July 3, 2001

Robert A. Corrigan
President
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94132

Dear President Corrigan:

At its meeting on June 20-22, 2001, the Commission considered the report of the evaluation team that visited San Francisco State University on March 20-23, 2001. The Commission also had available to it the self-study submitted by the University in preparation for this visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with Richard Giardina, Director of Academic Planning and Assessment; and you. Your comments were very helpful.

The Commission notes that the University undertook a self-study evaluating the implementation of its strategic plan. That plan resulted in 157 recommendations for action organized around six commitments: achieving academic excellence; generating teaching and learning success; combating discrimination; creating a user-friendly campus; fostering community responsibility; and internationalizing the University. The University's evaluation of these commitments, along with its work on assessment, the library, teacher preparation, the co-curricular environment, research, financial planning, and campus planning, were sufficiently broad to allow for an examination of the entire institution. The self-study provides an important basis for the University to further develop its common understanding of these commitments rooted in SFSU's mission. The Commission expects SFSU to continue this effort by prioritizing its own recommendations and incorporating within its plans the major work needed to accomplish such additional issues as year-round operations and on the need for major faculty hiring to replace the substantial faculty retirements anticipated over the next ten years.

In the time since the last comprehensive WASC visit, SFSU has acted on the concerns identified by the previous visiting team and by the Commission. Since many of those concerns were related to planning, by undertaking a self study organized around evaluation of the strategic plan, the University demonstrated its attentiveness to the issue in a manner that also enabled the team to consider the effectiveness of its planning activities. The Commission notes progress in this regard, as well as the very important
reinstatement of the library budget and the improvements in assessment and facilities. The Center for the Enhancement of Teaching (CET) is also worthy of commendation for the support it provides to faculty in the use of a variety of teaching approaches, especially innovative approaches to the use of technology.

SFSU's six strategic commitments have important implications at the program level as well as for the university as a whole. The Commission encourages the University to link strategic planning themes with resource allocation, departmental plans, and hiring requests. Not surprisingly, the team found that the themes were unevenly incorporated into programs at the University. Assuming that they continue to be reflective of values central to the University, work is needed to determine how, and to what extent, the themes are to be integrated into the broad range of programs.

The Commission found that the evaluation team made a number of valuable recommendations. It urges the University to consider them. Additionally, the Commission wishes to highlight several areas:

Graduate education: With approximately 24 percent of its students enrolled in graduate programs, graduate education is clearly important at San Francisco State. Yet there does not seem to be a consistent and shared vision of graduate education at SFSU. Additionally, the University's infrastructure for supporting quality in graduate education is not well-developed. The urban university vision articulated in the self study and by the administration provides viable criteria to guide graduate programs, but seems not to be widely shared, or perhaps understood, beyond the administration.

The Commission is concerned that graduate programs do not undergo their own program review and is unclear as to the role of the Graduate Council in the review process. The Commission expects the University to further develop its commitment to the role and quality of graduate education.

Assessment: SFSU has invested considerable energy and resources in outcomes-based assessment activities. The Commission commends the University for the progress it has made in creating an assessment infrastructure, integrating assessment into the program review process, creating an interactive database of survey data, and enlisting broad faculty participation. This work appears to have proceeded to the point that faculty have come to recognize its benefits in supporting their teaching and commitment to student learning. The Commission urges the University to continue to develop its assessment program. To this end, the team has provided a series of focused recommendations to aid it in further embedding student outcomes assessment into on-going practice at SFSU.

The Inventory of Program Assessment Activities is impressive in the breadth and scope of assessment endeavors it represents and is reflective of the varying degree to which the initiative has been incorporated into campus culture at the program level. Progress has been made; there are a number of departments that serve as exemplars for their integration of learning objectives, assessment strategies, and the use of findings. At the same time, the Commission notes that
ongoing encouragement, resources, and support will be needed to sustain and enhance progress especially in light of the anticipated high level of faculty turnover.

Student learning: The University’s commitment to academic quality and assessment has thus far focused more on program quality and the support of teaching than on student learning. The Commission encourages SPSU to continue its development of the “Learning Centered University” theme, in light of its own strategic goals and the increasing emphasis in the WASC Standards on educational effectiveness and student learning. The Commission concurs with the team that continued faculty development is essential in this regard. The emphasis on student learning mandates a further building of faculty expertise to tie student outcomes assessment to curricular change and enhancement. The emphasis on student learning calls also for development of a range of methodologies for assessing student learning outcomes and further development of faculty expertise in relating learning outcomes to curricular change.

The Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm the Accreditation of San Francisco State University.


The next scheduled review of the institution will occur under the Handbook of Accreditation 2001, which involves significant new Standards and substantially different expectations for Institutional Presentations under the new review cycle. The Commission urges the University to review the new Handbook and to assess how institutional evidence can be developed prior to the next accreditation review that will make the new process less burdensome and more useful.

In accordance with Commission policy, we request that you send a copy of this letter to Chancellor Charles Reed.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter and the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

Cc: Marilyn P. Satter
Richard Giardina
Members of the Team
Judie G. Wester