May 21, 2014

Ronald A. Route, Vice Admiral (ret.)
President
Naval Postgraduate School
One University Circle
Monterey, CA 93943-5002

Dear President Route:

At its meeting via teleconference on May 15, 2014, a panel of the Interim Report Committee considered the report of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) submitted on March 1, 2014, along with the supporting documents which accompanied it. The members appreciated the opportunity to discuss the interim report with you and your colleagues: Douglas Hensler, Provost; Douglas Moses, Vice Provost, Academic Affairs and Interim ALO; David Olwell, Professor and Faculty Chair; Robert Dell, Professor; and Eleanor Uhlinger, University Librarian. The discussion was informative and helped the panelists to understand more clearly NPS’s responses to the Commission Action Letter dated March 7, 2011 following the EER Visit of October 26-28, 2010.

That Commission letter asked the institution to address three issues related to the activities of the School: (1) completion of assessment protocols across all academic units; (2) progress in expanding international partnerships, recruiting distinguished research scholars, broadening sources of revenue, and strengthening delivery systems in distance learning; and (3) the development of strategies for sustained cost savings, reputational advancement, further diversification of the student body, and enhancement of the physical plant. The panel commended the School for a coherent, well-written, and easy to navigate institutional report. There was significant evidence of progress in each of the areas, achieved in a time of substantial trial for the institution. Both the Inspector General’s report and federal budget sequestration imposed unanticipated challenges. The panel noted the confirmation of NPS’s mission by the governing federal bodies, and compliments the institution on achieving this validation in an uncertain time.

With respect to assessment of student learning, the panel acknowledged the deeper work being done at the course level, and the use of national program accreditation review (e.g., ABET) as a template for institutional program review. The hiring of the Associate Provost for Educational Effectiveness represents a substantial commitment to imbedding assessment as a systemic activity. Newly calibrated criteria for credit hours and extended work on capstone projects have refined assessment of student learning. The creation of the Graduate Writing Center, resulting from the study of capstone course data, is a fine example of institution-wide response to assessment analysis. The dual methods of program review (academic program [institutional] and curricular [stakeholder]), provide different but complementary lenses to assess the success of students. The current cycles and schedule result in a methodical and complete appraisal of the institution’s academic activity.
The first three elements of the Commission’s second request were vitiated by circumstances outside of the institution’s control (i.e., the IG report and sequestration). The 2011 strategic direction has been refocused on the core mission of NPS, putting essential Navy programs in the foreground. The panel notes that the School must be responsive, first and foremost, to the needs of its parent organization, and the manpower requirements issuing from those needs. With an absence of hiring authority for the past two years there has been little flexibility to identify and secure additional faculty, much less international research scholars. Nonetheless, the institution is consistently alert to the prospect of additional good faculty as replacements, and affirms its continued commitment to (and achievement of) significant research and scholarship. It is evident that ongoing clarification from the Navy about the Navy’s manpower needs for degreed personnel will frame much of the construct of the institution over the next few years. With respect to distance learning, the panel compliments the School for its move to a more centralized support approach, resulting in significantly increased communication and enhanced library resources.

The panel appreciated the institution’s ready and complete response to student diversity demographics. It evidenced the School’s awareness of this critical component, and it compliments the institution on making use of curricular reviews to promote increased diversity, as well as using outreach to program officers when discussing students who are proposed for admission. It is understood that NPS does not recruit students in the manner of a traditional higher education institution. The report noted appropriate progress in managing business operations and the continued improvement of the physical plant to promote educational activities. Finally, the panel noted that the institution, with the affirmation of its mission, is now in a position to re-engage its strategic planning activities.

After deliberation, the panel acted to:

1. Receive the institution’s interim report.

2. Continue with the scheduled reaffirmation reviews, with the Offsite Review set for spring 2020 and the Accreditation Visit set for fall 2020.

3. Request that the institution convey a copy of its strategic plan, upon completion, to the WSCUC staff liaison. No report on the plan is requested; a transmittal letter and the plan itself are all that is required.

With respect to the next WSCUC review, please be advised that the Commission acted at its June 19 – 21, 2013 meeting, to approve the final version of the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation and the new Institutional Review Process as outlined in that Handbook. Proceeding forward, the institution should rely upon the new Handbook as the appropriate guide for matters related to Standards and CFRs. Please contact me if you have specific questions about these changes.

I look forward to working with you and your colleagues at the Naval Postgraduate School.
Sincerely,

Christopher N. Oberg
Vice President/COO

Cc: Douglas Moses, Vice Provost, Academic Affairs and Interim ALO
    Members of the Interim Report Committee