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PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ralph A. Wolff

June 24, 2009

Robert Underwood
President
University of Guam
UOG Station
Mangilao, Guam 96923

Dear President Underwood:

At its meeting on June 17-19, 2009, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that visited the University of Guam (UOG) on March 31 - April 2, 2009. The Commission also had access to the University's Educational Effectiveness Report and your response to the team report dated May 8, 2009. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and Senior Vice President and ALO Helen Whippy. Your comments were most helpful.

UOG's Educational Effectiveness Report was framed around a set of institutional themes related to the WASC Standards of Accreditation. These themes focused on enhancing academic quality, supporting student success, increasing commitment to the University's Land Grant mission, and improving effectiveness and efficiency. The report was clearly written and informed by a spirit of candor. Supporting documentation was easily located on the institution's web site, and additional materials were made available in the team room during the visit.

The Educational Effectiveness Review completes the comprehensive review cycle begun with the acceptance of the University's Institutional Proposal, and continued with the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit in February 2007. In receiving the report of the CPR visiting team, the Commission called for: a university-wide enrollment planning and student retention strategy; a review of program quality, appropriateness, and sustainability at all levels, and especially at the graduate level; increased support for academic assessment and institutional research; and a more collegial and responsive approach to relations with the Micronesian region's community colleges. Additionally, it expressed its ongoing concern about the University's continued financial viability and its dependence on the mercurial budgetary health of the Island. This concern led the Commission to issue a formal Notice of Concern "to provide notice to the University that without longer term solutions to the continuing financial situation, UOG could be found out of compliance with Commission Standards, especially Standard 3."

In its major commendation, the visiting EER team found that the University "fulfilled the outcomes it envisioned in its 2004 proposal for the comprehensive review. In striving to meet these self-set objectives in the face of fiscal obstacles and challenges that other institutions might have found insurmountable, the university has established stronger and more effective administrative structures, sounder fiscal practices and policies, more vigorous academic programs, and a highly participatory culture of evidence and continuous improvement." More specifically, the team found that all programs are "developing systematic assessment of student learning and applying assessment results to curricular improvement," the quality of graduate programs is being given increased

attention, and there has been a “major shift in enrollment planning with a stronger evidentiary approach and additional recruitment and outreach activities.” It also noted that improvements have been made in shared governance, the institution’s leadership team is strong, and relations have improved with public schools, community colleges, and agency partners throughout the region. In the financial arena, “UOG has taken a hard look at all its finances and made many tough decisions. It has come to agreement about a base budget and prioritized growth initiatives, reallocating funds so that the highest priorities are funded..., and evaluating academic programs on their fiscal impact as well as their programmatic impact.”

The Commission endorsed the major findings and recommendations of the EER team and urged UOG to give them full consideration. Additionally, the Commission highlighted a number of items for institutional attention.

Enhancing Academic Quality. As was mentioned above, UOG has made major commitments to assess student learning and focus on graduate education for the purpose of enhancing academic quality. As noted by the visiting team, the University needs to continue along these paths, with long-term assessment plans and efforts to document learning results and student achievement over time, and program by program. Additionally, at the graduate level, the University needs to: a) “address issues of quality and consistency of expectations across graduate programs, ensure that there are uniform and appropriate policies and procedures governing graduate program offerings, and further improve guidelines for graduate program review;” and b) “engage faculty and graduate students more closely in the research enterprise.” [CFRs 2.1 - 2.4 and 2.6 - 2.9] The Commission endorses these recommendations and notes that these are extremely important undertakings which will require continued institutional commitment, as appropriate to the stated mission of the University.

Supporting Student Success. Reflecting the positive impact of the *UOG - The Natural Choice* initiative, student enrollment at the University has reached record levels, with 3% growth between fall 2007 and fall 2008, and a 28% increase in freshman enrollment over the past eight years. Still, as the visiting team noted, “the reported IPEDS six-year undergraduate cohort graduation rate of 28% is alarmingly and unacceptably low.” This statistic caused the team to call for a major University endeavor to undertake “an evidence-based analysis of factors relating to persistence and attrition,” and to establish a committee to recommend action plans to further support students, improve their campus experience, and increase the rates of retention and graduation. [CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 2.13, 4.3] There is no doubt that the University is already doing a great deal to support student success, given that 60% of the students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree begin their studies in pre-collegiate English courses. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done, systematically and comprehensively. The Commission calls upon the University to develop a clear plan of action in this area, with targeted goals for improvement, as appropriate to the open enrollment mission of the campus.

Increasing Commitment to the Land Grant Mission. Since at least 2002, successive WASC visiting teams have asked that the University develop closer collaborations with the various community colleges in the Western Pacific Micronesia region. There is evidence that this is occurring, though, as the team noted, a closer working relationship with Guam Community College could be beneficial to all, to “share resources, divide labor, and collaborate in developing common or complementary programs.” [CFRs 1.8, 2.1, 4.1]

Unfortunately, one thing that has not changed in the course of this accreditation review cycle is the continuing lack of formalized, assessable articulation agreements with the various community colleges for courses and degree programs. As the EER team reported, “The current case-by-case, department-by-department process is perceived as inconsistent, unnecessarily slow, and generally undependable.” This caused the team to make a four-pronged recommendation for UOG to “(l)ead an effort to [a] complete the formalizing of comprehensive articulations agreements course-by-course and institution-by-institution; [b] make these articulations agreements accessible on the web; [c] assess the comparative success of native and transfer students by analyzing how well each group performs in subsequent coursework at the University;

and [d] expand collaborative work with the community colleges to provide support to improve transfer student success [CFR 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.10, 2.12, 2.14, 4.4].”

Additionally, the University must improve its use of technology-assisted distance education if it wishes to maximize its ability to serve its Land Grant mission. Even though a new electronic communication system has been funded, constructed, and equipped, “few UOG faculty members are using either videoconferencing or online instruction to reach students at remote locations. Broader use of such technologies would improve delivery of programs while saving costs...” [CFRs 3.4, 3.7, 4.2] The Commission would like to see all of the above recommendations implemented, as a way for the University to show its commitment to its Land Grant mission and engagement in the broader Micronesian region.

Sustaining and Improving Effectiveness and Efficiency. The University’s battle to have some control over its finances and its financial relationship to the Government of Guam is seemingly a never-ending saga. Payments from the government continue to be unpredictable. In a change from previous visits however, the EER team noted that the University “has developed systems, processes, internal engagement – and sheer will power on the part of University personnel – to adapt to Guam’s perpetual fiscal stress and occasional spikes of intense distress....” As the team noted:

- The Business Office adopted comprehensive and sophisticated cash management tools.
- The University completely redesigned its budget for FY 2009 by identifying a base budget and growth initiatives.
- When the Government failed to fund the base budget, the campus re-engaged the community and reapportioned funds.
- The Board of Regents approved a University Stability Reserve.
- Financial planning processes were introduced to integrate programs, plans, and budgets based on strategic assumptions and program needs.
- Steps were taken to expand and diversify revenues so that the University would be less dependent upon appropriated funds.

Nevertheless, given the continued unpredictability of government funding, sources of revenue must continue to be diversified. [CFRs 3.6, 4.8]

Additionally, campus constituencies, government leaders, Guam Public School and Community College leadership, and the larger community must be brought together to define the role the University will assume in responding to the impending military build up, and an appropriate funding plan must be developed. [CFRs 4.1, 4.2] The Commission is pleased to note that this latter activity is already occurring as result of the endeavors of the previous president, Harold Allen, and your own *UOG Leading Change* initiative. Through this initiative, you and your colleagues are, according to the visiting team, “already ‘leading change,’ in the vanguard of planning the community’s responses to the build-up, while the faculty are struggling to come to terms with what these changes will bring to their student population and their curriculum.” This struggle is not insignificant. When an institution such as UOG is at the cusp of change in the face of financial unpredictability, it must, as the team has indicated, “(c)ontinue its efforts to resize, redirect, and realign its base budget to live within its means; in particular, narrow its portfolio of program offerings, determining the relative size and balance of those offerings... including which programs should be discontinued.” [CFRs 2.1, 2.7, 3.5, 3.6] In doing so, it can then be even better prepared to meet the changing programmatic needs of a changing Island society and larger Micronesian region.

The Commission has made a number of these recommendations for sustaining and improving effectiveness and efficiency before, and the University has made significant progress in responding. Continued progress is required, however, for the institution to maintain quality, further improve efficiency, and enhance its control over its academic and financial future.

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review team and reaffirm the accreditation of the University of Guam.
2. Remove the formal Notice of Concern.
3. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for spring 2016 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for fall 2017. The Institutional Proposal will be due in spring 2014.
4. Request an Interim Report for Spring 2011, to include:
 - Audited financial statements for 2008-09 and 2009-10
 - The most recent revenue and expenditure reports filed with the Government of Guam
 - Most recent staffing pattern legislative report
 - Year-to-date budget-to-actual summary financial report
 - A brief summary commenting on significant changes and decisions with respect to academic program offerings
 - An update on success in increasing retention and graduation rates.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that the University has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the multistage 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, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of UOG's Board of Regents in one week. It is the Commission's expectation 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

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
Helen Whippy, Accreditation Liaison Officer
Peter Ada, Chair, Board of Regents
Members of the Team
Richard Giardina