

November 15, 2024

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of the University of California, Berkeley, I write to express our appreciation for the opportunity to pursue the Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR) of accreditation and to respond to the 2024 report of the peer evaluation team.

Reflections on what we gained from the process. The process of composing our institutional self-study report was enlightening for us as a campus. Over the course of two years, our internal Steering Committee for the UC Berkeley WSCUC Reaffirmation of Accreditation collaborated on a university-wide evaluation of campus programs, operations, and strategic goals in relationship to the Standards of Accreditation. We reflected on our response to WSCUC's 2015 recommendations during our previous accreditation review, selected and proposed the theme for our TPR proposal, and gathered information from a wide variety of faculty, staff, and students in order to explicate our campus's compliance with the Criteria for Review. For many members of our Steering Committee, this was a unique opportunity at our large and decentralized university to delve into all aspects of campus teaching, research, learning, the undergraduate and graduate student experiences, and operations.

In addition, the review period, covering the last ten years, included many significant challenges facing higher education as an industry, California as a state, and UC Berkeley as an institution — such as the pandemic, infrastructure challenges, technological changes, climate risks, and major socio-political and economic developments. We believe that engaging in the TPR process has provided us with a much-needed opportunity to reflect on the impact of these dynamics on our campus mission and community.

As a result of the self-study process, we have gained a new appreciation for the resilience of our students, faculty, and staff; recommitted ourselves to supporting transformational experiences for our students both inside and outside the classroom; identified needed areas of improvement in supporting our faculty and staff so that they are well-positioned to support student success; and identified important changes for us to make to institutional structures and processes.

Response to commendations. We appreciate the peer evaluation team's dedicated attention to our campus, and greatly value the team's observations of Berkeley's strengths. We are delighted to have received commendations from the peer evaluation team for our Discovery Trailblazers program, which promotes curricular innovation; the success of our recent Light the Way capital campaign and our determination to generate new revenue streams; our spirit of collaboration and dedication to shared governance; our responsive institutional research staff; and our creation of a positive culture in which faculty and staff exhibit devotion to our public mission. We note that these commendations are aligned with our own self-evaluation of the areas in which Berkeley excels: innovation, creative approaches to challenges, collaboration, complex analysis, and public-spirited dedication to higher education.

Response to recommendations. We also appreciate the peer evaluation team’s four thoughtful recommendations. As a campus, we are dedicated to continuous improvement in all areas in order to remain at the forefront of higher education. We therefore approach these recommendations from peer university leaders with gratitude. Going forward, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will be leading the campus efforts to respond to the recommendations and to track our progress.

We agree with all four recommendations and acknowledge that they reflect aspects of the campus that we recognize and wish to transform. In particular:

Response to Recommendation #1: The team recommends that we **continue our focus on fully supporting our at-risk, disabled, and marginalized student populations to promote equitable access to opportunity.** We fully agree that this is an essential area in which UC Berkeley must remain dedicated to serving all our students. Some of the ways in which we expect to address this recommendation include greater alignment of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions with the Center for Educational Partnerships; continuing to encourage diverse student recruitment pipelines, such as through our Cal Day programming and developing ways to preview Berkeley for prospective students; implementing the recommendations of our recent joint Senate-Administration Task Forces on the First Year Student Experience and the Transfer Student Experience; strengthening the alignment between advising teams in the Colleges with central campus offices and programs; further developing our cross-campus Berkeley Scholars Consortium, which shares best practices among programs that support underrepresented and marginalized students; continuing to advocate to the State for increased resources to support students with disabilities while implementing the UC Systemwide Advisory Work Group on Students with Disabilities recommendations; and investing in our Thriving Initiatives, which work to cultivate opportunities and resources to transform UC Berkeley into a place where every member of our community feels a deep sense of belonging.

Some of the challenges we face in addressing this recommendation include: the need for additional funding to support faculty members in implementing accommodations for students with disabilities; the need for us to make transformative institutional shifts as we embrace our new identity as an Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI, designation gained 2023) and as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI, designation expected 2027); and the need for us to garner resources so that we can fully include students from low socioeconomic backgrounds for basic needs, housing, tuition and fees, and living expenses. We are firmly dedicated to our mission as a public institution, and to serving the people of the state of California and beyond; this commitment is increasingly challenging in a scarce resource environment. We are hopeful that the peer evaluation team’s recommendation in this area will help us tell the Berkeley story more persuasively so we can secure the resources needed for the institution to support all its students consistently and equitably.

We are also highly aware that staff workload, retention, and burnout are significant concerns on our campus, and that these were highlighted by the peer evaluation team in their comments on

this area of recommendation. We will be continuing to invest in programs such as Advising Strategy + Training and the Graduate Student Affairs Officer group in order to provide support for our advising staff members and to ensure that UC Berkeley creates sustainable and rewarding employment for staff who care for our student community and support our faculty. We also have a practice of periodically soliciting feedback from staff broadly across all job categories through People and Culture in order to maintain our awareness of how staff are doing.

Response to Recommendation #2: The team recommends that we **improve internal communication to foster transparency, augment collaboration and innovation, and support student success and other institutional priorities.** We believe that this recommendation is relevant to many areas of our campus operations. As a highly decentralized and very creative campus, we continually negotiate the friction between the benefits of centralizing programs and services and the importance of encouraging local control, accountability, and innovation throughout the university. We recognize that, at Berkeley, it is not uncommon, for example, for a student to be unaware of the existence of a specific program or service that addresses a need they have; for a faculty member to be unaware of an opportunity that would benefit them; or for a staff member to be unaware of an existing resource that could support an emerging need and prevent the development of a duplicative program. Even at the leadership level, Deans and senior leaders may not know all of the possible opportunities and connections across the campus. In other words, we recognize that navigating our campus effectively can be challenging for any population. Investing in our internal communications infrastructure, habits, and culture will help us disseminate our best ideas as widely as possible, use our limited resources wisely, and strengthen our community. Many variations on this topic are under frequent discussion throughout the campus.

Presently, the campus is in the process of starting the search process for a new Associate Vice Chancellor (AVC) for Communications. We anticipate that the new AVC will develop a strategic plan for campus communications that will partly address the team's recommendation. Communications also intends to hire for a new role in internal communications to improve cross-campus engagement. In addition, the campus is updating both the email messaging system for campus communications and the WarnMe system for campus emergencies. We are reviewing and revising templates, automating more processes, emphasizing training and consistency, revising a campus-wide crisis communications plan, and exploring new technologies and tools.

Of particular relevance to the Discovery Initiative, the campus will be reviewing the materials used for new student orientation and orientation, Golden Bear Orientation, to examine what additional supplementary communications are needed for students throughout their first year on campus so they remain aware of Discovery Initiative and the Discovery Opportunities Database.

Response to Recommendation #3: The team recommends that we **build on the momentum of the Discovery Initiative's early successes by exploring a sustainable model to ensure access to an immersive experience for every undergraduate**

student. We agree that both sustainability and scaling for the Discovery Initiative are important for UC Berkeley as a whole. The campus is actively developing the next phase of the initiative to explicitly address these concerns.

In relation to scaling, Discovery is preparing to launch a funding round targeted at faculty who want to re-envision existing courses through a Discovery lens. When students pursue original research and creation, they practice how to move from being knowledge consumers to being knowledge producers. The seven pilot courses Discovery is funding as a precursor to the new funding round include a variety of creative disciplinary applications of research in which students will be able to participate directly, across many fields. For example, one of the pilot courses is a required Chemistry lab in which students will be engaged in the process of new material discovery that will impact areas such as energy, storage, biosensing, and drug delivery. Another pilot course in History of Art will give students the opportunity to explore the concept of the museum and the behind-the-scenes functioning of it, resulting in students presenting exhibition proposals of their own to the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive advisory board.

In relation to sustainability, we are exploring how to identify sources of financial support for Discovery in and beyond the classroom. To date, the initiative has primarily been funded through philanthropy. While philanthropic engagement remains an important aspect of the program, it is also important for Berkeley to establish an ongoing source of funding for Discovery initiative areas such as curricular reinvention, support of smaller courses, and support of graduate student mentors.

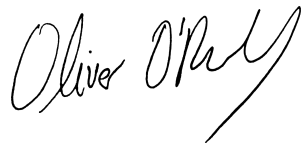
During the reaffirmation of the accreditation process, it became clear that the Discovery Initiative could also be better integrated with the programs offered within colleges, schools, and departments. With the increased awareness of the importance of internships for our students, it will be important to continue to promote the Discovery Opportunities Database so that these opportunities can be advertised in an equitable manner to our students. We will therefore be including Deans in future updates and developments in Discovery, to ensure that they can provide input as the initiative develops and also to ensure that they are able to cascade the resources provided to all their faculty and students.

Response to Recommendation #4: The team recommends that we **incorporate an analysis of student achievement of Program Learning Outcomes consistently and constructively in the Academic Program Review Self-Studies.** We agree that the campus can improve consistency in the evaluation of student learning in our degree programs, both graduate and undergraduate, during the APR process. Our own Berkeley Division of the University of California's Academic Senate, through its Undergraduate Council, recently made a similar recommendation, emphasizing that departments should be more consistent in gathering information about undergraduate student experiences. The Undergraduate Council drafted guidance in May 2024 for soliciting feedback from undergraduate students to evaluate an academic program's needs, concerns, and opinions about the unit under review. This guidance was added to our internal Academic Program Review Guide for UC Berkeley and will be implemented in future reviews. The Division of Academic Planning and the Division of

Undergraduate Education will collaborate to develop more robust processes to implement programmatic evaluation of student learning, and will also inform departments and programs under review that evaluation of student learning is required for us to be in alignment with WSCUC standards. With the leadership of the Graduate Council of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate and the administrative Graduate Division, the campus will also explore opportunities for expanding more consistent analysis of student learning achievement for graduate programs in the APR process.

Closing Remarks. These are only brief updates on the areas highlighted by the peer evaluation team in their recommendations to our campus. We look forward to discussing further with the WSCUC Commission at the scheduled meeting on February 13, 2025. Thank you again for this opportunity to evaluate the work of our campus and to cultivate a mindset of continuous improvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oliver O'Reilly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Oliver O'Reilly

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, UC Berkeley

Chair, UC Berkeley WSCUC Reaffirmation of Accreditation Steering Committee, 2024

cc: Richard K. Lyons, Chancellor

Benjamin E. Hermalin, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Catherine Cronquist Browning, Accreditation Liaison Officer