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June 8, 2010

Dr. Joseph C. Hough
Interim President
Claremont Graduate University
150 East Tenth Street
Claremont, CA 91711-6160

Dear President Hough,

At the May 26, 2010 meeting of the WASC Proposal Review Committee, a panel reviewed Claremont Graduate University's Institutional Proposal, submitted as the first step in CGU's upcoming cycle of review for reaccreditation. The panel also reviewed CGU's accreditation history and the action letter of June 2002, which followed the comprehensive visit in March 2002. The CGU representatives participating in the conference call – Provost Yi Feng, ALO Scott Simpson, Vice Provost Dean Gerstein, and Institutional Research Officer Jeanette Gurrola – were most helpful in providing the panel with important information and insight.

The panel acted to approve the proposal. Panel members would like to commend the University for an ambitious and thorough proposal that reflects responsiveness to earlier WASC recommendations. The panel was particularly pleased to see the emphasis on assessment of student learning and the way in which it has been integrated with both themes. The themes CGU has chosen to address – “transdisciplinary education” and “research that matters” – are substantive, relate directly to the mission and identity of the University, and promise to position the University well for the future. The resources that will be devoted to the self-review reflect seriousness of purpose.

The panel also had some observations and suggestions regarding the proposal and ways it can be implemented to optimal effect. First, the panel noted that there are numerous research questions for each theme and multiple inquiries flowing from each question. The panel is concerned that CGU may be taking on too many discrete projects and suggests that the University be selective and focused in carrying out these inquiries. On a related note, the panel found that in framing the research, the distinction between Capacity and Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness is not clear, nor is the distinction among questions, methodologies, products, and results. It will be important, as the University proceeds, to be clear about these distinctions, both for itself and ultimately for the visiting team. This selecting and sorting should be done very soon, so that as the self-review goes forward, work can be undertaken as efficiently as possible.

The WASC document “Expectations for Two Reviews: Clarifying the Focus“ (formerly known as “Two Lenses on Two Reviews”) may provide some guidance.

The prominence of assessment of student learning is a strong feature of the proposal. The panel believes that the University may benefit from providing development opportunities and ongoing support for the faculty who will be centrally involved. It will be essential for faculty (and others) to understand the difference between assessment – a collective process of improvement – and traditional practices such as testing, grading, and evaluation of theses; these latter are often referred to as “assessment,” but they alone do not comprise a complete assessment cycle of defining outcomes, collecting evidence, analyzing it, and using the findings for improvement in outcomes. The visiting team will look for an emphasis on direct assessment, using student work and performances as evidence, with indirect assessments (e.g., surveys, focus groups) playing an important but secondary role. WASC also expects assessment findings and improvements to be incorporated in any program review process.

The panel was pleased to hear about the broad faculty involvement behind the University’s strategic plan and the development of the Institutional Proposal that grew out of the plan. In the area of assessment, as in other areas of the accreditation process, it will be important for CGU to continue to involve faculty as well as students and the wider University community.

For its first theme, the University has defined a promising set of learning outcomes. It would be helpful if learning outcomes could also be defined for the second theme, research that matters. In addition, the panel hopes that criteria or characteristics of such research can be defined and their effect on learning plotted. A serious inquiry into the qualities, impacts, and best ways to promote, disseminate, and reward such research could make a significant contribution not only to CGU’s success but also to an innovative understanding of research in much wider academic circles, as interdisciplinary and applied research becomes more prominent.

Finally, the panel would like to compliment the University on its diversity efforts. The panel would urge the University to continue the work it is doing to disaggregate data regarding student success -- i.e., retention, time to degree, and completion rates -- for various student subpopulations, and to follow through with initiatives to improve success rates where needed. To assist institutions in separating out CPR aspects of diversity from EE aspects, my colleague Richard Winn developed a schematic representation of the kinds of questions appropriate to each stage of inquiry. I would be happy to share it, if there is interest at CGU.

The Proposal now becomes the framework for the accreditation review and represents a plan of action and commitment by the institution. The Proposal will be shared with the visiting teams for both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review and with the Commission following each visit. You may need to make minor adjustments to the activities you undertake in the Proposal; however, major changes to the Proposal, such as a change in the outcomes or themes, need to be approved in advance by Commission staff.

President Joseph C. Hough

June 8, 2010

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Finally, as you are aware, changes were made to the Standards of Accreditation and Criteria for Review and to the Institutional Review Process in 2008. Please be sure that you are using the current Standards of Accreditation as you address the WASC Standards. Also, please be sure that you follow the requirements for CPR and EER reports carefully. The requirements are set forth in the relevant section of the Handbook of Accreditation under the heading "Institutional Review Process." Note that there are new required areas of coverage (student success for CPR and EER reports and program review and sustainability of effectiveness efforts for EER reports). As you work toward preparing your report, please remember that the report is due 12 weeks before your visit.

Congratulations and best wishes. If there is any way in which I can be of assistance as the University moves to the next stage of self-review, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Wright" followed by a stylized monogram or initials in a circle.

Barbara D. Wright
Associate Director

cc: Scott Simpson, Assistant Provost and WASC ALO
Members of the Proposal Review Committee