



February 29, 2008

Susan Avila
Vice President for Advancement
California College of the Arts
1111 8th Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

Dear Vice President Avila:

At its meeting on February 21, 2008, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review team that visited California College of the Arts (CCA) on October 10-12, 2007. The Commission also had access to CCA's Capacity and Preparatory Review report and its Institutional Proposal. The panel would like to thank you, Provost Stephen Beal, and Accreditation Liaison Officer Melanie Corn for your participation in the conference call.

The team found the CPR report comprehensive and the on-site support for the visit exemplary. CCA has undergone dramatic change since the mid-90s: It has broadened its mission and degree offerings, changed its name (from California College of Arts and Crafts), nearly doubled its enrollment (from 900 to almost 1600), opened a second campus in San Francisco, and significantly increased its endowment. In summer 2007, President Michael Roth departed for another position and, since then, the College has been run by an executive committee. The visiting team commends the College for the skillful way in which these changes have been managed.

For its Capacity and Preparatory Review report, CCA chose a theme approach that would allow it to address these changes. CCA's last comprehensive WASC review occurred in 1997, and a fifth-year visit took place in 2002. The 2002 team report and the subsequent Commission letter raised the following issues: 1) assessment, particularly at the program level; 2) retention and graduation rates, particularly of ethnic and minority students; 3) library and information resources; 4) services for students, particularly international students; and 5) systematic planning. The themes that CCA chose for the current comprehensive review – enhanced national visibility, development of a sustainable business model, and internal and external community relations – build on earlier work but also go well beyond it.

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The fall 2007 CPR team found an institution that is well-run, generally following its strategic plan, working toward a stronger focus on student learning, and fiscally stable, though with a slim margin for error, and level enrollments in place of planned growth. Leadership does not appear to be an issue: since the president's departure last summer, the institution has operated smoothly under an administrative triumvirate, and a search is under way. The team noted broad involvement of the campus community in the preparation of the CPR report and observed that faculty "are champions of the [institutional proposal's] three themes." The team report describes responsiveness to the recommendations of the earlier fifth-year report and good progress on each of the themes, although room for improvement remains.

The team made the following specific recommendations: 1) consider how to operate two campuses and maintain quality at both; 2) complete planning for assessment, conduct assessments of program and College-wide student learning outcomes, and implement program review; 3) improve institutional research capability; 4) review faculty governance; and 5) continue to implement plans for diversity and improve the retention and graduation rates of students of color. These recommendations are well-chosen. They are discussed below in the order of priority and with a degree of emphasis that reflects the judgment of the Commission.

Implement program review (CFRs 2.7, 4.4). The Commission has expected institutions to implement systematic program review since the late 1980s, and this expectation is more fully expressed in the 2001 Standards. The Commission views systematic, comprehensive program review as a cornerstone of quality assurance in educational institutions. Thus, it is imperative that CCA move ahead with its plans for "cluster program reviews." This will entail finishing at least a draft set of guidelines for the reviews, piloting them with at least one cluster, and having some results to show the visiting team when it returns in spring 2009 for the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). Results should not only include a recounting of the process that was followed, but also present findings and at least tentative plans, with budgeted resources, for responding to the findings. The program or cluster review should include analysis of student learning outcomes at the program level, but it should not be limited to student learning. It should also include more traditional input and process criteria for program quality, such as faculty numbers and qualifications, financial support, facilities, information resources, course and curriculum review, promotion and reappointment, and the like.

Assess program and college-wide learning outcomes (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8). The team was impressed by the College's practice of frequent and intense critiques of student work. Clearly, this practice provides high-quality feedback to students on an ongoing basis and contributes to their development as artists. However, as the team report noted, there is still "considerable work" to be done in moving from assessment of individual student- or course-level learning to program-level analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses. A plan for systematic assessment of College-wide goals needs to be developed, one that will look not only at upper-division work, capstones, or theses, but also at the entire trajectory of students' artistic development. Similarly, the effectiveness of student services should be assessed, given the resources that are being invested in them. In short, the College's multi-tiered assessment plan urgently needs to be developed and implemented.

A more robust data collection and analysis function can provide support for assessment and program review, as well as for enrollment management (discussed below) and for future planning of all kinds. The College may wish to consider such steps as centralizing data collection or hiring a director of institutional research. As the team report notes, provision of evidence to support assertions was uneven: while some areas were well-supported (e.g., library resources), in other cases (e.g., assessment efforts, retention, community relations), “evidence was not marshaled effectively to substantiate assertions.” Making fuller use of the capabilities of the newly adopted Datatel system may help in this regard. Adopting a course management program may also provide a means of collecting and analyzing evidence of student learning.

Improve enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of students of color (CFRs 1.5, 2.10).

The team was impressed both by the efforts to provide more adequate services to students and by the College’s extensive enrollment management efforts. Much has been accomplished. Nevertheless, as the team reports and as the College itself recognizes, these efforts have not succeeded in raising overall enrollment to targeted levels, substantially improving retention rates, or producing similar student success rates across all student subpopulations. It would be wise for the College to continue to administer the NSSE; compare data from 2004, 2006, and 2008; look for changes and trends over time; and report on both changes and responses to this data in its Educational Effectiveness Review report. CCA’s success with students of color at the graduate level may offer lessons that can benefit the undergraduate programs.

Given the energetic leadership in enrollment management, the team has expressed confidence that efforts in this area will continue, and it will be interested in seeing the results of all those efforts at the time of the EER. Enrollment management is a linchpin of the College’s goal to achieve a sustainable business model; thus, as the team notes, “all [enrollment initiatives] require study and analysis so that the ample resources devoted to those efforts can be distributed appropriately.”

Review and clarify faculty governance (CFR 3.11). CCA benefits from an engaged and generous Board of Trustees, as well as from skillful administrative leadership. However, the role of faculty in governance is less clear. The team reports that it was “unable to determine the ability of faculty to exercise effective academic leadership regarding academic quality.” The structure of the College faculty (with relatively few full-time and many part-time and unranked faculty) makes sense for the kind of institution that CCA is. However, only ranked faculty can vote on college-wide matters and faculty representatives on key committees are named by the administration in consultation with faculty leadership. Nor was it clear to the team what matters come before the faculty senate for disposition, what matters are dealt with at the program level, and what matters are handled exclusively by administrators.

The team gathered from its meetings with faculty and administration that the current approach to faculty governance is generally accepted. Still, the team and the Commission have questions about the ability of the CCA’s faculty to assert sufficient leadership over the academic quality of the College. The College is advised to revise its faculty handbook, engage the faculty in a discussion of governance, and provide greater clarity regarding the role, authority, and autonomy of faculty at the time of the EER visit.

Plan for continued growth and quality at the two campuses (CFRs 3.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). In the words of the team report, “the institution has been creative and opportunistic in its acquisition and development of the properties now making up its San Francisco campus.” When the team visited, the sense of artistic energy there was palpable. It is understandable that students and faculty located on the Oakland campus may wish to take greater advantage of all that the San Francisco campus has to offer. It will be important for the College to negotiate any tensions arising from the relationship between the two campuses and to attend carefully to the needs of students, faculty, and programs so that learning experiences for all can be adequately supported. Similarly, administrative structures supporting the coordination of the two campuses should be examined. While the team, like the College, recognizes that significant planning efforts must await the arrival of a new president, it recommends, nevertheless, that efforts to clarify the relationship between the two campuses begin now, and that planning for this relationship be made a priority.

In its report, the team concludes by noting that it “did not find evidence that CCA employed ‘a deliberate set of quality assurance processes at each level of institutional functioning’ (CFR 4.4).” The College does not yet have a program review process, though one is in development. In addition, there do not appear to be clear quality assurance processes for program or new curriculum approval or for non-academic areas. However, the team is confident about the College’s ability and willingness to develop these processes, working from its own traditions, implicit expectations, and practices. The team anticipates that such processes will be formalized and operational in time for the EER visit. This is an outcome that the Commission also endorses.

The Commission believes that the College is in a position to proceed effectively to the Educational Effectiveness Review in the next 18 months. While much remains to be done, there is also commendable momentum and energy on campus to support that work. Thus, the Commission acted to:

- 1) Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report and continue the accreditation of California College of the Arts.
- 2) Schedule the Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2009. The Institutional Report will be due 12 weeks prior to the visit.
- 3) Request that the institution incorporate in its Educational Effectiveness Report its response to the issues raised in this action letter and the major recommendations of the Capacity team report. This may be done by referencing where these responses are in the Table of Contents or in an addendum to the Report.

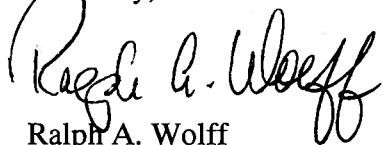
In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the Chair of the institution’s governing board in one week. It is the Commission’s expectation that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote

further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in them.

The Commission also requests a meeting of the new president with the WASC president/executive director and WASC staff liaison within 90 days of his/her start. This will enable the president to discuss the process, the team and Commission recommendations, and any other issues that may be salient to CCA's reaccreditation.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter
Melanie Corn, ALO
Members of the team
Barbara Wright