July 7, 2014

Dr. Frieda K. Brown
Vice Chancellor
United States International University, Kenya
P.O. Box 14634-00800
Nairobi, Kenya 00800
AFRICA

Dear Dr. Brown,

At its meeting June 18-21, 2014, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted the review by video conference to United States International University, Kenya (USIUK) at intervals between November 5, 2013 and February 6, 2014. The Commission also reviewed the Special Visit report submitted by USIUK prior to the team’s review and your response to the team report, dated March 2014. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and (by conference call) your colleagues Angelina Kioko and Matthew Buyu. Your observations were very helpful in informing the commission’s deliberations.

The Special Visit was required by the Commission following the fall 2008 Educational Effectiveness review in order to verify the institution’s sustained efforts in educational effectiveness, program review, general education, academic leadership transitions, and long-range planning. As noted above, the team’s review was conducted by a series of video conferences rather than by an onsite visit in view of a terrorist attack in Nairobi that occurred just prior to the scheduled September visit. The team found the institution’s report to be mostly complete and responsive to each area, though hampered somewhat by the fact that documents the team had expected to review on site had to be transmitted to them electronically.

The team found evidence of significant progress in developing general education course design, delivery, and assessment, along with improved integration of general education with other divisions of the university.

Based on the evaluation of reports from four completed program reviews, the team noted “exceptional efforts related to the assessment of student work.” The team also applauded the professional development being provided to the faculty in this skill area and the productive changes resulting from these reviews at the school level. The team was particularly impressed with the work the institution has done in assessing educational effectiveness, including in the co-curricular areas. Linkages of proposed changes to the budget and planning processes remain to be verified at the time of future reviews.
The positive developments related to long-term planning since the 2008 visit have been essential, especially in view of rapid growth at the university. The 2009-2014 Strategic Plan, with its related goals, was seen as a sound foundation for operational planning, though it was less clear how closely and broadly the plan was being shepherded over time or evaluated for its effectiveness. The implementation of the plan as it has unfolded, however, has assisted the university in identifying key challenges such as in faculty recruitment and in conducting market analyses prior to launching new programs. The expansion of academic programs has been a particularly valuable outcome.

The team was impressed with several aspects of the recently launched doctoral programs. Strong student applicant pools, the emerging development of a research culture, and success at recruiting qualified faculty merit the Commission’s commendations.

Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan, related to fiscal health, was seen by the team as an area of progress as the institution has moved further from a significant reliance on tuition revenues. The receipt of research and foundation grants and endowment funds was noted, even as the institution acknowledges the need to build its infrastructure in support of capital projects.

The Commission joins the team in commending the institution for these achievements. At the same time, the Commission wishes to draw the university’s continuing attention to the following areas:

**General Education.** Building on the solid work already achieved in the design and increased acceptance of the new general education program, the university is expected both to deploy the program and to at least preliminarily assess its effectiveness in time for the report prepared for the next comprehensive review.

**Strategic Planning and Budgeting.** While a promising foundation has been set for the university’s strategic planning process, it is yet to be demonstrated how the process is linked to program assessment and review outcomes, to hiring priorities for the doctoral programs, and to budgetary processes and cycles. The Commission wishes to see a more defined role for the board in strategic planning, with member training as needed in fulfilling this role. The designation of a suitably qualified administrator who will “own” the implementation of the plan is also recommended.

**New Doctoral Programs.** By the time of the comprehensive review, the university should be in a position to have completed evaluations of the effectiveness of its several new doctoral programs. This should focus, in particular, on an analysis of the quality of graduates’ dissertations as indicators of rigor. The development of a faculty doctoral culture should also be demonstrated by documenting research and publication activities and successful grant applications.

In view of the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit team report and continue accreditation
2. Reschedule the Offsite Review for fall 2017 and the Accreditation Visit in fall 2018
3. Request that the institution address the recommendations in this letter as an aspect of its self-study for the comprehensive review.
In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of USIUUK’s governing board in one week. The Commission expects 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 these documents.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the work that United States International University, Kenya undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while assuring public accountability, and we are grateful for your continued support of our process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Petrisko
President

MEP/rw

Cc: Harold Hewitt, Jr., Commission Chair
Angelina Kioko, ALO
Manu Chandaria, Board Chair
Richard Winn, WSCUC Staff Liaison