July 11, 2012

Alvin H. Cheung
President
California Northstate University
10811 International Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

Dear President Cheung:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an on-site review of California Northstate University (CNU) March 15-16, 2012. The Commission also reviewed CNU’s Special Visit report submitted prior to the visit and its May 7, 2012 response to the visiting team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and with David Hawkins, dean (retiring); Shane Dessell, dean (incoming); and Karen McClendon, director of institutional assessment and accreditation liaison officer. Your observations were very helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

In conjunction with granting Candidacy at its February 2011 meeting, the Commission scheduled a single visit to CNU in spring 2012 to review the institution for Initial Accreditation. In its 2011 action letter, the Commission requested that the institution continue to give attention to preparing for Title IV participation, ensuring support for scholarly research for students and faculty, further developing institutional policies, and demonstrating that its graduates are consistently achieving program outcomes.

The team report acknowledged that the institution had given serious attention to each of these areas. According to the team’s findings, the financial aid office is prepared to participate in Title IV financial aid. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) has been established that is appropriate to the types of research currently being conducted by students and faculty. Significant progress has been made in policy development; however, some work remains to bring academic policies to the level of good practice in professional higher education. The institution should then harmonize policies in the Employee Handbook with those in the Faculty Manual.

Like the previous team, this team continued to see an impressive level of commitment to a sophisticated and effective system of assessment that tracks and displays student learning, parsed by specific program outcomes. The universal use of common rubrics for scoring course-, program-, and institution-level learning outcomes supports a high level of institutional confidence that its students have achieved intended outcomes.

The Commission endorsed the findings, commendations, and major recommendations of the Special Visit team, and encourages the institution to give continuing attention to the issues as identified below.

Continuing policy development. The institution, with evident board involvement, needs to complete its development of institutional policies, specifically those related to faculty role definitions, contractual expectations, requirements for promotion and tenure and participation in faculty governance. All policies should be fully integrated and
harmonized in all institutional publications. The Commission appreciated the update on the development and adoption of various faculty-related policies, set forth in your letter of May 7, 2012. (CFRs 3.3, 3.8 and Guideline, 3.9)

**Formalizing a policy on academic freedom.** The institution is expected to formalize its commitment to academic freedom through policies pertaining to faculty, staff, and students. These board-approved statements should also address such matters as termination and appeals processes, with the purpose of ensuring freedom to express findings and ideas related to one's area of expertise. (CFRs 1.1, 1.4, 1.8)

**Building academic infrastructure.** As a relatively new institution, CNU is expected to preserve a sharp focus on continuing to build a solid and effective academic infrastructure. In addition to recruiting and retaining capable academic leadership and faculty, the institution should bring its assessment infrastructure to higher levels, ensuring that it is integrated fully into existing and planned academic programs. Institutional research and planning processes, as described in WASC Standard 4, should clearly guide the ongoing development of the university. These steps should be taken and solidified prior to, and as a foundation for, anticipated program growth. (CFRs 1.3, 3.8, 4.1-4.8)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report.
2. Grant Initial Accreditation to California Northstate University for a period of five years and set the effective date as May 19, 2012.
3. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the off-site review in spring 2017 and the visit in fall 2017.
4. Request an interim report in fall 2013 to address the issues identified in this letter.

Institutions granted the status of Accreditation must use the following statement if they wish to describe the status publicly:

(Name of institution) is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001.

The phrase “fully accredited” is to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible. The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WASC refers to the quality of the institution as a whole. Since institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program in the institution, statements like “this program is accredited” or “this degree is accredited” are incorrect and misleading.

California Northstate University is approved to offer only the PharmD (Doctor of Pharmacy) degree. Any additional degrees that the University may wish to offer must be approved through the WASC Substantive Change process. (See the WASC Substantive Change Manual for details.)

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of California Northstate 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 assuring 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,

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/rw

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
    Karen McClendon, ALO
    Candace Fong, Board Chair
    Members of the Special Visit team
    Richard Winn