July 6, 1998

Kenneth R. Nielsen
President
Woodbury University
7500 Glenoaks Boulevard
Burbank, CA 91510-7846

Dear President Nielsen:

At its meeting on June 24-25, 1998, the Commission considered the report of the evaluation team that visited your campus on March 17-20, 1998. The Commission also had available to it the self study prepared by Woodbury University in preparation for this visit and the University's response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the University's response to the team report and the opportunity to meet with you and Zelda Gilbert.

The Commission commends the University for a self study prepared with a significant level of involvement on the part of the campus community. The Commission acknowledges the demonstrated efforts to respond to many of the concerns identified in its last action letter and the progress made since the last accreditation visit.

The evaluation team found much about the institution to commend. The team found that the University is deeply concerned about its students; that it is dedicated to teaching and student development through the creation of an active learning environment; that it provides multiple alternatives to the traditional course format; that it is enthusiastic about faculty efforts to sustain curriculum innovation and improvement; that it is expanding the diversity of its student body; that it fosters respect of cultural differences; and that it is committed to progress in bringing technology to the faculty and providing opportunities to use technology effectively in the delivery of instruction.
The evaluation team identified a number of important recommendations for consideration. The Commission endorses those recommendations and urges the University to give them consideration. In addition, the Commission wishes to highlight a number of areas warranting special attention.

**Financial Viability.** While it seems that the Woodbury University administration and its Board are committed to maintaining the institution’s financial base, the Commission views three recent developments as cause for concern: the recent financial constraints that necessitated the reduction of budgetary expenditures by $1.3 million; the apparent lack of internal budgetary procedures and controls; and the continued reliance on tuition as a primary means of meeting financial obligations.

The Commission will monitor Woodbury University’s financial health. It urges the University to take the following steps: analyze its enrollment and budgetary trends carefully; incorporate, within its overall financial plan, provisions for securing a continually increasing percentage of its revenues from sources other than tuition; develop budgetary policies that provide for appropriate financial controls and for early identification of financial difficulties; and develop reserves (including enlarging its endowment) to meet unforeseen emergencies. In addition the Commission expects that the University will involve the campus community in the budgeting process.

**Assessment.** While there are vigorous and concentrated assessment activities underway on the campus, they are not universal, nor are they integrated. As reflected in the evaluation team’s report, considerable work remains to be done in implementing assessment of student learning more effectively throughout the institution. The University is encouraged to expand its efforts to assess student learning, while bearing in mind that it is not the assessment activity itself that is important, but how the results of the assessments are applied toward improving student learning and teaching effectiveness. Assessment data can provide meaningful indicators of quality, providing the basis for program improvements and faculty development. The Commission encourages the University to build an infrastructure that will permit the examination of learning goals and provide University-wide coordination of assessment activities.

The University is urged to develop an effective system of data collection and analysis to support the assessment process. By integrating the assessment data into its decision-making process (including planning, resource allocations, and academic program reviews), the University will enable faculty, staff and administration to discuss future directions and set policies in a cohesive and cogent manner.
The Commission agrees with the evaluation team that the University should take the next step, that is, to develop a comprehensive plan that will ensure that assessment efforts are more uniformly undertaken and their results more uniformly applied.

**Planning:** The Commission was pleased that the University has developed some momentum in building upon its strategic plan. The Commission believes that this is an important opportunity for the University to develop well-understood planning procedures at all levels. The Commission endorses the team's recommendation that the University develop an integrated planning process. As it moves toward this goal, the University should ensure the integration of technology into both academic programs and administrative services; it should set priorities and assign resources appropriately; it should assure widespread campus involvement in the planning process; and it should incorporate measurements to assess its progress in meeting the goal.

The Commission recommends that the University examine how institutional planning, financial planning, and assessment can be integrated with an effective system of data collection to support the integrated planning process. This undertaking may result in significant tangential outcomes: greater collaboration between faculty, staff and administration in developing a shared vision of institutional development and growth; and decisions made that tie together financial realities with programmatic needs and expectations.

**Faculty:** The Commission observed that the adequacy of the core faculty and the faculty workload—both issues that had been identified previously by the Commission—remain items of concern. Although the University has given these issues attention, the Commission encourages it (1) to find an appropriate balance between core, full-time faculty and adjunct faculty; (2) to develop criteria for the allocation of faculty workload, being mindful of the various responsibilities it expects faculty to undertake; and (3) to continue the work it has begun in addressing appropriate compensation for faculty.

The Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm the accreditation of Woodbury University.

2. Request ten (10) copies of a progress report due March 1, 1999, addressing progress made in financial stability, planning and procedures. This report should
include the most recent audited financial statement. Enclosed is a memorandum providing guidance on the format and content of a progress report.

3. Schedule a Special Visit for the spring of 2001 that focuses on progress made in financial viability and planning, assessment, faculty and technology. A report in preparation for this visit will be due two months in advance of the visit. The time for the next comprehensive visit will be set by the Commission at its June 2001 meeting.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

RW/brn

cc: David K. Winter
Zelda Gilbert
Erwin Seibel
Members of the Team