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Mary Ellen Petrisko

March 6, 2015

Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian
Interim President
American University of Armenia
300 Lakeside Drive, 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear President Der Kiureghian:

At its meeting February 18-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to the American University of Armenia (AUA), September 15-17, 2014. The Commission also reviewed the EER report and exhibits submitted by the university prior to the visit and your response to the EER team report, dated October 23, 2014. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and Lawrence Pitt, Chair of the Board. Your observations were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

AUA outlined two themes as the focus for its EER visit: 1) institutionalizing assessment of student learning and 2) cultivating a community of scholars. The team reported that AUA is an institution that has successfully integrated "assessment into the fabric of the university," that "assiduously gathers evidence of student learning and success to inform changes to courses, programs and instructors," and that is building a faculty and staff who are "passionate," "committed to excellence," and set "high levels of achievement for themselves and their students." In a relatively short period of time, AUA has transitioned to a "remarkably learning/learner centered university" that is building "an exemplary culture of assessment."

In the July 10, 2012, Commission letter following AUA's Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR), six areas were identified for attention: 1) refining assessment practices and institutionalizing staffing and resources for educational effectiveness; 2) implementing three new undergraduate degree programs; 3) promoting student success; 4) reviewing academic support and student services programs; 5) strengthening the institution's financial position and capacity; and 6) ensuring consistency of credit hour information. The team concluded that AUA satisfied the Commission's expectations, providing "ample and relevant forms of evidence" in each of these areas, though financial issues remain an area for continued attention.

During its time on campus, the team noted the following areas for commendation:

Assessment and program review. According to the team, AUA has done more work than many other universities in institutionalizing assessment of student learning and in instituting program review. The team praised AUA for its “well-established, meaningful” program review process and for making “evidence-driven modifications to instruction, courses, and programs.” While academic program review is deeply embedded into the university, reviews of academic support and student service programs are just underway in 2014-15. In addition, all three new undergraduate programs will undergo their first reviews in 2017-18.

In terms of assessment, activity in the graduate programs “is generally quite strong,” with AUA demonstrating the “important link between program review and on-going assessment.” However, as AUA reported in its institutional report and the team confirmed, some graduate programs have fallen behind in annual assessment. Because the undergraduate programs are recent, assessment efforts are nascent. The team observed that AUA has put in place procedures and practices so that assessment will be conducted in ways that increase undergraduate student learning and that provide data on how best to structure courses and curricula. Overall, the team commended AUA for its “remarkable work around student learning assessment and program review.”

Undergraduate education. AUA “thoughtfully and successfully completed its inaugural year of undergraduate education,” incorporating all five core competencies in its institutional outcomes, and ensuring that these skills are systematically addressed in the curriculum. The university also “deserves significant credit for undertaking the development of a range of co-curricular programs” to support the undergraduate academic programs. The team was impressed by “the degree to which the university has taken thoughtful steps to build on its past success as a graduate institution to ensure that undergraduates are well prepared to succeed at high levels.”

Student success. The team reported that AUA developed “a rich, multidimensional view of student success,” encompassing academic achievement in relation to explicit outcomes, timely degree progress, high retention and degree completion rates, and high levels of student, alumni and employer satisfaction. According to the team, “by many measures, AUA is successfully achieving its goals for student success.”

Credit hours. In the context of its transition from the quarter to the semester system, AUA conducted a comprehensive revision of course syllabi, including an examination of workload. Procedures and policies are in place for the periodic review of credit hours. The team confirmed that AUA complies with WSCUC policy on credit hours.

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

Strengthening the institution’s financial position and capacity. While the university is making great progress in developing financial sustainability, AUA has an underlying structural deficit and relies on the goodwill of a small number of philanthropists to meet budget shortfalls. The Commission expects AUA to continue to rigorously monitor its financial performance so that its financial resources can keep pace with academic growth, and to continue to build its endowment. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 4.2)

Continuing to implement the policy on faculty scholarship. As the team observed, AUA has made “important strides in advancing its community of scholars” and has adopted as a paradigm Boyer’s four types of scholarship. Although faculty research has been taken into account in hiring and promotion decisions, “its extent and type, as defined by the Boyer model, has not.” The Commission expects AUA to continue to implement its policy on faculty scholarship, providing appropriate resources and support, and advancing its plans for developing faculty career paths. (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.3)

Enhancing diversity. AUA’s policies on diversity are less developed than its other policies, according to the team. AUA could benefit from greater clarity on what constitutes diversity in Armenia and for AUA’s aspirations. The Commission expects AUA to continue to define, attend to and cultivate a vision for and commitment to diversity that reflects the interests of its faculty, students and staff in the context of AUA and the larger world. (CFRs 1.5)

Aligning program review, planning and resource allocation. The team was impressed with AUA’s “thoughtful design of core quality assurance processes, their intentional connection to strategic planning, and the robust support” provided for assessment and institutional research. Less well developed, however, is the use of program review findings to support planning and resource allocation in relation to institutional goals and outcomes. AUA is expected to align the results of its program reviews to its planning efforts and the allocation of resources. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.4)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review team report and reaffirm the accreditation of the American University of Armenia for nine years, through February 2024
2. Schedule the Offsite Review for spring 2023 and the Accreditation Visit for fall 2023
3. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review for spring 2020
4. Request a Progress Report due June 1, 2018, on the following issues:
 - a. Information and analysis about the first graduating class of undergraduates, including disaggregated data on student learning outcomes, retention, time to graduation, student demographics, and other measures of student success including initial job placement after graduation, or matriculation in graduate education (types and placements)
 - b. Update on the status of the endowment campaign and how the funds have been or will be applied to undergraduate education including the hiring of new faculty and staff, the renovation or building of facilities, and the addition of new or enhanced support services.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that the American University of Armenia has addressed the two Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the 2008 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next

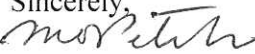
comprehensive review, the institution is encouraged to continue its progress, particularly with respect to student learning and success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the 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 these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response.

Please note that the Criteria for Review (CFR) cited in this letter refer to the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation*. The *2008 Handbook* continues to be available on the WSCUC website at www.wascenior.org.

As the institution works on the issues cited in this letter, it should be mindful of the expectations that it will need to meet at the time of its next comprehensive review, which will take place under the revised Standards of Accreditation and institutional review process in the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation*. These expectations build on past practice and include, for example, student success; quality improvement processes such as assessment and program review; planning; and financial sustainability. However, the *2013 Handbook* also includes new foci: the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees; student performance in core competencies at the time of graduation; and institutional planning for the changing landscape in higher education. AUA is encouraged to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* and to approach its challenges in ways that will address both old and new expectations.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the American University of Armenia 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 thank you for your continued participation in 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/bgd

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Thomas Samuelian, ALO
Lawrence Pitts, Board Chair
Members of the EER team
Barbara Gross Davis, WSCUC liaison