



June 8, 2010

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Ralph A. Wolff

Dr. Haroutune K. Armenian  
President  
American University of Armenia  
40 Marshal Bagramian Avenue  
Yerevan, 375019, Armenia

Dear President Armenian,

At the May 26, 2010 meeting of the WASC Proposal Review Committee, a panel reviewed American University of Armenia's Institutional Proposal, submitted as the first step in AUA's upcoming cycle of review for reaccreditation. The panel also reviewed AUA's accreditation history and the Commission's action letter of February, 2007, following the Educational Effectiveness Review visit in fall 2006. The panel regretted that due to your travel schedule you were unable to participate in the conference call to discuss the proposal, but those in attendance – Provost Lucig Danielian, ALO Theony Condos, Dean Thomas Samuelian, Professor Aram Hajian, and Institutional Research Manager Narine Hakobyan – provided important information and insight.

The panel acted to approve the proposal. The panel would like to commend the University for a thoughtful, candid, and well-written proposal, and for the responsiveness to earlier WASC recommendations that it reflects. The themes are substantive and forward-looking; they promise to position AUA well for the future and the changing environment in which it functions. Not least of all, the panel and indeed the entire Program Review Committee were impressed by the remarkable progress AUA has made since its founding in 1991, and the seriousness with which the University approaches its mission to serve as a model for higher education in Armenia and in the region.

The panel also had a few observations and suggestions regarding the proposal and ways it can be implemented to optimal effect. With regard to the first theme, "institutionalizing the assessment of student learning," the University's diagnosis of where it needs to go next rings true. Many institutions have come to the realization that initiating assessment processes is not enough; to realize the benefits of assessment, the loop needs to be closed and findings used for improvement. There are many institutions working on this "stage 2" assessment issue, and AUA should be able to locate models and resources that will help in the effort. The panel strongly endorses the idea of bringing a US expert on assessment to Yerevan to work with a wide range of faculty and build the intellectual capacity to institutionalize assessment. Here, as in other areas of the accreditation process, it will be important for involvement of the faculty to include but not be limited to, the core faculty.

With its second theme, “cultivating our community of scholars,” AUA is taking on another issue that is surfacing for other institutions engaged in non-traditional research – research that is, for example, interdisciplinary and applied. A serious inquiry into the qualities, impacts, and best ways to promote, disseminate, and reward such research could make a significant contribution not only to AUA’s success but also to an innovative understanding of research in much wider academic circles. As the University works on this theme, we would urge you to consider the scholarly value of assessment of learning as a form of academic inquiry and the ways in which it can contribute to a community of scholars. We were interested to hear that the School of Public Health, for example, has already published articles on assessment and accreditation, and we hope that that practice will spread to other schools at the University.

The panel also noted the desirability of multi-year faculty contracts precisely in order to support longer-term research as well as to promote faculty engagement in the institutionalization of assessment and the scholarship of teaching and learning, or SOTL. And, of course, such longer-term reciprocal commitments will ensure stronger faculty participation in governance and the continued development of AUA.

For both themes, the panel recommends that AUA carefully distinguish in its research questions and activities between the purposes and foci of the Capacity and Preparatory Review and those of the Educational Effectiveness Review. This should be done very soon, so that there is clarity as the self-review goes forward. The WASC document “Expectations for Two Reviews: Clarifying the Focus“ (formerly know as “Two Lenses on Two Reviews”) may provide some help here.

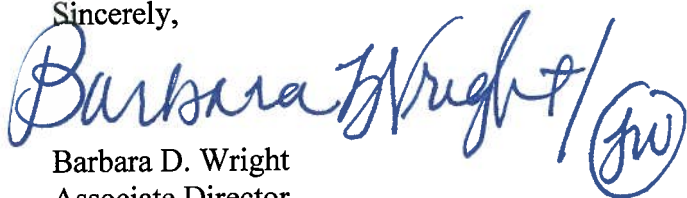
The panel noted that it will be essential, in the interests of efficiency, focus, and ultimate effectiveness, for the response to the McKinsey report and the new president’s strategic planning initiative to be integrated with and supportive of the themes of the Institutional Proposal. The panel also observed that the Bologna process is likely to remain a significant feature of AUA’s environment for the foreseeable future. Given that, the University may be able to maintain its role as a model of high-quality US-style education by finding ways to synthesize learning outcomes and assessment with the Bologna process’s degree frameworks and tuning processes. The panel looks forward to learning more about such efforts.

The Proposal now becomes the framework for the accreditation review and represents a plan of action and commitment by the institution. The Proposal will be shared with the visiting teams for both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review and with the Commission following each visit. You may need to make minor adjustments to the activities you undertake in the Proposal; however, major changes to the Proposal, such as a change in the outcomes or themes, need to be approved in advance by Commission staff.

Finally, as you are aware, changes were made to the Standards of Accreditation and Criteria for Review and to the Institutional Review Process in 2008. Please be sure that you are using the current Standards of Accreditation as you address the WASC Standards. Also, please be sure that you follow the requirements for CPR and EER reports carefully. The requirements are set forth in the relevant section of the Handbook of Accreditation under the heading "Institutional Review Process." Note that there are new required areas of coverage (student success for CPR and EER reports and program review and sustainability of effectiveness efforts for EER reports). As you work toward preparing your report, please remember that the report is due 12 weeks before your visit.

Congratulations and best wishes! If there is any way in which I can be of assistance as the University moves to the next stage of self-review, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,



Barbara D. Wright  
Associate Director

cc: Theony Condos, Special Assistant to the President and WASC ALO  
Members of the Proposal Review Committee