July 7, 2014

Dr. Paul Ague
President
San Diego Christian College
200 Riverview Parkway
Santee, CA 92071

Dear Dr. Ague:

At its meeting June 18–20, 2014, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) considered the report of the review team that conducted the Special Visit (SV) to San Diego Christian College (“SDC”) April 7–9, 2014. The Commission also had access to the institutional report prepared by SDC prior to the Special Visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you; your comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

The Special Visit was scheduled to address Commission concerns contained in the Action Letter dated July 10, 2012. In specific, SDC was asked to address:

1. Financial sustainability, with attention to enrollment management, advancement, and financial management and reporting structure
2. Strategic planning
3. Program review and assessment, both for academic and co-curricular programs

The team concluded that the institutional report directly addressed the three central concerns raised by the Commission. Report preparation engaged multiple constituencies across the institution, and was appropriately supported by evidence. It provided a clear and comprehensive picture of the numerous efforts undertaken to improve practice and attain fiscal stability.

With respect to financial sustainability, “the Team discovered in interviews with the President and Chief Financial Officer three significant findings that have enhanced the financial stability of SDC”: (1) a move to a new physical location at which it has direct control of its plant operation and support services expenses; (2) a larger than projected increase in enrollment in both traditional and non-traditional programs; and (3) a revamped budgeting process that builds upon the known of past years rather than on the hopes of future years. The new and modern plant facilities have established a separate and distinct identity for the institution. The team found that the move precipitated, in the institution’s words, a “total reset” with respect to policies, practices, and protocols, even as the mission has been preserved. This was especially evident in the attention paid to the integrated and adaptive five-year financial plan, although a more sophisticated software tool in support of fiscal planning is desirable as the institution grows in complexity.
A significant change in organizational structure – the appointment of a Vice President for Student Services – has resulted in the integration of activities in support of admissions, retention, and ultimately graduation. This change promises to enhance enrollment, and thus revenue, in future years. When combined with the addition of a more sophisticated process for student prospect identification and recruitment and the addition of selected academic programs, SDC has taken important steps to solidify its tuition revenues. In addition, “the appointment of a full-time CFO has enabled the College to establish more effective accounting procedures, refine its internal controls, and automate its reporting of financial data to budget managers.” The institution has implemented budget training sessions for managers with the result that budget variance expenditures are almost non-existent. These multiple efforts, although recent, have enhanced both the institution’s financial position and its management capacity.

The team report noted that “a number of planning procedures...have been bolstered since the Commission’s 2012 Action Letter.” Perhaps most inspired by the need to prepare for relocation to a new physical campus, the Strategic Planning Committee “appears to have been reinvigorated.” The planning process has embraced multiple constituencies with a spirit of collaboration, and constituents have readily acknowledged the need for continued and enhanced strategic efforts. Although recent planning activities have focused on the near-term, the institution is recalibrating the strategic process to sharpen its consideration of longer-term prospects. The President has articulated three principles of action: (1) building a strong community; (2) cultivating a dynamic learning environment; and (3) securing a sustainable future. From these strategic positions, departments are crafting tactical implementations. While a final synthesis of action remains to be fashioned, these principles, and the spirit of optimism and aspiration they foster, are on their way to realization. The institution must, however, address persistent challenges in the areas of program review and the assessment of student learning to inform resource allocation. In addition, the planned-for change in enrollment mix, with an increase in non-traditional students, will require careful examination to ensure that these expanding areas are appropriately supported, especially with respect to faculty. Finally, the team noted that planning for graduate-level degrees should be evaluated in the context of the institution’s foundational strength in current programs.

The team notes that “SDC has taken significant steps to respond to the WASC 2012 Action letter recommendation to refine its assessment-related processes and guidelines (CFR 4.1).” Significant among those steps are the use of capstone projects as a way to assess program-level student learning, which has garnered broad faculty support; a revamping of the program review process itself to make it more complete yet concise, which is engaged according to a nine-year schedule published so that all departments are aware of the review cycle; the use of these program reviews for ongoing planning between the department and the VPAA and other senior administrators; and the deployment of a standard template for course syllabi to document the links among course-, program-, and institutional-level student learning outcomes. The team also noted that program review and assessment for the co-curricular program of the institution continue to lag those efforts in academic departments.

San Diego Christian College is to be commended for:

**Developing and Implementing New Budget Planning Processes.** As a result of new and deployed management tools, the institution has real-time information on which to make immediate decisions.
When coupled with gains in enrollment, there is evidence of successful efforts towards achieving financial sustainability.

**Clarifying Position Responsibilities and Hiring a Full-time CFO.** When combined with the new management tools and the discipline to inform managers of their departments’ fiscal position on a regular basis, the organizational structure has been strengthened in a way that will help ensure consistent financial management.

**Designing, Developing, and Moving Into a New Campus.** With dedicated facilities over which it exercises sole management, the institution has both established an independent identity and achieved significant cost savings.

**A Rejuvenated Strategic Planning Process.** Not only has the strategic effort been revitalized, but the President’s three initiatives are being used to develop detailed departmental plans to provide a continuity of planning and action across the institution.

**Development and Use of Student Capstones.** The institution’s assessment activity has broadened and deepened the work of students; in particular, senior students are increasingly motivated to demonstrate their mastery of program learning outcomes as they near graduation.

The Commission also endorses the following recommendations of the team:

**Continue Attention to Graduation and Retention Efforts.** This will include developing important student support programs as well as refining enrollment management practices. The institution may consider goals in these areas commensurate with peer institutions. (CFRs 1.2, 2.10 and 2.13)

**Frame a Unified Vision for Traditional and APS/online Academic Programs.** The results of this effort will serve as input to the next strategic planning cycle. (CFRs 3.7, 4.1, and 4.4)

**Expand Assessment Efforts to Provide for Educational Quality Comparisons.** Using its current assessment foundation, the institution may embrace measures that contrast traditional and APS programs, as well as national benchmarks, selected peer group results, and its own performance. (CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 2.7)

**Define Student Learning Outcomes for Co-curricular Programs.** This effort will provide a complement to the work currently taking place in the academic arena and should include appropriate assessment strategies.

**Enhance and Integrate Technology Systems.** The institution will increasingly require accurate, readily-available data that are available across departments in order to support continued evidenced-based decision-making.
Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit team report and continue accreditation

2. Continue with the scheduled Offsite Review set for fall 2015 and the Accreditation Visit set for spring 2016

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of San Diego Christian College’s 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 San Diego Christian College’s web site 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 action letter also will be posted on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that San Diego Christian College 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 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/cno

Cc: Harold Hewitt, Jr., Commission Chair
    Lundie Carstensen, ALO
    Robert Zinn, Board Chair
    Christopher Oberg, WSCUC Staff Liaison