

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2 PM ET / 11 AM PT, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020

February 26, 2020

To the WSCUC Community,

You are likely aware that the US Department of Education has new rules that will soon change the landscape for higher education accreditation. The Commission has been thinking hard about how to advance the interests of students and institutions, and WSCUC's leadership and values, in this environment.

Our reflections have been guided by our longstanding core principles:

- We believe accreditation should put student learning and success front and center.
- We aspire to be a leader in honoring institutional mission and diversity while sustaining high standards. To us, quality means inclusiveness and equity, not exclusivity and stratification.
- We are committed to transparency and accountability, and to a model of accreditation that provides value to the institution and isn't an undue burden.
- Finally, as the accreditor for a dynamic, diverse, and innovative part of the country, we understand that higher education must and will change as the world changes.

In that spirit, WSCUC has decided to broaden our reach. The Department's new rules, which were finalized last October and go into effect in July, allow us to accredit institutions outside our historic geographic scope of California, Hawaii, and American territories in the Pacific. Since the new rules were announced, several WSCUC-accredited institutions have asked if we would consider accrediting related institutions located beyond those areas.

The Commission agreed unanimously on February 14, 2020 that saying yes to these requests is consistent with our mission of supporting institutions we accredit as they seek to reach new audiences and increase their effectiveness and sustainability. Going forward, we will consider applications from WSCUC-accredited and affiliated institutions that could result in WSCUC's accrediting institutions in states outside our current scope, and we plan to notify the US Department of Education to that effect.

The step we are now taking is both deliberate and an opportunity for further meaningful change. You may well ask, what comes next, and what will it mean for institutions we currently accredit and for WSCUC? The Commission, composed of institutional representatives and public members, will consult with institutions and other stakeholders about the principles and focus for our accreditation mission and our activities in the future. Your perspectives will be essential as we plan how to serve students, partner with institutions, support high quality innovation, and build on our existing strengths. We will sustain our commitment to the quality of education and collaboration among institutions in the western region. We will also explore beyond this immediate decision how best to use our experience and yours to advance our goals of student success and institutional effectiveness. WSCUC has long been proud of initiating and responding to change, such as our innovations relating to transparency, outcomes, international, and incubation, and this provides another opportunity to do just that.

WSCUC has a number of other consequential undertakings in the works. As you know, we are reviewing the substance of our Standards for Accreditation and calling on your ideas and discussion. We are also developing better ways to understand and use evidence of student success for both improvement and accountability (“Better Conversations, Better Data”), and we are seeking new ways to support institutions’ governance and financial sustainability.

We need your engagement in each of these mission-critical projects if we are to sustain the values with which we began this letter: student learning and achievement, equity, institutional quality, and accountability. Please contact either of us with your suggestions and questions. We look forward to your participation in these initiatives and hope to see many of you at ARC2020 and the special CEO and ALO sessions there.

Sincerely,



Reed Dasenbrock  
Chair



Jamienne S. Studley  
President