MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert Cooney
Chair, Mānoa Faculty Senate

FROM: Reed Dasenbrock
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: WASC Communication Action

When I met with the SEC last week, we discussed the Degree Qualifications Profile and WASC’s focus on institutional learning objectives. I qualified my remarks by saying that the WASC Commission was meeting soon, and they might make some consequential decisions at their forthcoming meeting. Attached is the report by WASC of actions taken at their November 3rd meeting, and I do believe that some of our discussion last week is already out of date given this report. Several aspects of this deserve comment.

First, all institutions will be required to submit data regarding retention and graduation rates for both undergraduate and graduate programs starting between 2013 and 2015. We already collect this data for undergraduate programs, but I do not believe that it is systematically collected for graduate programs. A component of this will be external benchmarking, and this will make the discussion we have had about updating our list of peer institutions somewhat more urgent.

Second, each institution is now expected to demonstrate the proficiency of its graduates in five areas. These areas map imperfectly onto our general education requirements, so we will need to discuss how we will demonstrate these proficiencies. The time line of this ‘demonstration of proficiency’ is not yet clear.

Third, the expectation about defining learning outcomes has now been extended to “the degree as a whole.” I believe that this means more than simply defining the learning outcomes for general education, but such a definition is, I believe, an essential first step. The time line here is also not yet clear.

Fourth, the Degree Qualifications Profile will be piloted between 2012 and 2014. We need to discuss Mānoa’s stance towards this pilot.

Finally, there is a discussion in the letter about the possibility of requiring external validation of some of the proficiencies, a matter postponed until the February Commission meeting.
My sense is that the issues raised in this letter—while not demanding an immediate response—are substantial and will need extended conversation. My recommendation, for what it is worth, is that we form a working group to discuss the issues raised by the letter. This group should have representation both from the General Education Committee and the Mānoa Assessment Committee, and both the General Education office and the Assessment Office have relevant expertise that should be represented on the committee. This could be an MFS-formed committee or it could be jointly constituted by the OVCAA and MFS.
Commission Resolution on Accreditation Redesign

November 10, 2011

Dear WASC Region,

At its November 3, 2011 meeting, the WASC Commission approved an accreditation redesign resolution that takes significant steps to enhance its role as an agent of quality assurance and public accountability. In doing so, WASC will give greater attention to student success and student learning in the accreditation process.

Highlights of the resolution include:

- Making Commission action letters and team reports publicly available on the WASC website effective June 2012
- Creating external review panels to evaluate retention and graduation
rates and financial audits and ratios

- Requiring institutions to demonstrate proficiency of their graduates in 5 key areas
- Focusing institutions on the meaning, quality and rigor of the degrees offered
- Significantly shortening and streamlining the institutional review process

In addition to these changes, WASC is launching a voluntary pilot of the Degree Qualifications Profile developed by the Lumina Foundation to gather information on its usefulness as a framework in assessing the meaning and quality of the degree and to determine what uses of the DQP are appropriate for quality assurance.

To read a full text of the resolution and accompanying press release, click here.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President

Please contact Jessica Worchel, Project Manager for Accreditation Redesign at jworchel@wascsenior.org.

Western Association of Schools & Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges & Universities
985 Atlantic Avenue Suite 100
Alameda, CA 94501
www.wascsenior.org

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Commission Approves Resolution on Accreditation Redesign - November 3, 2011

Following a public hearing and extensive discussion at the Commission meeting, the Commission has approved the first stage of the accreditation redesign process. Click here to read the full text of the resolution.

At its November 3, 2011 meeting, the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) approved an accreditation redesign resolution that takes significant steps to enhance its role as an agent of quality assurance and public accountability. In doing so, WASC will give greater attention to student success and student learning in the accreditation process. The proposed changes respond to the public demand to ensure a quality education from accredited institutions while also balancing pressures from institutions for the process to be efficient and effective.

Highlights of the redesign include:

- Enhancing transparency by making Commission action letters and team reports publicly available on the WASC website effective June 2012
- Increasing accountability of institutions to graduate students by externally reviewing and validating retention and graduation rates
- Requiring institutions to demonstrate proficiency of their graduates in 5 key areas: written communication, oral communication, quantitative skills, critical thinking and information literacy

In addition to these changes, WASC is launching a voluntary pilot of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) developed by the Lumina Foundation to gather information on its usefulness as a framework in assessing the meaning and quality of the degree. The results of the pilot will help determine what uses of the DQP are appropriate for quality assurance in the accreditation process.

Linda Johnsrud, chair of the Commission and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost of the University of Hawai‘i system, stated, “We have been measuring student learning outcomes and using the data to improve programs, but now it is time to look at those outcomes and ask, ‘Are they good enough? Are the degrees awarded by the institutions we accredit sufficient in quality and rigor?’”

WASC undertook an extensive accreditation redesign in 2001 to become outcomes focused, followed by an update to the Handbook of Accreditation in 2008. The current redesign is intended to build on and accelerate the institutional work to date of increasing educational effectiveness. Anna DiStefano, chair of the Redesign Steering Committee, a member of the Commission and Faculty at Fielding Graduate University, explains, “Throughout this twelve month process, WASC has taken seriously its responsibilities both to the public and to our member institutions. The proposed changes to the accreditation process were generated from the work of five Task Forces and a Steering Committee with widespread institutional representation. Feedback gathered at regional meetings, webinars and a public hearing have enhanced the Commission’s final resolution. This resolution moves WASC forward in significant ways.”

The higher education landscape has changed drastically in the last 10 years including an increase in for-profit and non-traditional institutions seeking
accreditation. With the amount of federal financial aid rising to $150 billion annually, a debate has ensued about the ability of regional accreditors to adequately monitor academic quality of accredited institutions. New numbers showing that student loan debt has outpaced credit card debt has also increased scrutiny of higher education institutions and accreditation. WASC is committed to working with the region to address the real issues that students face today. Tim White, member of the Commission and Chancellor of UC Riverside, explains, "The new options in the toolbox of assessment promise to hold every accredited institution to a high standard, while at the same time allowing the wide and diverse range of institutions to thrive."

For more information, contact Jessica Worchel, Project Manager, Accreditation Redesign at jworchel@wascsenior.org.

Attachment

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Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities

CONTACT WASC

PHONE: (510) 748-9001 | FAX: (510) 748-9797

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