February 28, 2011

Roger Ellis  
President  
California Baptist University  
8432 Magnolia Avenue  
Riverside, CA  92504

Dear President Ellis:

At its meeting on February 16-18, 2011, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to California Baptist University (Cal Baptist) on September 29 to October 1, 2010. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by Cal Baptist prior to the visit, the institution's December 8, 2010 response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2008. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues: Jonathan Parker, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dawn Ellen Jacobs, Associate Provost and Accreditation Liaison Officer. Your comments were helpful.

Cal Baptist’s institutional proposal identified growth as the major theme for the review, driven by Cal Baptist’s goals of increasing enrollments, providing an environment conducive to learning, promoting excellence, and enhancing its reputation as a premier Christian comprehensive university. Four sub-themes relating to growth were addressed in both the CPR and the EER: mastering growth, sustaining an educationally effective institutional identity, sustaining educational effectiveness, and educationally effective program innovation. The visiting team notes that Cal Baptist did an excellent job in its institutional presentation of reporting on the institutionalization of outcomes, discussing goals for aggressive growth and the addition of doctoral programs, and committing to assessment of student learning outcomes across the curriculum and in student services and student support areas. At the same time, the team notes the need for continued work in addressing growth challenges related to Cal Baptist’s Christian distinctiveness, the use of data and analysis in planning and decision making, the analysis of current practices and programs, the sufficiency and support of faculty, and financial sustainability.

In addition to the themes selected by Cal Baptist, the Commission’s action letter of March 6, 2009 highlighted two major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: plans for growth and the development of doctoral education; and educational effectiveness. The issue of planning for growth included the workload of faculty in new programs, refinement of market analyses,
protection of the undergraduate programs while studying the possibility of offering doctoral programs, and the development of the culture of research necessary to support doctoral programs. The issue of educational effectiveness included assessment, strategic planning, student success, technology, student services, and institutional research. The team report notes that the EER addressed most of the issues raised in the CPR, although a few, noted below, continue to be concerns. The Commission appreciates Cal Baptist's statement in its response to the team report that each recommendation is already the subject of attention at the institution.

The Commission finds much to commend at Cal Baptist, including the alignment of academic and administrative units with the overall mission of the university; a substantial increase in enrollment; an atmosphere of academic entrepreneurship that the team found to be "pervasive and invigorating"; a vast improvement of campus facilities; the addition of a new, well-staffed, and well-planned Division of Online and Professional Studies; a reasonable plan for growth; and the congruence of the entire university community around the President’s vision, with a "laser focus that is remarkable in a university of this size and complexity."

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

Ensuring Financial Strength and Sustainability. As highlighted in the team report, the team was "concerned about the institution’s significant financial leverage (specifically, its debt load) that will require greater and greater enrollment growth to sustain...." The team further stated that "managing its debt service will require program expansion for enrollment growth at a rate that may be more rapid than its infrastructure can sustain" and that "the current structure of operational and capital funding creates a significant drag on future operations." The current level of debt makes Cal Baptist vulnerable to changes in the external environment, especially those that might cause downturns in enrollment. The Commission recommends that Cal Baptist engage in continued monitoring of fiscal indicators, the external economic environment, and costs of the new programs that it is considering and in careful short- and long-term planning. The Commission also noted that this issue was raised in the CPR and appreciates your commenting on this area of concern in your letter of response. (CFRs 1.8, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2)

Planning for Enrollment and Program Growth. The CPR for this review recommended discussion and reflection on how Cal Baptist's planned growth will affect finances, faculty, student services, and quality assurance. Each of these areas remains a subject for continued study, reflection, and planning. The team noted that Cal Baptist's report would have been strengthened by a discussion of which new programs are still being contemplated and reflection on how realistic the 2020 enrollment goal is, given that it projects six-percent annual growth and a total campus enrollment of 8080 in 2020, up from a current enrollment of 3200. The Commission finds that the impact of this continued projected growth on the current infrastructure and the challenges that this growth might pose for Cal Baptist's identity cannot be determined without further evidence-based analysis and careful planning. (CFRs 4.1-4.5)

New Doctoral Programs. The move to become a doctoral degree-granting and research institution is a major one that affects the entire institution. The team report states that "further thought, analysis, and realistic evaluation clearly need to occur before this can become a reality" for Cal Baptist. Among the matters to be considered are the qualifications of the faculty for doctoral-level education;
faculty workload, compensation, promotion and related policies; and the development of a doctoral culture. As the team noted, the current faculty teaching load has "left some faculty feeling overloaded" and the "prospect of expanded programs and degree offerings energize some faculty and overwhelm others." Policies and infrastructure needed to support doctoral programs include a support for culture of scholarship and research appropriate for the doctorate, the development of learning outcomes and tools to assess learning, and improved library resources and services. The Commission appreciates the institution's clarification that the decision to move to doctoral education is still in the discussion and data-gathering stages, and is encouraged that Cal Baptist is engaging in careful planning to address these issues. (CFRs 2.1, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.8, 2.9, 2.13, 3.2-3.4, 3.6, 3.11, 4.1-4.4)

**Developing Systems for Data Collection, Analysis and Use.** A culture of evidence requires the collection and analysis of data and its use in planning and decision making. The Commission notes that, while Cal Baptist has made substantial progress in this area, more work needs to be done. The team emphasizes the need for more effective use of data analysis at Cal Baptist throughout its report, a matter that also was highlighted following the CPR. The hiring of a new associate provost for institutional research, assessment, and planning is a positive step toward addressing this important function. The Commission commends Cal Baptist for evidence of planning and models for data flow, program review, assessment processes, and strategic planning, and urges Cal Baptist to move quickly to implement plans that will support student success (see more on this topic below) and inform decision-making. More systematic and comprehensive collection and use of data also will lead to better planning. As noted by the team, "the demands of enrollment growth and program expansion are making the need for better dissemination and incorporation [of data] into decision-making more critical." (CFRs 1.2, 2.10, 4.1-4.3, 4.5, 4.6)

**Enhancing the Assessment of Student Learning.** Cal Baptist has identified six University Learning Outcomes that are included in academic and student services programs across the institution, communicated to students, and embraced by the faculty and administration. Individual program learning outcomes also have been adopted. The Commission acknowledges the progress Cal Baptist has made in aligning and assessing these outcomes and also finds that the effectiveness of this work varies across the campus. The team noted that "much [assessment] activity is apparent and more is planned" and also found that "the relatively new implementation and still-contemplated assessment [activities] ... made it difficult to judge the efficacy of the assessment plan, the sustainment of the ethos of assessment, and how the data collected will be analyzed and used to improve student learning". Further development and use of assessment results are needed, including less dependence on indirect assessment through surveys and the use of sound, direct assessment methods. Consideration should be given to the team’s recommendation for a central assessment office, such as a teaching and learning center, to provide assessment resources and training. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 3.4, 4.6-4.8)

**Improving and Aligning Program Review.** The Commission acknowledges that program review is an essential quality assurance process at Cal Baptist, with all academic and some non-academic programs subject to formal cyclical program review and to annual reporting on learning outcomes. The Commission encourages Cal Baptist to consider further development of its program review processes in areas identified by the team, including connecting the results of program review with budgeting and planning so that identified program needs are addressed. Using specialized or programmatic accreditation in lieu of institutional program review is efficient, but advisable only if the accrediting review is as comprehensive and useful as Cal Baptist’s own process and includes the
results of assessment. Clear and standardized program review policies and procedures also are desirable. (CFRs 2.7, 4.2, 4.4)

**Measuring, Understanding and Supporting Student Success.** Retention, persistence, and completion are important indicators of an institution’s educational effectiveness. As noted by the team, Cal Baptist has markedly improved graduation rates for most of its students (from a low of 33 percent in 2001 to a high of 60 percent in 2007, followed by a drop to 49 percent in 2008). However, some sub-populations of students, such as African-American students and students who are admitted conditionally, are not succeeding at the same levels as the overall student population. Also, freshmen retention rates have varied dramatically over time. Although Cal Baptist has programs intended to help students succeed, it is not yet collecting and analyzing data that will help it to understand why rates vary among student sub-populations or why overall rates vacillate over time. As the team noted, “the reason for fluctuations in these measures is still not well understood, nor is the information that is known shared or communicated consistently with faculty or individuals who have direct contact with students”. The Commission acknowledges and supports Cal Baptist’s mission to educate a student body that includes students who might not be especially well prepared for college and the obligation that this policy carries to support every admitted student. The Commission urges Cal Baptist to develop more effective means to collect, analyze and utilize data, including disaggregated and comparative data, that can be used to build effective programs to support students and to establish goals for student success.

Noting that Cal Baptist appreciates both how improved retention can increase enrollment and how improved graduation rates might be an element that “[enhances] the reputation of Cal Baptist as a premier Christian comprehensive institution,” the Commission recommends that Cal Baptist consider carefully the many recommendations in the EER team report concerning enhancements that may improve retention and completion. Such recommendations include those related to library resources, faculty and staff workload, university-funded financial aid, and the development of facilities. The initiatives to improve student success should be included in the budget, aligned with the financial plan, and assured of sufficient funding. (CFRs 1.2, 2.6, 2.10, 2.13, 3.1, 3.5, 3.6, 4.2)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of California Baptist University.


3. Request an Interim Report be submitted on November 1, 2013 on the issues cited in the EER report, emphasizing in particular the following issues: 1) financial strength, planning, and management; 2) planning for enrollment and program growth; 3) the status of deliberations on new programs, both online and doctoral, and related plans, if any; 4) progress in building capacity for data collection, analysis, and use; 5) updated information on assessment and program review; 6) progress in analyzing and improving graduation and retention rates, including the disaggregating of data by program and sub-populations and the analysis of gaps in achievement among the various groups on campus; and 7) steps taken to develop and fund programs and initiatives that support student success. Progress should be demonstrated, as defined above and as discussed in the visiting team’s report.
In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California Baptist University 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 California Baptist University’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 University 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/DH/cf

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
   Dawn Ellen Jacobs, ALO
   Dr. Anthony Dockery, Board Chair
   Members of the EER team
   Diane Harvey, Vice President, WASC