings in this area” that identify major factors influencing retention and degree completion. These data will inform the steps Whittier takes to improve its current rates. The Commission commends Whittier for benchmarking its retention and graduation rates against other Hispanic-serving institutions and comparing favorably to those institutions, while actively seeking ways to continue to improve its rates and promote student success.

Culture and diversity. According to the team, “Whittier has made culture and diversity the cornerstone of the curriculum and co-curricular programs.” Multiculturally enriching activities, courses, and programs offer students the opportunities to learn about and actively engage with culture and diversity. Learning outcomes have been established, and evidence has been collected on how students experience diversity on campus. The Commission joins with the team in

commending Whittier for providing “a full and rich experience in the classroom, in co-curricular activities, in the living environment, and in field experiences with respect to culture and diversity.”

New ecology of learning. The team praised the Board of Trustees for being “active, engaged, and supportive.” Of special significance to the Commission is a new committee established by the Board called the “Scanning Group.” This group will monitor trends and innovations in the changing landscape of higher education (what WASC calls the new ecology of learning) and, in concert with appropriate administrators and faculty, consider the implications for Whittier. The new ecology of learning is an important component of the 2013 Handbook, and the Commission commends Whittier for moving forward in this area.

Faculty, staff, and administrator commitment. The team was impressed by the personal attention students receive, the small classes taught by caring faculty, the availability of faculty outside of class, and the support provided by student service units. The dedication and enthusiasm of those who work at Whittier (both the college and the law school) were readily apparent to the team during the visit. The team concluded that stakeholders are “deeply committed to students and to the value the institution places on community.”

Engagement with WASC. In its written materials submitted to WASC over the course of two visits and during the visits themselves, the college showed responsiveness to previous recommendations and demonstrated that it “had taken the accreditation process seriously.” The Commission commends Whittier for its high level of commitment to the WASC process.

The Commission endorsed the recommendations of the EER team and wished to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development:

The Whittier College 2015: Positioning Plan. The Commission understands that the *Positioning Plan* is short-term and focused on key strategic initiatives. The Commission expects Whittier to carefully monitor its “Hallmarks of Success,” actively engage faculty in planning efforts (secure “faculty buy-in” as the team noted), and use the results of this 2015 plan to inform the process for and content of subsequent triennial plans. As stated in WASC’s *2013 Handbook*, future strategic (or “positioning”) plans are expected to show specific ways an institution will respond to opportunities and challenges as a result of a changing marketplace, a fast moving higher education landscape, and a new ecology of learning. (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

Undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity (URSCA). Whittier has made progress in developing a culture of undergraduate research and has begun to assess its impact on students’ research and analytical skills. The team concluded, however, that URSCA appeared to be “the responsibility of a small group of faculty, with no central oversight,” no institutional support for faculty participation, and no institution-wide mechanisms for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and using data about this program. Whittier will want to engage more departments and faculty in URSCA, integrate URSCA more fully into the curriculum, expand opportunities for students, strengthen the management of URSCA, and assess its effectiveness so that improvements can be made as needed. (CFRs 2.5, 4.5)

Retention and graduation data. The Commission commends Whittier for its investigations into retention and graduation rates (“its research-based approach,” according to the team) and its emphasis on early interventions and “sound organizational practices” to promote student success. The team reported some difficulty in understanding and interpreting enrollment, retention, and graduation data because they were not presented in formats typically used by colleges and universities. Whittier is expected to use the tools common in institutional research to present, analyze, and interpret aggregated and disaggregated student data, so that informed decisions can be made about student success. The Commission also expects retention and graduation data to be publicly accessible on Whittier’s website. (CFRs 2.10, 4.3- 4.5)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report.
2. Reaffirm the accreditation of Whittier College.
3. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the Offsite Review for fall 2021 and the visit tentatively for fall 2022.
4. Request an Interim Report in fall 2016 on the following issues cited in the EER team report:
 - a. Positioning Plan. For the 2015 Plan: status of the “Hallmarks of Success” and the achievement of the plan’s goals; description of faculty involvement in implementing and assessing the plan; changes in the institution as a result of the plan. For the subsequent plan: process for engaging campus stakeholders in the development of the plan; findings of the Board’s “Scanning Group;” institution’s responses to the changing higher education landscape.
 - b. Undergraduate research, scholarship and creative activity. Progress in integrating URSCA into the curriculum, expanding opportunities for students, engaging faculty and departments, managing the process, and assessing the impact on students.
 - c. Student success. Aggregated and disaggregated data on undergraduate retention and graduation, using WASC templates; web site where the public posting of undergraduate retention and graduation data can be located.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Whittier College has satisfactorily addressed the two Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is encouraged to continue its progress, particularly with respect to student learning and success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Whittier College’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 Whittier College web site and

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. The team report and the action letter also will be posted on the WASC website. If Whittier wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WASC will post a link to that response.

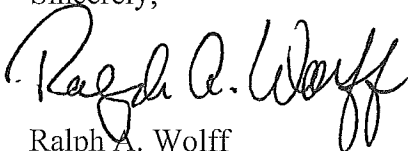
Please note that the Criteria for Review cited in this letter refer to the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation*. The *2008 Handbook* continues to be available on the WASC website at www.wascsenior.org.

As Whittier works on the issues cited above, it should be mindful of the expectations that it will need to meet at the time of its next comprehensive review, which will take place under the revised Standards of Accreditation and institutional review process in the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation*. These expectations build on past practice and will include, for example, student success, quality improvement processes such as assessment and program review, planning, and financial sustainability. However, the *2013 Handbook* also includes new foci: the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees; student performance in core competencies at the time of graduation; and institutional planning for the new ecology of learning. The college is urged to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* and to approach its challenges in ways that will address both old and new expectations.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Whittier College 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
Charlotte Borst, ALO
Richard Gilchrist, Board Chair
Members of the EER team
Barbara Gross Davis, WASC