



December 20, 2005

Jerome B. Walker
Associate Provost
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Office of the Provost, Academic Affairs
Grace Ford Salvatori, #315
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Dear Jerry:

At its November 29, 2005, meeting, a panel of the Proposal Review Committee considered the University of Southern California's proposal for its next reaffirmation of accreditation review. The panel found the phone conversation with Beth Garrett, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs; Sidney M. Irmas, Professor of Public Interest Law, Legal Ethics, and Political Science; Margo Apostolos, Administrative Vice President; Gene Bickers, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs; Ed McCann, Professor of Philosophy; Mark Pavekchak, Academic Information Officer; and you to be very helpful in understanding the context for the proposal and how it will be connected to the initiatives already underway that were launched by the Provost. This letter confirms the Committee's action to accept the proposal as indicated in my email of November 29, 2005.

The proposal effectively identified the context for the next accreditation review. Since the last accreditation review, the University has increased its resources—human, financial and technological—in very significant ways, increasing both incoming student selectivity and graduation rates, and launching a number of impressive educational and research initiatives. The proposal also identifies ways in which the University has responded to the recommendations of the last accreditation review team within the context of these changes at the University.

The progress made by the University since the last review, leading to the current state of the University, provides an exceptionally promising platform for the next accreditation review cycle under the *2001 Handbook of Accreditation* and the new visit model. As defined by Vice Provost Garrett and others during our call, the University strives to move vigorously "to the next level," especially in the quality of its educational programs. Through our conversation, the panel found the proposal as a critical vehicle for connecting

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the accrediting process to these goals, and it urges the University to use the values embedded in the Standards of Accreditation and the *Handbook* to shape the implementation of the plans identified for the accrediting review.

The chief outcomes for the review as stated in the proposal—significantly increasing the University's commitment to interdisciplinary and learner-centered education—are very appropriate to the University's context and future plans, and for the accrediting review process. As discussed in our conference call, the actual initiatives underway are significant and comprehensive, but many will be completed well before the Capacity and Preparatory Review. Thus, it will be important for the initiatives to be foundational to the implementation of the themes identified by the University, but not represent the sole focus for the accrediting review.

In accepting the proposal, the panel offered a number of recommendations for the University as it moves forward:

1. It is evident that the University has significant resources, processes and structures well beyond the minimum level. Thus, the Capacity and Preparatory Review is best focused on University's infrastructure – resources, personnel, structures and processes—to support and improve student learning. This seems directly aligned with the themes identified by the University for the accreditation review. Thus, the Capacity Review would be most useful if, within the framework of the many significant educational initiatives underway, the University could use the process to evaluate how effectively it is organized to address student learning through the program review process, school or cross-institutional initiatives, the processes by which faculty are engaged in identifying student learning outcomes, etc.
2. As reflected in the data forms describing the approaches to assessment taken by the many programs offered by the University, there would be value in learning from those already undertaking assessment, such as through portfolios or capstone experiences, so that best practices can be shared more broadly within the institution. By the time of each review it would be expected that the number of departments engaged in student learning assessment will have increased and that the campus engagement with assessment and student learning outcomes will be more robust by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review.
3. The proposal identifies a number of very significant educational initiatives many of which are already underway, and for the Educational Effectiveness Review (pp. 18–22), others that are to be implemented soon. They do seem effectively connected to and aligned with the overarching themes identified in the proposal. As the University undertakes these initiatives, especially those identified for the Educational Effectiveness Review, there is an excellent opportunity for building into these activities a University commitment to assessment—identifying the anticipated learning outcomes for each initiative and then developing assessment approaches that evaluate at different stages the effectiveness of the initiative beyond faculty and student satisfaction. The embedded assessment approach being

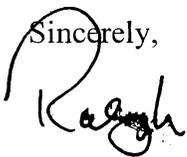
developed by the University would be particularly appropriate, and these initiatives could serve as models for assessment that could then be extended to other initiatives.

4. As we discussed in the call, as the University moves forward with its emphasis on interdisciplinary education, there is an opportunity to use its exceptional research capacities to develop assessment approaches that would be of value both within the University and more broadly in higher education. I would be glad to discuss approaches that might be used and identify other schools grappling with this issue.

As you know, at its June meeting, the Commission reviewed comments from institutions on the timing between the Capacity & Preparatory and the Educational Effectiveness Reviews and has now made the normative schedule between visits to be 18 months. Therefore, the Capacity & Preparatory Review will be conducted in spring 2008 followed by the Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2009. The proposal as approved now becomes the framework for the accreditation review process and represents a plan of action and commitment by the institution. The proposal will be distributed to visiting teams for both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review, and with the Commission following each Review. The data tables and relevant material are to be updated and included as part of the Capacity and Preparatory Review presentation. It is understood that adjustments in the activities undertaken as outlined in the Proposal will be made as implementation occurs. Major changes to the proposal, such as a change in theme or in major focus of activities for the accreditation process, are to be approved in advance by Commission staff.

Please let me know if you have any questions about these comments. I look forward to working with you, Vice Provost Garrett and others at the University to support you in the implementation of the proposal.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

Cc: Steven B. Sample, President
Members of the Proposal Review Committee