December 17, 2009

Michael Vinciguerra
President
University of St. Francis
500 N. Wilcox St.
Joliet, IL 60435

Dear President Vinciguerra:

Enclosed is the report of the team that conducted the University of St. Francis Quality Checkup site visit. In addition to communicating the team’s evaluation of your compliance with the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and with the Commission's Federal Compliance Program, the report captures the team’s assessment of your use of the feedback from your last Systems Appraisal and your overall commitment to continuous improvement.

I hope you will read and study the report carefully, because the team invested heavily in preparing for and conducting this visit, and its perceptions and advice are valuable to your institution. Please consider distributing it widely throughout your institution, since its positive feedback can be helpful in strengthening and broadening involvement in your quality improvement efforts.

A copy of the report will be read and analyzed by the AQIP Panel that reviews institutions for Reaffirmation of Accreditation at the time your review is scheduled. Prior to that review, we will send you a listing of the materials the Panel will consider, and give you an opportunity to update or supplement them if you so desire.

To comply with federal requirements, we need the CEO of the institution formally to acknowledge receipt of this report within the next two weeks, and to provide us with any comments you wish to make about it. Your response will become part of the institution’s permanent record.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Spangehl
Vice President, Accreditation Relations
QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

University of St. Francis

Joliet, IL
November 11 – 13, 2009

Quality Checkup Team Members:

Dr. Douglas Haneline
Professor of English
Ferris State University

Dr. Shanda Traiser
Dean, Gary Tharaldson School of Business
University of Mary

The Higher Learning Commission
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
800-621-7440 • www.ncahlc.org
Background on Quality Checkups conducted by the Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission’s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) conducts Quality Checkup site visits to each institution during the fifth or sixth year in every seven-year cycle of AQIP participation. These visits are conducted by trained, experienced AQIP Reviewers to determine whether the institution continues to meet The Higher Learning Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation, and whether it is using quality management principles and building a culture of continuous improvement as participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) requires. The goals of an AQIP Quality Checkup are to:

1. Affirm the accuracy of the organization’s online Systems Portfolio and verify information included in the portfolio that the last Systems Appraisal has identified as needing clarification or verification (System Portfolio Clarification and Verification);

2. Review with organizational leaders actions taken to capitalize on the strategic issues and opportunities for improvement identified by the last Systems Appraisal (Systems Appraisal Follow Up);

3. Alert the organization to areas that need its attention prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, and reassure it concerning areas that have been covered adequately (Accreditation Issues Follow Up);

4. Verify federal compliance issues such as default rates, complaints, USDE interactions and program reviews, etc. (Federal Compliance Review); and

5. Assure continuing organizational quality improvement commitment through presentations, meetings, or sessions that clarify AQIP and Commission accreditation work (Organizational Quality Commitment).

The AQIP peer reviewer(s) trained for this role prepare for the visit by reviewing relevant organizational and AQIP file materials, particularly the organization’s last Systems Appraisal Feedback Report and the Commission’s internal Organizational Profile, which summarizes information reported by the institution in its Annual Institutional Data Update. The report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluator(s). Copies of the Quality Checkup report are provided to the institution’s CEO and AQIP liaison. A copy is retained by the Commission for the institution’s permanent file, and will be part of the materials reviewed by the AQIP Review Panel during Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
Clarification and verification of contents of the institution’s Systems Portfolio

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

- The Team that reviewed the 2007 Systems Portfolio noted areas in which improvements needed to be made in almost every AQIP category. It also identified two accreditation and seven strategic issues which, in the team’s view, needed institutional attention.

- USF significantly improved the quality of its portfolio by providing more, and more detailed, information in all areas of the portfolio. This information was supplemented by written information provided on-site and by meetings with key individuals. More specifically, USF met this goal by providing additional evidence in the areas of the assessment of student learning, the status of current AQIP Action projects, strategic planning, and the financial condition of the institution.

Review of specific accreditation issues identified by the institution’s last Systems Appraisal

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

- USF’s first systems portfolio was missing information in a number of areas due to a misunderstanding of some of the requirements for its assembly. In addition to the significantly revised and improved portfolio completed in 2009, USF provided much more written and oral information during the visit to demonstrate their compliance with Commission and AQIP expectations.

- The 2007 team identified two accreditation issue areas, both in Criterion Three: student learning and effective teaching, and quality control for off-campus sites.

- In the 2009 version of the systems portfolio, USF shows that it has made significant progress in assessment of student learning and has broadened opportunities to use this information to make decisions, thereby helping the campus community to see the value of performing assessment. The 2009 systems portfolio also provided much more detailed information regarding quality control at off-campus sites.
In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations. 

- The 2007 team identified seven strategic issues to help USF in prioritizing and taking actions on the challenges and opportunities it faces: assessment, quality improvement systems and processes, relationships with non-student stakeholders and collaborators, systems for communicating, developing resources for financial stability, increasing institutional commitment to the AQIP process, and improving the quality of self-analysis.

- USF seems to have received the feedback from the Systems Appraisal in an open-minded manner. They have either acted upon, or are in the process of acting on the recommendations of the Strategic Issues Analysis of the last Systems Appraisal.

- USF recognizes it must continue to work to improve communication, to further develop assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness, and to integrate assessment, strategic planning and budgeting processes.

- USF has learned much since its last System Appraisal regarding AQIP, its principles and the expectations of HLC, and also of the value of the process to the institution.

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

- From visits with various groups, including faculty, staff and administration, and students, it is apparent that USF is making strides to incorporate a culture of continuous improvement into its institutional life.

- USF has developed an increased sophistication in its use of AQIP processes. This increased sophistication is shown in the significant improvement of quality in the 2009 Systems Portfolio over the 2007 version, as well as in the greatly increased number of and cross section of individuals involved in AQIP teams and processes.
- Continued progress will require a continuation of the strong focus and commitment that the President and his team have demonstrated since his arrival to keep the momentum going over the next few years during times of economic turmoil, demographic change, and financial challenges.

Other Issues:

- Because USF has a small endowment and its revenue stream is largely tuition-driven, the team suggests that USF focus on its financial viability, a major concern for all institutions of higher education in the current economic situation. Prudent institutions perform an objective review and analysis of their particular situation in regards to risk assessment and contingency planning. Transparency and communication is an important part of that process. USF should review where it can make changes to help weather any potential storms, using processes like academic program review, a degree program cost model, and deferred salary adjustments.
WORKSHEET ON
Federal Compliance Requirements

INSTITUTIONAL MATERIALS RELATED TO FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REVIEWED BY THE TEAM:

**Federal Compliance**: Document (with hot links to USF website) provided by USF listing required federal compliance areas and demonstrating the institution’s compliance with federal requirements.

**EVALUATION OF FEDERAL COMPLIANCE PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

1. **Credits, Program Length, and Tuition**: *The institution has documented that it has credit hour assignments and degree program lengths within the range of good practice in higher education and that tuition is consistent across degree programs (or that there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).*

   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.
   **Comments**: The information is in order and USF is in compliance in this area.

2. **Student Complaints**: *The institution has documented a process in place for addressing student complaints and appears to be systematically processing such complaints as evidenced by the data on student complaints for the three years prior to the visit.*

   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.
   **Comments**: USF’s student complaint process is in order.

3. **Transfer Policies**: *The institution has demonstrated it is appropriately disclosing its transfer policies to students and to the public. Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions.*

   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.
   **Comments**: Transfer policies are appropriately disclosed to students and the public, and the policies contain information about the criteria USF uses to make transfer decisions.

4. **Verification of Student Identity**: *The institution has demonstrated that it verifies the identity of students who participate in courses or programs provided to the student through distance or correspondence education.*

   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.
   **Comments**: USF has demonstrated that it verifies the identity of students in distance education courses or programs.
5. Title IV Program and Related Responsibilities: The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program. The team has reviewed these materials and has found no cause for concern regarding the institution’s administration or oversight of its Title IV responsibilities.

- **General Program Requirements**: The institution has provided the Commission with information about the fulfillment of its Title IV program responsibilities, particularly findings from any review activities by the Department of Education. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution’s fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.

- **Financial Responsibility Requirements**: The institution has provided the Commission with information about the Department’s review of composite ratios and financial audits. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution’s fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.

- **Default Rates, Campus Crime Information and Related Disclosure of Consumer Information, Satisfactory Academic Progress and Attendance Policies**: The institution has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution’s policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations.

- **Contractual Relationships**: The institution has presented evidence of its contracts with non-accredited third party providers of 25-50% of the academic content of any degree or certificate programs.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance by USF and recommends the ongoing approval of such contracts.

6. Institutional Disclosures and Advertising and Recruitment Materials: The institution has documented that it provides accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to current and prospective students and the public about its accreditation status with the Commission and other agencies as well as about its programs, locations and policies.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

**Comments**: USF has provided the appropriate documentation demonstrating compliance in this area.

7. Relationship with Other Accrediting Agencies and with State Regulatory Boards: The institution has documented that it discloses its relationship with any other specialized, professional or institutional accreditor and with all governing or coordinating bodies in states in which the institution may have a presence.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

**Comments**: USF has documented that it discloses its relationship with accrediting, governing, and coordinating bodies in the states where it has a presence.
8. Public Notification of an Evaluation Visit and Third Party Comment: The institution has made an appropriate and timely effort to solicit third party comments. The team has evaluated any comments received and completed any necessary follow-up on issues raised in these comments.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance. **Comments:** USF has appropriately sought third-party comments which the team reviewed and found no issues that would require follow-up.