

January 20, 2015

Alecia DeCoudreaux
President
Mills College
5000 MacArthur Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94813

Dear President DeCoudreaux:

At its meeting by conference call on January 12, 2015, a panel of the Interim Report Committee convened to consider the Interim Report submitted by Mills College (Mills) on October 31, 2014. The panel reviewed your Interim Report and the Commission action letter of February 28, 2011. Kathleen O'Brien, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Alverno College, and chair of the CPR and EER teams to Mills, also provided added perspective to the panel's deliberations.

The panel appreciated the opportunity to discuss the report with you, Dave Donahue, Acting Provost, Professor of Education; Maggie Hunter, Faculty Fellow of Advising and Undergraduate Studies, Associate Professor of Sociology; Renee Jadushlever, Chief of Staff and Vice President for Communications and External Relations; Alice Knudsen, Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Academic Assessment; Brian O'Rourke, Vice President for Enrollment Management; and Marianne Sheldon, Accreditation Liaison Officer, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, and Professor of History. The conversation was informative and helped the panelists better understand your institution's challenges and progress on meeting the areas cited in the Commission's letter.

Women's colleges along with small special focus institutions across America have been going through a time of enrollment and financial challenges. Mills is no exception to this nationwide trend which has resulted in a major restructuring of college operations including several leadership changes and reductions, the elimination of numerous staff positions, a hiring freeze, and an early retirement incentive plan. Following the long tenure of a President who spent many years rebuilding Mills from even more difficult circumstances, you and your administrative team, with broad support throughout the campus, have courageously focused on the future in the midst of these challenges. The panel offers its commendation for the major work carried out in the last three years in meeting the recommendations from the 2011 Commission action. The panel also provides several additional commendations:

1. The serious engagement of Mills with difficult issues, resulting in a well prepared report.
2. The significant work carried out in incorporating student assessment throughout the college with a very high level of faculty involvement.

3. The extent to which Mills is looking ahead to the new WSCUC 2013 *Handbook of Accreditation* in such areas as the Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degree and the assessment of core competencies which puts the institution ahead of many other institutions in the region in its preparation.

The Commission's 2011 action letter requested a report on:

Assessment and Program Review Processes. The Commission concluded in 2011 that, while Mills had made great strides in the development of student learning outcomes and assessment coupled with program review, much of the work had been accomplished just prior to the team's visit leading to a request for evidence of further progress in an Interim Report. The panel commends Mills for the deepening engagement in assessment across campus as evidenced by the clear curriculum maps, through closing the loop in the program review process, and by the assessment of 12 of 16 institutional learning outcomes. In looking at the program review process, the panel suggests that as the process matures a greater emphasis be placed on integrating the discussion of improvement of student learning with the review of physical space issues and the staffing levels. The panel expresses concern that the multiple levels of review of student learning outcomes may be difficult to sustain. Consideration might be given to how the various review processes might be better aligned, coordinated, and streamlined. The panel was encouraged to hear that an assessment culture is developing at Mills "where stakeholders such as faculty and staff see assessment not as something extra they have to do but as something that is embedded and integral to their work of providing the best instruction and services possible to students." Based on the progress made between the CPR visit in 2009, the EER visit in 2010, and now this report, the panel is confident that even more progress will be made in meeting this cultural expectation by the time of the reaffirmation visit in 2019.

The Commission action letter also asked for an update on other issues in the EER team report not directly mentioned in the letter. Mills provided helpful updates on the following:

1. **Comprehensive Review of General Education.** Mills provided evidence that they have been engaging in a comprehensive review of the current general education program, which has resulted in the 2014 appointment by the President of a Curriculum Transformation Task Force to revise the program. Just as impressive is the work assessing outcomes defined as core competencies by WSCUC in critical thinking and information literacy. Results of this work have been a motivating factor in setting a goal of a complete revision of general education requirements anticipated in fall 2016.
2. **Support for Faculty to Improve Their Teaching Practices.** At a time of financial reductions, the panel was impressed that Mills has given priority to appointing a respected faculty member to lead the Center for Academic Excellence, which will support innovation in pedagogy and professional development for faculty. A significant number of faculty are engaged on a regular basis in conversations about improvement of teaching practices which provides evidence of strong faculty peer leadership.
3. **Technology, Equipment Infrastructure, and Integrated Systems.** Following the Commission's concern about technology, Mills engaged in a comprehensive process of

finding the best assessment-focused software product for them and chose TaskStream. Beginning in 2012, Mills has systematically implemented parts of this software in a logical manner so that the campus could effectively learn how to use this powerful tool. The new software platform not only supports tracking of assessment activities, it also supports quality improvements by encouraging the systematic review of outcomes and curricular maps guided by common standards. The tool also has the potential to engage students in their own learning, and the panel encourages Mills to explore the possibility of engaging students further in the use of the tool, e.g. for portfolios, etc.

After discussion of the progress that has been made by Mills in addressing these areas, the panel voted to:

1. Receive the Interim Report with recommendations and commendations as noted in this letter.

The panel encourages continued progress as Mills moves toward its Offsite Review in spring 2019 and Accreditation Visit in fall 2019 for reaffirmation of accreditation.

The panel, again, reaffirms the hard work and important steps Mills College has taken to address these issues. I look forward to working with you and wish you every success as you proceed toward the next stages of accreditation review.

Sincerely,



Richard Osborn
Vice President

Cc: Marianne Sheldon, ALO
Members of the Interim Report Committee