July 3, 2012

Gary Brahman
Chancellor and CEO
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine CA 92618

Dear Chancellor Brahman:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team that conducted the visit to Brandman University (BU) March 21-23, 2012. The Commission also reviewed the Capacity and Preparatory report submitted by the University prior to the visit and your response to the CPR team report, dated June 11, 2012. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and with Charles Bullock, Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs; and Laurie Dodge, Associate Vice Chancellor of Institutional Assessment and Planning and Accreditation Liaison Officer by conference call. Your observations were very helpful in informing the commission’s deliberations.

Brandman University’s institutional proposal outlined two themes for the Capacity and Preparatory Review: attaining student success and building an effective learning community through communication. The team’s report indicated that the institution elaborated the meaning of each of these themes to prompt very productive inquiry and reflection. The focus on student success has helped to strengthen a number of initiatives related to advising, faculty development, and tracking of student progress. The team particularly noted the very detailed manner in which learning outcomes at all levels were integrated into curriculum design and delivery. The Commission also commended the scope and quality of the University’s assessment efforts, viewing them as an essential part of the “culture of evidence” that supports the institution’s commitments to quality improvement. The Commission also wishes to affirm the degree to which the institution has incorporated learning outcomes into all its academic programs, which, together with appropriate assessment activities, will serve the institution well in preparation for the Educational Effectiveness Review.

In view of the distributed nature of the institution’s 28 instructional locations, the focus on communication in service of effectiveness has led to an innovative and expanded use of technology, strategic meetings of key personnel, and other forms of collaboration that have knit key institutional functions closely together. The site team also evaluated several dimensions of the separation of Brandman from its parent entity, Chapman University, as this transition has evolved over the past four years. The team saw evidence of careful planning, resulting in smooth and effective operations for BU.

The Commission likewise endorsed the recommendations of the CPR team and wished to emphasize the following areas for continued attention and development:

Addressing faculty workload and engagement. The Commission recognizes that the University relies heavily on a core group of full-time faculty and a significant number of
adjunct faculty who deliver most of the instruction. While this is an emerging model for many institutions of higher education, the Commission will want to see evidence of the effectiveness of this model in assuring consistently high standards of academic quality and rigor as part of the Educational Effectiveness Review. Such analyses will also be instructive to the Commission as it engages more frequently in reviews of institutions that resemble the Brandman model in varying degrees. In view of the team’s report of high levels of faculty commitment to BU’s academic purposes, the Commission is concerned that their considerable efforts not lead to undue fatigue or burnout. In preparation for the next review BU will be expected to engage in a workload analysis for full-time faculty and for associate deans that will ensure that their assignments are both sustainable and properly supported with technology and other resources. In addition, because BU also relies so heavily on a substantial cadre of adjunct faculty, there is need for appropriate numbers of them to participate in the University’s assessment processes, and to be provided adequate support through resources, professional development and training. Through these analyses, the Commission expects Brandman to be able to demonstrate that a sufficient number of both full-time and continuing adjunct faculty exercise collective responsibility for academic quality and governance in keeping with the Standards. (CFRs 2.1, 3.2, and 3.11)

Consolidating growth. The institution has been undergoing a period of intense growth and re-invention since its separation from Chapman University. While these efforts have resulted in a well-defined institution, continued rapid growth could result in what the team referred to as “innovation fatigue.” The Commission expects that the University’s gains are consolidated and embedded into its infrastructure. This process necessitates an evaluation as to whether resource allocations and work assignments have kept pace and are aligned with the multiple new initiatives. (CFRs 4.1 and 4.2)

Developing student support services. Recognizing that BU’s mission is to serve a mostly distributed adult population and acknowledging the efforts being expended to support these students in achieving their goals, the Commission urges BU to develop creative initiatives that respond to this population’s professional development needs. Drawing on its electronic resources, BU should consider how to serve its students’ interests in continuing professional development and career advancement. Helping to form learning communities, perhaps drawing alumni into them as well, could enhance BU’s contribution to its students’ lives. (CFRs 1.5, 2.11, 2.13, 4.2, 4.6)

Preparing for the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). The team observed systems and structures in place at BU as required for a data-supported and reflective Educational Effectiveness Review. As suggested by the team, refinements to program review processes may be in order prior the EER. The Commission reminds the institution to be sure to include in its self-study the results of recent initiatives, particularly the new Doctor of Education (EdD) program, and the innovative Ameritas College, designed to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking students. (CFRs 2.10, 4.5, 4.6, and Draft Graduate Education Policy)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and continue the accreditation of Brandman University.

2. Proceed with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2013. The Institutional Report is due 12 weeks prior to the scheduled visit.

3. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the issues raised in this action letter and the major recommendations of the CPR team report into its Educational Effectiveness Review report.
This analysis may be included in an appendix to the Educational Effectiveness report or incorporated into the report.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Brandman University’s governing board in one week.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website in approximately one week. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while ensuring 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,

[Signature]

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/rw

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
    Laurie Dodge, ALO
    David Janes, Board Chair
    Members of the CPR team
    Richard Winn, WASC Liaison