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**PRESIDENT**  
Ralph A. Wolff

July 9, 2012

Steve Altman  
President  
NewSchool of Architecture and Design  
1249 F Street  
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear President Altman:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012 the Commission considered the report of the team that conducted the visit to the NewSchool of Architecture and Design (NSAD) March 14-16, 2012 as part of NSAD's efforts to seek WASC accreditation. The Commission also reviewed the School's self-report and exhibits, its response to the visiting team's report dated May 23, 2012, and the January 2011 letter that followed the Eligibility review. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues: Linda Thomas-Mobley, chair, construction Management; and Kurt Hunker, acting arovost and accreditation liaison officer. The updates, information and observations that were provided about NSAD's plans were very helpful to the Commission's deliberations.

In January 2011, the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) found that NSAD met 22 of 23 eligibility criteria and that activity was underway to meet the remaining criterion, namely expanding the Board of Directors to assure that a majority of the members are independent. At the same time, the ERC noted several areas that warranted continuing attention. These included: the governing board, chief executive officer, educational objectives, transfer credit, general education, faculty, admissions, information and learning resources, institutional planning, and assessment of student learning. The team looked at NSAD's progress in these areas and the School's "performance in light of the WASC Standards ...to formulate an assessment of the institution's readiness for initial accreditation."

In finding NSAD eligible to apply for accreditation, the Eligibility Review Committee authorized NSAD to pursue accreditation through a single comprehensive review ("Pathway B") because of NSAD's existing accreditation with the Accrediting Council for Independent College and Schools (ACICS), which is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. In keeping with the policy for such reviews, NSAD took a comprehensive approach to the review process focusing on the four WASC Standards of Accreditation. The team found NSAD's self-study to be thorough, candid, and responsive to the Standards and Criteria for Review, demonstrating "continuity of the institution's engagement with key issues."

As stated in the WASC guide "How to Become Accredited," an institution needs to establish that it is in "substantial compliance" with all four Standards of Accreditation for initial accreditation to be granted under Pathway B. As further described below, the Commission found that NewSchool had not yet demonstrated it had achieved substantial compliance with all four Standards. In such circumstances, the Commission may choose to grant Candidacy for Accreditation following the single Pathway B review. Candidacy,

as defined in “How to Become Accredited,” is appropriate when “the institution demonstrates compliance with the WASC Standards and CFRs at a *minimum* level, yet shows promise for achieving *substantial* compliance within the time period allocated for candidacy (four years).”

As described further below, the visiting team found there was considerable variation in the institution’s demonstration of compliance with WASC Standards. For example, NSAD has defined its institutional purposes, ensured its educational objectives, and operates with integrity (Standard 1). As the team stated, “NSAD articulated a clear and thorough mission statement that both expressed its purpose and informed its educational activities.” However, NSAD is in the emerging stages in areas related to educational effectiveness (Standards 2 and 4). For example, more work is needed on articulating and integrating student learning outcomes across the curriculum at the course, program and institutional level. Overall, the team viewed the assessment process as “not yet fully mature.”

As a consequence of these findings, the Commission acted to grant Candidacy for Accreditation to provide time for NSAD to demonstrate that it has achieved substantial compliance with each of the four WASC Standards of Accreditation.

The team found acknowledged a number of strengths at the institution. It commended NSAD for its student-centered focus; its involved and committed governing board; the successful appointment of key academic leaders; the development of institutional research capacity; the introduction of a faculty governance structure; the spirit of collegiality among students, faculty, staff and alumni; and the strong ties between the institution and the local professional community. The team noted that the influx of resources, support, capital, and administrative and technological systems from its owners, Laureate Education, Inc., “signaled an impressive capacity for continuous improvement.”

While capacity was found to be strong, the team concluded that NSAD needs more time to strengthen its educational effectiveness. Assessment of student learning was often “via final grades in class.” Course rubric development was just “beginning to take place.” In terms of program review, NSAD has implemented an annual academic program assessment and designed a formal, five-year program review process, but the findings from academic program assessment are not yet linked “to the budget process and to institutional planning.” Initial implementation of the five-year review is “planned several years into the future.” Co-curricular programs have not been formally evaluated, “with reviews scheduled to begin in 2012.”

The Commission endorses the findings in the team report and expects NSAD to consider them carefully. In addition, the Commission wishes to emphasize the following areas for attention and development:

**Strengthening the systems and processes for assessment of student learning.** As the team noted, “The tools, mechanisms and commitment all existed to make the process of assessment more broadly institutionalized” at NSAD, but more progress is needed. The Commission appreciated hearing that efforts are underway to map learning outcomes across courses, programs and the institution. NSAD will need to continue this work to (1) articulate and integrate student learning outcomes across the curriculum at the course, program and institutional levels; (2) take steps to assess whether students are meeting expected levels of performance (using direct assessments of student work products); and (3) develop a process for systematically addressing areas of concern identified through assessment to improve the curriculum and pedagogy. NSAD might consider unbundling some of its larger learning outcomes (for example, research skills) and measure them with focused rubrics “to gauge improvement of all parts of the skill set.” A positive step is your announcement that workshops are being planned for faculty to

enhance their expertise and engagement in the assessment of student learning, which is an important step in creating a broader culture of assessment. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7-2.9)

**Refining program review and creating a culture of evidence.** According to the team, NSAD needs to “develop a culture of evidence...with systematic cycles of data collection and analyses, and with feedback loops that revise and improve institutional planning and educational effectiveness.” NSAD will need to continue to refine its annual program assessment and program review process so that the results are integrated with planning and budgeting. A comprehensive program review process can help NSAD assure that its educational programs are effective and that the expectations for student learning are widely shared among campus stakeholders. In addition, a robust institutional research capability can support a culture of inquiry and educational effectiveness and can help NSAD close the loop and link planning and budgeting, implementation, data collection and analysis, and improvement. (CFRs 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

**Understanding student success.** The Commission had some difficulty interpreting NSAD’s retention and graduation data. The Commission expects NSAD to gather, analyze, publish and understand the meaning of its graduation and retention data, using methodologies appropriate to its institutional size and instructional context. Besides reviewing aggregated data, NSAD should examine disaggregated data to identify performance gaps among various subpopulations (such as Pell recipients or adults returning to higher education studies) to seek to understand any disparities it finds, and to develop and implement strategies to raise the rates in areas identified. In addition, the Commission expects NSAD to use comparative data from other institutions to contextualize and understand its graduation and retention rates. (CFRs 2.6, 2.10, 4.4)

**Developing the governing board.** The team observed that “the multiple and concurrent relationships among NSAD, its Board and its parent company created a complex structure... (that) warranted both praise and continued review.” WASC standards, guidelines, and policies emphasize the importance of institutional autonomy and an independent governing board. The Commission was pleased to see the steps NSAD has taken to increase the size of the board so that it has a majority of independent members, to put in place procedures for the evaluation of the president, and to define the length of term of the president. The Commission expects that board policies and by-laws will be reviewed and updated as needed, to reflect WASC expectations for independent governing boards, and that particular attention will be given to the professional development of its members and assessment of board effectiveness. (CFR 3.9 and the newly adopted Policy on Independent Governing Boards)

**Clarifying budget preparation and management.** The team observed that campus stakeholders “did not have a firm understanding of the budget process and its outcomes.” In particular, the faculty seem absent from participation in budget development. The Commission was pleased to hear that NSAD is putting in place procedures to make budget preparation and management more transparent. The Commission expects NSAD to continue to engage members of the campus community more broadly in the preparation of the budget and other planning processes. (CFRs 3.5, 4.1)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the visiting team report.
2. Grant Candidacy to NewSchool of Architecture and Design for four years, through spring 2016.

3. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review visit for Initial Accreditation to take place in spring 2013 and the Educational Effectiveness Review in spring 2014.
4. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the issues raised in this action letter and to the major recommendations of the team report into its next self-study report. You may include this analysis in an appendix to your Educational Effectiveness report or incorporate it into the report.

In taking this action to grant candidacy, the Commission confirms that NewSchool of Architecture and Design has met the WASC Standards at least at a minimal level and is expected to meet the Standards at a substantial level at the time of the next visit.

Institutions granted the status of Candidate for Accreditation must use the statement in the *How to Become Accredited* manual if they wish to describe that status publicly.

(Name of Institution) has been recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001. This status is a preliminary affiliation with the Commission awarded for a maximum period of four years. Candidacy is an indication that the institution is progressing toward Accreditation. Candidacy is not Accreditation and does not ensure eventual Accreditation.

Federal law requires that the WASC address and phone number appear in your catalog.

Institutions granted Candidacy are required to:

1. Submit an Annual Report in the format required by the Commission.
2. Keep the Commission informed of any significant changes or developments, especially those that require prior approval according to the Commission's Substantive Change Policy. NewSchool of Architecture and Design is approved to offer the following degrees at its current location:
  - Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Arts in Architecture;
  - Master of Architecture I, Master of Architecture II, Master of Science in Architecture, and Executive Master of Architecture;
  - Bachelor of Science in Digital Media Arts;
  - Bachelor of Science in Construction Management and Master of Science in Construction Management;
  - Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and Master of Landscape Architecture;
  - Master of Science in Digital Design and Delivery;
  - Bachelor of Arts in Interior Design; and
  - Master of Science in City Design and Urbanism.

Please consult the *Substantive Change Manual* and confer with your WASC liaison about any proposed new degree programs, off-campus sites, online offerings, and/or changes in governance or ownership to determine if these matters should be approved by WASC.

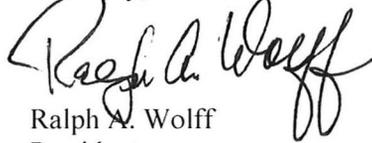
3. Pay Annual Membership Dues calculated on the institution's FTE and prorated from the date of this action. An Annual Dues statement will be sent under separate cover.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of The NewSchool of Architecture and Design's governing board in one week.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website on Friday, July 13. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work NSAD 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/bgd

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair  
Kurt Hunker, ALO  
Nichole McDonald, Board Chair  
Paula Singer, President of Laureate Education, Inc.  
Members of the Pathway B team  
Barbara Gross Davis, WASC