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July 5, 2011

Susan Marquis  
Dean

Frederick S. Pardee RAND Graduate School  
1776 Main Street  
Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

Dear Dean Marquis:

At its meeting June 22-24, 2011, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to the Pardee RAND Graduate School (PRGS) March 8 - 10, 2011. The Commission also reviewed the Educational Effectiveness Review Report submitted by the School prior to the visit and the materials related to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) conducted in 2009. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and with Accreditation Liaison Officer Rachel Swanger. The updates and additional information you provided and your observations were helpful.

PRGS chose three themes to focus its review: (1) the on-the-job-training (OJT) aspect of its curriculum, (2) the effectiveness of classroom instruction, and (3) dissertation quality. Each theme received productive analysis during each phase of the review. The CPR team focused its recommendations in these three areas, each of which were then addressed during the EER visit. Speaking to the centrality of the OJT component of the curriculum, the CPR team recommended defining student learning outcomes for this aspect of the learning experience. Faculty subsequently articulated the student learning outcomes for OJT and has begun to systematically assess their achievement. The CPR team also advised strengthening the assessment infrastructure, particularly in support of evaluating classroom instruction and dissertation quality. Dissertation rubrics and quality standards have been developed which, along with application tools and workshops, are producing consistency in outcomes. Learning outcomes (though of recent vintage) are now included in course syllabi, supporting more relevant course evaluations. Finally, the CPR team urged continuing attention to recruiting both students and faculty from under-represented minorities, which has led to several new recruiting initiatives intended to increase representation from these categories.

Other signs of progress since the CPR visit include the Career Services Center, which had just been established at the time of the CPR visit and is an essential element in the commendable employment rate for graduates of nearly 100 percent. The team also noted a new and inclusive strategic planning process that has, thus far, produced a useful setting of institutional priorities.

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

**Refining and Conducting Program Review.** As noted by the team, “PRGS has not conducted a formal program evaluation for over a decade” and has not integrated external reviewers or results of assessment of student learning into its program review process. While the PRGS faculty and academic leaders engage regularly in a strategic alignment between current RAND activities and the academic outcomes of the PhD program, the need for a well-designed and regularly scheduled program review process remains critical. The review should be sufficiently comprehensive to include the on-the-job-training component that is central to the students’ experience. Building on the foundational work already accomplished for refining the OJT experience, PRGS will need to be innovative in more explicitly considering the results of assessment in the program review process. Comprehensive program review should also encompass an examination of the effectiveness of recent quality initiatives related to the dissertation. Given the importance of periodic program review as a major quality assurance process, the Commission urges PRGS to refine its program review process immediately and to complete this review before the next interaction with WASC. (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

**Improving Degree Completion.** While PRGS’s five- and ten-year overall completion rates (40 and 75 percent respectively) are well above national averages for similar doctoral programs, these rates reveal a substantial number of students that do not earn their degree despite a major investment of time and resources. Though graduation rates have improved in recent years, the Commission urges the institution to engage in a study to identify factors that may inhibit degree achievement. A review of disaggregated data reveals achievement gaps for women and students from underrepresented minority groups, which should be studied and addressed. Linkages to admissions criteria and processes, as well as to student support services, should be created in order to facilitate data-supported reflection and improvement. (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 4.3, 4.5)

**Serving the Underrepresented.** As noted by the EER team, “the lack of under-represented minorities (domestic) among the students and faculty has been a long-standing concern of visiting WASC teams.” The Commission commends the School’s Next Generation Initiative, which seeks to create a pipeline for students from domestic underrepresented groups. It notes that this initiative holds promise for addressing the teams’ stated concern and recommends that this creative outreach should remain in the forefront of PRGS planning in coming years, combined with thoughtful means to assess and improve its effectiveness. (CFRs 1.5, 4.5)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review team report and reaffirm the accreditation of the Pardee RAND Graduate School.
2. Schedule the next comprehensive review visit for spring 2020. As you know, the Commission is in the process of considering major revisions to the current three-stage institutional review process. It expects these revisions to be adopted by June 2012 and implemented during the following two years. Once the revised process is adopted, WASC staff will communicate with you and your ALO to explain the

impact of any changes on your next comprehensive review and on the interactions you may have with WASC before that review.

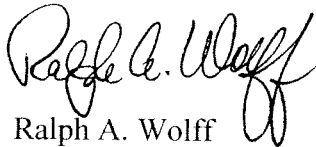
3. Request an interim report to be due on March 1, 2016, addressing progress in: (1) refining the program review process and completing a program review, (2) studying and addressing retention and completion and addressing rate and achievement gaps, and (3) implementing and evaluating the Next Generation Initiative.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Pardee RAND Graduate School has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of PRGS'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 them.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the institution undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while assuring public accountability, and we are grateful for your continued support of our process. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff  
President

RW/rw

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair  
Rachel Swanger, ALO  
Paul Kaminsky, Board Chair  
Members of the EER team  
Richard Winn