



February 27, 2008

William McKinney
President
Pacific School of Religion
1798 Scenic Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94709

Dear President McKinney:

At its meeting on February 20-22, 2008, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team that conducted the visit to the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) on October 10-12, 2007. The Commission also had access to the Proposal and Capacity and Preparatory report prepared by the School prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with John Davis, Chief Financial Officer; Dean Mary Turner; and Randi Walker, Professor and ALO. Your comments were helpful, especially in understanding the context for the visit and learning of your plans for the upcoming Educational Effectiveness Review (EER).

As noted by the visiting team, PSR's Capacity and Preparatory report was prepared with extensive involvement of the PSR community, was candid and comprehensive, and identified important issues the campus is addressing. These included finances, facilities maintenance, academic and student services assessment, collection and use of data, and diversity. PSR's Proposal and CPR report also identified three important themes that will be addressed in the Educational Effectiveness Review – Education for Progressive Christian Leadership, the recently revised Master of Divinity program, and a cluster of issues relating to Faculty Development, including teaching and advising loads, committee work, scholarship, and policies on retention, tenure and promotion. These areas align well with the four chief priorities established in PSR's current strategic plan: Progressive Christian Leadership Development, Dismantling Racism and Building Cross-Cultural Competency, Resource Development, and Telling the PSR Story. PSR appears to be using the WASC process effectively to address critical issues of strategic importance to its future.

From its review of the team report and institutional materials, the Commission acknowledged several areas for commendation. First, the team noted progress in the areas cited in the earlier Commission action letters, which followed the

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last comprehensive review in 1997 and the special visit in 2002. PSR has increased the number of full-time faculty members, increased the size of its endowment, reduced its rate of draw-down on the endowment, revised the curriculum of its largest program (the Master of Divinity), and built a strong foundation for assessment of student learning and a culture of evidence. The faculty is deeply dedicated to student learning and engaged in creative and scholarly work that enhances both the learning environment and PSR's connection to the world of theological education. Team teaching and co-teaching are widely used and deeply valued at PSR, creating rich classroom experiences for students and collaboration among the members of the faculty. A well-conceived and widely supported five-year strategic plan, adopted in 2005, guides the board and administration in decision making.

The Commission endorsed the findings and recommendations of the team and calls attention to the following key areas as PSR prepares for its Educational Effectiveness Review:

Assessment of Student Learning. PSR has made substantial progress in assessment of student learning. Guided by a standing assessment committee, the faculty has made improvements in assessment instruments, started to use departmentally developed rubrics for program-level assessment, and is developing additional methods and processes for collecting and using evidence of student learning. As noted in the team report, the frequent “face-to-face interactions” with students, the “collegiality and cooperative spirit” of the faculty, and strong sense of mission have set PSR on “a fruitful journey to assessing and improving student learning.” The faculty conducts longitudinal assessment of student learning by building on data collected at admission, gathering and analyzing formative assessments throughout each student's studies, and culminating with summative assessment in senior integrative seminars. Faculty-developed rubrics are used to assess learning in senior seminars, and the results of this analysis are discussed by department faculty members. To move this assessment work to the next level of effectiveness, PSR should formalize assessment plans and processes to show the alignment of program learning outcomes with courses, to include plans for data collection and analysis, and to establish processes for ensuring that the results of assessment are interpreted, reported, and used to make improvements in student learning. Enhanced support for faculty to develop the knowledge and skills to conduct assessment work and to integrate assessment into their regular activities will be essential to the success of these plans. Finally, PSR should assess the effectiveness of student services functions and the library and their impact on student learning. (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 3.5, and 4.5-4.8)

Financial Management and Resources, and Strategic Planning. As noted in the team report, PSR has made progress in ensuring financial sustainability through the development of a five-year strategic plan and by increasing its endowment through successful fund-raising activities and improved investment performance. The rate at which PSR has drawn on its endowment has been incrementally decreased from ten percent in 1995 to six or seven percent in recent years. However, the Commission remains concerned about PSR's financial picture. Its draw-down rate remains higher than standard practice and, if continued at this level, will erode the buying power of the endowment. PSR faces

ongoing challenges in managing resources and planning for its future. WASC has concerns about a pattern of operating deficits and recent declines in enrollment. The Commission noted that, since the time of the visit, PSR had taken steps to address concerns about these matters, including instituting a hiring freeze, budgeting expenses for centers more comprehensively, and recruiting new board members with financial expertise. Processes should be developed to better align the strategic plan with the budget and to implement cost-saving measures when revenue targets are not met. Action plans should be adopted and employed to implement the strategic plans, including the facilities audit and plans to address deferred maintenance needs. The Commission understands from the discussion at the Commission meeting that work in these areas is already under way. (CFRs 3.5, 3.8, and 4.1-4.3)

Relationship with the Graduate Theological Union. Pacific School of Religion is deeply committed to the Graduate Theological Union (GTU). Through the GTU, PSR students have access to a doctoral degree, a wide array of supplemental courses and programs, and the superb faculty that teaches the GTU programs. The PSR community values deeply this relationship and sees PSR's identity as being integrally tied to the GTU. However, the substantial financial support that PSR provides to the GTU has given rise to concerns about the structure of this relationship. As noted in the team report, the Alternative Futures Task Force is addressing the GTU's future financial plans in view of the fragile financial condition of some of its members. Changes in the funding formula for PSR's contribution to the GTU have recently been made, following discussions between PSR and the GTU leadership. Remaining issues that should be addressed include budget clarity and transparency, equity in financial arrangements, and communication among the relevant governing bodies, committees, and personnel. Library governance, funding, and planning should be encompassed in ongoing conversations. Other closely connected issues that should be addressed are the impact of the GTU relationship on faculty workload and on the use and maintenance of facilities. (CFRs 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.8, 4.2)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report and continue the accreditation of Pacific School of Religion.
2. Proceed with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review in spring 2009. The Institutional Presentation is due 12 weeks before the review.
3. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the issues raised in this action letter and to the major recommendations of the CPR team report into its Educational Effectiveness Review Report. This may be done by referencing where these responses are in the Table of Contents or in an addendum to the Report.

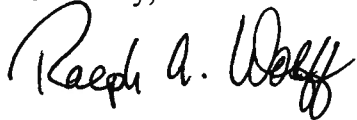
In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the Chair of the PSR Board of Trustees within one week. The Commission expects that this action letter

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will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified herein

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a stylized "W".

Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter
Board Chair
Randi Walker, ALO
Members of the team
Teri Cannon