July 15, 2015

Dr. Christopher Kimball
President
California Lutheran University
60 West Olsen Road
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

Dear President Kimball:

At its meeting June 17-19, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit (AV) to California Lutheran University (Cal Lutheran) April 14-16, 2015. Commission members reviewed the institutional report prepared by California Lutheran University prior to the Offsite Review (OSR) and any supplemental materials requested by the team following the OSR. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues: Leanne Neilson, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; and, Rodney Reynolds, Director of Educational Effectiveness and Institutional Research and Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

This reaffirmation review was conducted in keeping with the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation, which requires institutions to address several components in their institutional reports. Cal Lutheran was also requested to address the following issues from the July 13, 2007 Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Commission action letter: assessment of student learning and planning issues, including the need for “a more formal plan to increase student, faculty, staff, and Board diversity.” Both are addressed in the discussion to follow.

With regard to each of the components in the institutional report, the team found the following:

**Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degrees:** The team commended Cal Lutheran for a strong sense of culture and identity, grounded in the Lutheran faith, as well as openness to multiple religious traditions. The meaning of a Cal Lutheran degree is reflected in the institution’s mission and in values that align closely with the university’s institution-level learning outcomes (ILOs).
Measurement and analysis of Cal Lutheran Core-21 general education outcomes ensure undergraduate degree quality while, according to Cal Lutheran’s institutional report, integrity is ensured “...through peer review, multiple levels of curricular oversight, and an external program review.”

The university has adopted a practice to include ILOs and program level outcomes (PLOs) into course syllabi; however, the team found inconsistent application of this practice. (CFRs 1.1 1.2, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4)

Core Competencies: The team found a very clear articulation of the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes Cal Lutheran students should possess by the time they graduate. Cal Lutheran’s ILOs align closely with the five core competencies and are assessed at or near graduation. ILOs are mapped to undergraduate programs, degrees and co-curricular activities. Graduate programs are guided by discipline-focused student learning outcomes; in some cases, professional accreditation helps define expected competencies. Cal Lutheran uses results from direct and indirect assessment measures, particularly at the program level, to identify student achievement gaps and make improvements.

The team endorsed Cal Lutheran’s plans to review and revise the Core-21 general education program, which is instrumental in the establishment of standards of performance and the assessment of student learning and achievement of the core competencies. (CFRs 2.2, 2.2a, 2.4, 2.6, 4.3)

Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation: According to the team, “Cal Lutheran defines student success as the students’ ability to persist, make continuous progress toward and complete a credential, certificate or degree program.” This definition accommodates first time full-time students, non-traditional undergraduates, and graduate students. Student persistence measures include achievement of student learning outcomes; student success is supported by a strategic set of initiatives and interventions and a culture across faculty and staff to support “one student at a time.” Through its “4 To Finish” program, Cal Lutheran improved its four-year undergraduate graduation rate from 58 percent in 2013 to 67 percent in 2014.

The university disaggregates student enrollment, retention and graduation data by a variety of characteristics including race and ethnicity. Impressively, Latina/o student six-year graduate rates are comparable to overall results. However, results are much lower for African-American students and lower still, for African-American male students. While the team acknowledged Cal Lutheran’s new program to address African-American male graduation rates, it observed very few efforts to understand impediments to student success for other student groups and, relatedly, the absence of targeted intervention efforts. (CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13)

Program Review, Assessment, Use of Data: Cal Lutheran has made substantial progress in the assessment of student learning, program review, and the use of data to inform decision-making that is “…systemic, intentional, and meaningful.” The Office of Educational Effectiveness and Institutional Research effectively generates and analyzes
data that inform institutional planning and improvement and supports the assessment of student learning.

While program review is rigorous in a number of departments, where results have caused “tangible, demonstrable changes,” the team found review quality and depth to vary across programs. The team observed that Cal Lutheran may be facing “survey fatigue” and suggests that it would benefit from an audit of survey efforts to assess their value-added, identify ways to streamline endeavors, and improve communication about results. (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.2)

**Sustainability and Response to the Changing Ecology of Higher Education:** Cal Lutheran has significantly improved the university’s financial health and viability since the 2007 EER. Increases in enrollment have generated needed revenue; Cal Lutheran has responded to the resulting strain on the institution’s facilities as well as student demand by strategically increasing online, hybrid, and offsite course offerings. Improvements have been guided by a strategic plan, widely shared across the university, that links financial and academic endeavors and is monitored by a talented and dedicated Board of Trustees. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 4.6)

There are three critical issues for Cal Lutheran to address between now and the next reaffirmation of accreditation to ensure continued educational effectiveness. First, a significant portion of Cal Lutheran’s student enrollment growth has been in graduate programs. According to the team, “the rapid growth of graduate programs through distance education and expansion of multiple sites has created challenges that require a highly coordinated leadership structure.” The team found that current structures “…may not fully support the complexity of graduate offerings, respond to the needs of graduate programs, or promote and enhance graduate education as a hallmark of Cal Lutheran.” (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2b, 3.4, 3.6)

Second, Cal Lutheran’s faculty governance structure does not reflect and may not accommodate a growing presence in graduate education. Cal Lutheran faculty are deeply engaged with and responsible for academic governance in what the university describes as a “high touch” culture. The team concluded that “…the faculty governance structure reflects a single-campus, undergraduate institutional structure and may not serve the current reality of the university.” (CFRs 3.2, 3.7, 3.10, 4.6, 4.7)

Third, the team found that Cal Lutheran had made little progress on the 2007 EER recommendation on diversity. Since the last WSCUC review, the increase in faculty of color as a percentage of full-time faculty has been small. As mentioned earlier, achievement gaps exist for African-American students; the team expressed concern that campus climate for faculty of color may not be sufficiently supportive and therefore be a factor in lower retention of these faculty and, consequently, these students. The team did not find a comprehensive plan, understood across the university, that articulated goals, success measures, and targeted support efforts, including resources and structural changes, to address this issue. Faculty recruitment and hiring efforts do not reflect best
practices and the team found a culture that, while caring, is steeped in a “status quo” perspective. (CFRs 1.4, 3.1).

The Commission endorses the commendations and recommendations of the team, as detailed on pages 35-37 of the team report, and as otherwise noted in the team report narrative. The institution should respond to the recommendations in its next review.

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the team report

2. Reaffirm accreditation for ten years

3. Schedule the Offsite Review in fall 2024

4. Schedule the Accreditation Visit in spring 2025

5. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2020

6. Schedule a Progress Report in spring 2018 to review progress on the following issues:
   a. A diversity plan to increase student, faculty, staff and board diversity and the reduction of achievement gaps for students of color, particularly African-American students, with timelines and benchmarks.
   b. A plan to accommodate growth in graduate programs
   c. A plan to restructure faculty governance that reflects the expansion of graduate education

7. Schedule a Special Visit in spring 2020 to review progress on the following issues cited in the team report:
   a. Diversity among students, faculty, staff, and board; student achievement gaps for students of color, particularly African-American students; and campus climate related to fostering diversity
   b. Leadership structures that support and promote graduate education
   c. A university faculty governance structure that accommodates growth in graduate education.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California Lutheran University has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability. California Lutheran University has successfully completed the multi-stage review conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to maintain its compliance with WSCUC standards and uphold its commitment to continuous quality improvement.
In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the California Lutheran University governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the California Lutheran University website and 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. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on theWSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that California Lutheran University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to public accountability, and we thank you for your continued participation in this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Petrisko
President

MEP/mam

Cc: William Ladusaw, WSCUC Commission Chair
    Rod Gilbert, California Lutheran University Board Chair
    Members of the reaffirmation team
    Maureen A. Maloney, WSCUC Vice President