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PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ralph A. Wolff

June 30, 2009

Stephen Beale
President
California College of the Arts
1111 8th Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

Dear President Beale:

At its meeting on June 19, 2009, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that visited California College of the Arts (CCA) March 11-13, 2009. The Commission also had access to CCA's Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) report and Institutional Proposal. The panel would like to thank you as well as Associate Provost and Accreditation Liaison Officer Melanie Corn for your participation in the meeting. Your comments regarding the usefulness of the two-stage process, your agreement with the visiting team's recommendations, and your plans to make a position in Institutional Research a priority were particularly welcome.

CCA's Institutional Proposal, accepted in 2005, took a thematic approach. For the CPR, the College's self-review would focus on citing three themes: (1) enhancing national visibility through educational excellence, (2) maintaining a sustainable business model, and (3) strengthening internal and external community relations. For the EER, the College proposed to answer a set of questions related to its success in enhancing learning, the curriculum, national visibility, enrollment and retention, financial stability, community relations, diversity, planning, data gathering, governance, and information resources and technology. The EER team reported that CCA effectively addressed both the three themes (in a follow-up statement requested by the team) and the questions (in its EER report).

The team found the EER report comprehensive, and the on-site support for the visit exemplary. The rapid pace of change at CCA that began in the mid-1990s has continued during the period between the CPR and EER visits, with clear benefits to the institution. The visiting team found much to commend, including the skillful way in which CCA has managed its presidential transition and developed an effective management/leadership team. Specifically, the visiting team noted 1) improvements in faculty governance and morale; 2) progress toward a "sustainable business model"; 3) a strong commitment to education for leadership in diverse communities; 4) a developing culture of evidence and faculty ownership of assessment; 5) dedication to scholarship and cross-disciplinary inquiry in arts and design; and 6) innovative new degree programs such as the MBA in Design and BFA in Animation.

The team report offers numerous suggestions and concludes with a set of recommendations that build on the College's recent progress. These focus on the need to: (1) clarify the faculty role in decision making; (2) consider ways to centralize and standardize data collection; (3) work toward achievement of retention and graduation goals, with special attention to student subpopulations; (4) continue work toward a sustainable business model; and (5) complete the next strategic plan, incorporating

lessons from the college's assessment activities and providing for faculty development in response to assessment findings.

The Commission agrees with these recommendations and wishes to highlight a number of items for continued institutional attention.

Financial stability and sustainability. The national economic downturn and state budget crisis have made prudent financial management more important than ever, particularly for institutions like CCA that are small, independent, and endowed at a modest level. Continued economic problems could put the College under even greater stress, if, for example, donors are affected or the Cal Grant program is eliminated. Although CCA's finances appear stable, operational expenses are currently running ahead of revenues and will require careful monitoring. (CFR 3.5)

Retention and graduation rates. As a small, tuition-dependent institution, CCA is dependent on excellent enrollment management for its financial health. It is also a key element of CCA's commitment to diversity to ensure that all student populations successfully complete their studies. The current 6-year completion rate, according to IPEDS, is 51%; some groups, e.g., African-American and Hispanic students, fall below that rate. There is considerable room for improvement in these outcomes. It will be important for the College to study these figures, including results for subpopulations, collect data, study the literature on best practices, and work to understand the obstacles affecting student progress before investing in solutions. It will be equally important for CCA to identify desirable and feasible targets, define a timeline, and continue to work toward improvement of retention and graduation rates in line with those targets. (CFRs 2.10, 2.12, 4.3)

Program review and program-level assessment of student learning. Program review and program-level assessment of student learning are relatively new and just getting established. Although progress thus far is impressive, it will be essential to demonstrate that the work continues to evolve, and that it leads to enhanced educational effectiveness in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional learning. Most importantly, these efforts must be conscientiously *sustained* over the long term in order for students, programs, and the College as a whole to realize maximum benefit. (CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7)

Data management and institutional research. Data management and institutional research provide the foundation for data-based decision making and a culture of evidence, two values of high importance to WASC. In the action letter of 2002, and again following the CPR visit of 2007, the Commission recommended creation of a centralized institutional research office. CCA made a conscious decision, in part for budgetary reasons, to continue its system of decentralized data gathering, relying on Datatel and the various offices where data are collected to respond to user needs. Additionally, the associate provost was given the responsibility of coordinating data and requests for it.

The Commission was pleased to learn that creation of an office of institutional research will be a priority in the College's next strategic plan. For as long as CCA continues with the current decentralized system, however, it will be important for the College to be able to identify clearly where and how needed institutional research of different types is conceptualized, conducted, analyzed, communicated, and utilized for decision making. (CFRs 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

The Commission acted to:

- 1) Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review Report and reaffirm the accreditation of California College of the Arts.

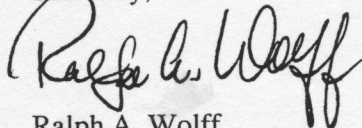
- 2) Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for spring 2016 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for fall 2017. The Institutional Proposal will be due in spring 2014.
- 3) Request that CCA, in its Capacity and Preparatory Review report, respond to the issues raised in this action letter and the major recommendations of the Educational Effectiveness team report, including:
 - a. Financial health and sustainability;
 - b. Graduation and retention rates for all students, including subpopulations;
 - c. Program review and assessment of student learning;
 - d. Data management and IR functions.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California College of the Arts has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the multistage 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 and be prepared to respond as expectations of institutional performance, especially with respect to Educational Effectiveness and student learning, further develop under the application of the Standards of Accreditation.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the institution's governing board in one week. It is the Commission's expectation 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.

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

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission chair
Board Chair
Melanie Corn, ALO
Members of the team
Barbara Wright