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**PRESIDENT**

Ralph A. Wolff

February 28, 2011

Janet L. Holmgren  
President  
Mills College  
5000 MacArthur Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94813

Dear President Holmgren:

At its meeting on February 16-18, 2011, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to Mills College (Mills) on October 6-8, 2010. The Commission also had access to the EER report and exhibits prepared by Mills prior to the visit, the institution's December 9, 2010 response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in March 2009. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you; Sandra Greer, Provost and Dean of the Faculty; and Marianne Sheldon, Professor of History and Accreditation Liaison Officer. Your comments were helpful.

Mills' institutional proposal outlined three themes, which were slightly revised for the EER into four themes: 1) Assessing Educational Effectiveness; 2) Assessment of Mission, General Education, and Academic Programs; 3) Retaining and Graduating Undergraduate Students; and 4) Graduate Education in a Liberal Arts College. Mills established goals, appropriate research questions, and anticipated outcomes for each theme. With openness and transparency, the administration and faculty working together made major strides in progressing forward on each theme, in some instances transforming how assessment of student learning takes place. In particular, the Commission acknowledges the team's finding that "the report persuasively illustrates how Mills' self-review led to a greater understanding of [its] effectiveness, systems of quality improvement, and student learning, and how it plans to close the loop by adjusting its practices on the basis of this analysis."

The Commission's action letter of June 24, 2009, following the CPR visit, recommended that special attention be placed during the interval between the CPR on EER visits on: 1) the measurement, assessment, and evaluation of student learning outcomes; and 2) the use of assessment for program improvement at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The Commission notes with satisfaction that the visiting team found that "Mills is further along in [both areas] than might have been expected given where they were eighteen months ago."

Mills is to be commended for the strong progress in developing a culture of evidence on campus, centered on program reviews and annual assessment reports; a new course review and revision process; a reactivated Assessment Committee; and a well-designed program of co-curricular assessment. Over 80 percent of all undergraduate and graduate programs have completed a cycle of assessment and more than 600 courses have already completed an online course revision process with strong evidence of changes being made as a result of the assessment findings. As the team notes, "Meaningful assessment of academic program goals has become part of the culture at Mills." The team found that "faculty are much more aware of the overall learning outcomes of the college and are more explicitly linking course goals to college mission, to general education goals (where appropriate) and to program goals." Great credit for helping create this new culture has been given to the academic leadership and renewed institutional research function. This culture of evidence has also extended to other areas including student services, campus climate, mission, and strategic planning.

The Commission also commended the efforts being made by the College to improve retention and graduation rates for undergraduates. Positive results are already being achieved as the Retention Task Force experiments with a wide variety of approaches including student surveys, advisor preparation, transfer student preview days, orientation sessions, and a new Center for Academic Excellence. A new program called Living and Learning Communities, where students with common interests live in the same residence and share coursework and advisors, has great potential for improving retention. While these various programs seemed to be taking place in a piecemeal fashion at the time of the CPR, the EER team found that "Mills is now more systematic and strategic in seeing these efforts as part of a unified whole."

The Commission endorses the recommendations of the EER team and wishes to emphasize the following area for further attention and development:

**Full Implementation of Assessment and Program Review Processes.** As highlighted in the team report, much of the development of assessment with comprehensive student learning outcomes and program review processes has taken place the last 18 months and the College is still learning how to take full advantage of the results of this important work. While 22 annual assessment reports have been submitted, only 12 academic programs have been reviewed. All programs need to be reviewed soon using the exemplary models already present on campus. Some gaps still exist in the development of program learning outcomes, especially at the graduate level. As required by the Standards, outcomes and expectations for student attainment must be clearly stated and appropriate for the degree level of the program. (CFRs 2.1, 2.3) Rubrics are being used effectively in many departments and the team "hopes that the faculty will develop further expertise in developing rubrics, moving from using a quantitative, one-dimensional ... type of rubric to more sophisticated qualitative ones." The Commission acknowledges that more general education assessment is planned and encourages completion of a comprehensive review of general education soon. Although the EER team observed great improvement in the faculty's capacity and desire to assess student learning, survey data showed that many faculty members still "do not see regular assessment of student learning at the course or program levels as worth the effort." The Commission is encouraged that with a few more years of implementation, assessment will become more deeply embedded in Mills' culture and systems. The Commission endorses the team recommendation that "while there is considerable momentum and widespread participation, it is imperative that the model of continuous

self-study, reflection, and improvement be maintained if Mills is to achieve its educational goals for all of its students." (CFRs 1.2, 1.3, 2.3-2.7, 2.10, 4.4-4.7)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

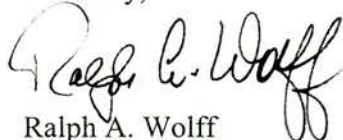
1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of Mills College.
2. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for fall 2019 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2021.
3. Request an Interim Report to be submitted by November 1, 2014. This report should address the issues cited in the EER report, including continued progress in implementing and using the results of multiple assessment and program review processes. Progress should be demonstrated, as defined above.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Mills has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Mills' 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 them.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the College undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review and to congratulate you for your successful service as president of Mills since coming to the institution in 1991. You have strengthened Mills through your fine leadership. 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

RAW/RO/cf

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair  
Marianne Sheldon, ALO  
Kathleen Burke, Board Chair  
Members of the EER team  
Richard Osborn, Vice President, WASC