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Mary Ellen Petrisko

July 15, 2015

Dr. Richard Pattenau
President and CEO
Ashford University
8620 Spectrum Center Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92123

Dear President Pattenau:

At its meeting June 17-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an Onsite Review of Ashford University (AU) April 8-10, 2015. Commission members also reviewed the Special Visit report submitted by Ashford prior to the visit and the institution's May 29, 2015, response to the visiting team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and with your colleagues Lorraine Williams, Provost and Accreditation Liaison Officer; and Gregory Geoffroy, Board Chair. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

Upon granting Initial Accreditation to Ashford University in 2013, the Commission scheduled a Special Visit in spring 2015 to address six issues requiring continued attention. These issues, and the team's findings with regard to each, are as follows:

1. Attrition, support for student achievement, and adequate levels of degree completion. The team found evidence of progress in data-driven interventions supporting student success. However there appears to be limited alignment between the specific initiatives and their effectiveness. By the time of the next accreditation visit, significant improvement in these metrics is expected along with the evidence that links the university's interventions to student success. In addition, we expect the university to report their retention/graduation rates on their website in a more accessible format.
2. Adequacy and alignment of resources with educational purposes. The team found evidence of the prioritizing of resource allocations to academics and of budgets informed by program review action plans. The university is urged to continue to ensure that proportional expenditures are invested toward support of the academic functions, regardless of changing enrollments, and to have cycles of data in support of this priority by the time of the next review.

3. Adequacy of the Ashford faculty model and the role of faculty. The team found evidence of investment in full-time faculty as well as evidence of faculty leadership, faculty control of curriculum, and well-functioning faculty governance and development. The university is urged to continue that investment in full-time faculty and to avoid any degradation in the full-time faculty/student ratio. The Commission also urges continued faculty participation in the current curriculum review and revision.
4. Effectiveness of program review. The team found evidence of substantial progress in the volume of program reviews, their high quality, and resulting actions taken based on these reviews.
5. Assessing student learning and ensuring academic rigor. The team found evidence of progress in the development and assessment of learning outcomes at both the undergraduate and graduate degree level together with a culture of evidence supporting continuous strengthening of student learning and rigor.
6. Independence of the Ashford governing board. In an extended interview with the entire board, the team saw evidence of appropriate governance at Ashford: oversight by a strong Ashford board exercising appropriate responsibilities with autonomy, and a collegial relationship with Bridgepoint that clearly prioritizes student success.

The Special Visit team found substantial evidence that Ashford University continues to make sustained progress in all six areas recommended by the Commission in 2013.

The Commission endorses the findings, commendations and recommendations of the Special Visit team and wishes to emphasize the following area for further attention and development:

Trend Data to Evaluate Initiatives. By the time of the next Comprehensive Review, the university will have accumulated sufficient longitudinal data to be make appraisals of its various strategies around student retention and completion.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report
2. Scheduled the Comprehensive Review with the Offsite Review in fall 2017 and the Accreditation Visit in spring 2018.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Ashford University's 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.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Ashford University undertook in preparing for and supporting this Special Visit review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to 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/ro

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Lorraine Williams, ALO
Gregory Geoffrey, Board Chair
Members of the Special Visit team
Richard Osborn, Vice President