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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 10, 2012

Bruce Boghosian
President
American University of Armenia
300 Lakeside Drive, 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear President Boghosian:

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 the American University of Armenia (AUA), February 8-10, 2012. The Commission also reviewed the Capacity and Preparatory report and related exhibits submitted by the university prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues. Your observations were very helpful in informing the commission's deliberations.

AUA's institutional proposal outlined two themes for the Capacity and Preparatory Review: institutionalizing the assessment of student learning and cultivating a community of scholars. For the first theme, AUA used the self-study process to examine and strengthen its efforts in the assessment of student learning. While the team noted that AUA has made "considerable strides in establishing its capacity for assessing student learning" by putting in place policies, processes and resources, the team confirmed AUA's self-evaluation of "gaps in participation across programs, ... unevenness in assessment methodologies, inconsistency in 'closing the loop,' deficiencies in monitoring mechanisms, and lack of general awareness of assessment beyond those directly involved." In short, as the team observed, assessment has yet to become "fully embedded in the university's culture." (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.6)

In terms of the second theme, cultivating a community of scholars, the team commended AUA for its plans to reorganize its academic programs into a smaller number of colleges that will forge new synergies and "create opportunities for interdepartmental interaction and interdisciplinary research." The team also praised AUA's careful efforts to clarify what constitutes research and scholarship in ways appropriate to AUA's mission and character. AUA has adopted new criteria for faculty appointment and promotion that take into account "the nature of applied research in a transitional economy while realistically promoting creative scholarship that links discovery and its integration with application in teaching." (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.8)

The Commission endorses the commendations of the visiting team that are found throughout the team's report. It especially praises AUA for using the WASC process for serious self-review and improvement. In addition, the Commission

commends AUA for its commitment to student learning and for the personalized attention students receive; the dedication and loyalty of faculty, staff, boards and alumni; the completion of a “substantial and inclusive strategic planning process” that has resulted in AUA preparing to offer its first undergraduate degree programs in fall 2013; a “thorough and effective” program review process that has led to modifications in curricula; and the recognition AUA has received by the national government as a “model...for higher education in Armenia.”

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

Refining assessment practices and institutionalizing staffing and resources for educational effectiveness. Greater consistency is needed in AUA’s assessment efforts to address the shortfalls in practice, noted above. In addition, the Commission recommends that AUA look at assessment results from an institutional perspective. As the team observed, by “aggregating and evaluating the meaning of program-level assessment results at the institutional level,” AUA can determine its progress in achieving its mission and can use the information “for institutional planning and decision making.” To ensure that AUA gathers, analyzes, and interprets data that can be used to improve educational effectiveness, the Commission expects to see robust, institutionalized, stable, and adequately funded assessment and institutional research capabilities by the time of the next visit. Further, the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team will expect to see evidence of student learning and the results and findings from assessment. (CFRs 2.3, 2.6, 2.10)

Implementing the new undergraduate degree programs. AUA has been authorized by the Commission to offer three undergraduate degree programs, beginning in fall 2013, based on the strides the university has made in identifying faculty, putting in place an organizational structure, developing educational plans, and budgeting appropriate resources. The Commission expects AUA to report on the progress of its undergraduate programs as part of its self-study in preparation for the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER), paying particular attention to the development of the general education program, including student learning outcomes and appropriate assessment strategies. In developing the undergraduate degree, the university should be mindful of the upcoming revisions to the WASC Standards and processes that will place a greater emphasis on the quality and integrity of the degree and will require evidence of learning in the core competencies set forth in CFR 2.2a, in particular written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, information literacy and quantitative reasoning. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.6)

Promoting student success. The Commission expects AUA to complete work on a set of institutional objectives for student learning and develop a clear set of objectives for student success. In terms of student achievement, AUA’s current three-year graduation rate of over 80% is “impressive for a relatively new institution.” However, the team observed, and the Commission concurs, that AUA would benefit from more detailed analyses that disaggregate graduation rates and time-to-degree data by variables important to the mission of the university. The Commission was pleased to hear from you about planned initiatives for more detailed data analysis. By examining disaggregated data, the university could identify performance gaps

among various subpopulations, seek to understand any disparities, and develop and implement strategies to raise the rates in areas identified as needing improvement. In addition, the Commission expects AUA to use comparative data from other institutions to contextualize and understand its graduation and retention rates and related patterns. The Commission also expects the university to routinely monitor aggregated and disaggregated retention and graduation rates for its new undergraduate degree programs, as those data become available. (CFRs 2.6, 2.10, 4.4)

Reviewing academic support and student services programs. AUA's academic program review process "has been largely successful." However, the university has not yet undertaken systematic reviews of its co-curricular programs although it does collect student satisfaction data. Putting in place mechanisms for the routine evaluation of its academic support and student services will be particularly important as AUA begins its undergraduate degree programs. The Commission expects AUA to have a plan for evaluating co-curricular programs, with a timeline, guidelines, and a process, by the time of the EER. (CFRs 2.11, 2.13)

Strengthening the institution's financial position and capacity. AUA is dependent upon philanthropy and endowment earnings to balance its budget. Only 15% of AUA's revenue is derived from tuition. Given the unpredictability of fundraising and the challenges of the global financial crisis, the Commission expects continuous, ongoing, disciplined attention to financial operations and advancement, "while providing the resources necessary for institutional growth and development." The Commission also expects to see multi-year faculty contracts in place by the time of the next visit. (CFRs 3.2, 3.3, 3.5)

Ensuring consistency of credit hour information. As AUA transitions to a semester system in fall 2012, the university will need to conduct an analysis of its syllabi to verify that each course complies with WASC policy on the credit hour, and that procedures are established for the periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable. (CFRs 1.9, 2.2, and Policy on Credit Hour)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and continue the accreditation of the American University of Armenia.
2. Reschedule the Educational Effectiveness Review visit from fall 2013 to fall 2014. 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 to the major recommendations of the CPR team report into its Educational Effectiveness Review report. You may include this analysis in an appendix to your Educational Effectiveness report or incorporate it into the report.

The Commission recognizes that AUA is well positioned to meet the original fall 2013 date for the Educational Effectiveness Review. Because of the launch of the undergraduate programs in fall 2013 and the desire of the Commission to give AUA an entire year's experience with these

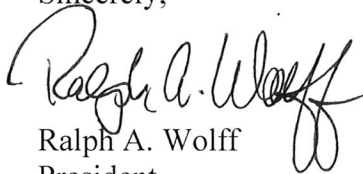
new programs, the date for the Educational Effectiveness Review is being rescheduled to fall 2014. In extending this timeframe, the Commission hopes to facilitate AUA's success and provide the EER visiting team with a fuller picture of the institution's educational effectiveness in undergraduate education.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of American University of Armenia'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/bgd

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
Tom Samuelian, ALO
C. Judson King, Board Chair
Members of the CPR team
Barbara Gross Davis, WASC