

March 9, 2017

Mr. Robert Gazzale
President
AFI Conservatory
2021 North Western Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90027

Dear President Gazzale:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning American Film Institute Conservatory (AFI) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting February 15-17, 2017. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit to AFI Conservatory November 16-18, 2016. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by American Film Institute Conservatory prior to the Offsite Review (OSR), and the supplemental materials requested by the team after the OSR. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleague Joe Petricca, Executive Vice Dean. Your comments were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's new status with WSCUC.

Actions

1. Receive the Accreditation Visit team report
2. Reaffirm accreditation for a period of six years
3. Schedule the next reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review in spring 2022 and the Accreditation Visit in fall 2022
4. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2020
5. Schedule a Special Visit in fall 2020. A report addressing the issues of organizational structure and planning, assessment, and governance areas, as detailed later in this letter, is due 10 weeks prior to the Special Visit.

Commendations

The Commission commends American Film Institute Conservatory in particular for the following:

1. The Conservatory maintains a unifying and focused mission through its celebrated commitment to a production-based curriculum (learn by doing), to the power of visual storytelling, and to the pedagogy of collaborative teams.

2. The Conservatory continues to recruit an impressive group of talented and skilled Fellows and possesses impressive retention and graduation rates in its programs.
3. The strength of the Conservatory's educational offerings is in large measure a product of a dedicated faculty of working professionals.
4. The professional accomplishments of its graduated Fellows, as well as the active alumni involvement in mentoring current Fellows
5. The open and positive attitude at AFI about the accreditation process and the ways in which best practices in higher education can serve as scaffolding for a new level of educational quality and student (Fellow) service
6. The significant progress with program review through the completion of reviews for all but one of its programs and the creation of the "Teaching/Learning Group"
7. The recently instituted practices of new faculty orientation, new mechanisms for student complaints and Title IX, a new budgeting process with increased transparency, and a working group dedicated to issues of diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations

The Commission identifies the following issues for further development:

1. Organizational Planning and Structure (CFRs 1.4, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7)

The Commission recommends that AFI contemplate an organizational structure that dignifies the centrality of the Conservatory within the Institute as a whole. The Institute should consider the following.

- a) Elevating the Dean of the Conservatory to the senior management team to voice the educational priorities of AFI within the context of the Institute's larger strategic initiatives and big picture conversations
 - b) Building a staff of higher educational professionals within the Conservatory to oversee faculty development, Fellows (student) life, assessment and curricular development, etc. These individuals should have opportunity to engage with AFI as a whole to ensure that educational values are a serious and persistent part of the Institute's planning and strategic focus.
 - c) Including the potential appointments of graduate higher education professionals to the Board and to the Trustee Conservatory Committee
 - d) Ensuring appropriate participation of Faculty and Discipline Heads not only within the Conservatory but also within the Institute as a whole
 - e) Crafting a longer-term financial plan for the Conservatory that: matches the larger strategic values of AFI; is consistent with recognized structures of academic financial planning; and assures increasing and sustainable fiscal health
 - f) Encouraging the development of a robust culture of higher education through strategic hires, faculty development, and increased Board and Presidential attention to the Conservatory and to its educational role within the Institute as a whole
 - g) Assessing and promoting the diversity of faculty to represent the spectrum of Fellows whom the Conservatory currently educates.
2. Assessment (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, and 4.2)

The Commission recommends that the Conservatory continue to enhance the

establishment of a comprehensive outcomes-based program assessment and review system. AFI should expand its institutional research capacity and awareness to inform decision-making and the assurance of educational effectiveness.

- a) Refine newly established program review process to ensure focus on Fellow learning that leads to improvement through documented action plans clearly connected to budget
- b) Continue efforts through the Teaching and Learning Working Group to assess faculty-generated learning outcomes and to establish process of annual reporting, analysis and the dissemination of fellow achievement
- c) Build on institutional research knowledge base and expand Conservatory awareness of IR function through standard reports such as a Conservatory fact book and dashboards.

3. Governance (CFRs 3.1, 3.3, and 3.10)

The Commission recommends that AFI craft a shared governance model appropriate to its situation and conditions. The model should take into consideration the following elements.

- a) The importance of collaborative, comprehensive and open conversation that will inform institutional decisions and those responsible for making those decisions
- b) The advantages of appropriate Faculty, Staff, and Fellow representation on the Board of Directors (in a non-voting capacity) and on other appropriate bodies of management
- c) The need for an independent self-governed faculty group that is able to set its own agenda of issues. AFI should consider the development of an appropriate arena for those issues to be reviewed in constructive and respectful dialogue.
- d) The creation of a process for the dissemination of relevant institutional data and the communication of pertinent developments that will allow for informed shared governance conversation and activity
- e) The development of a clear and workable structure designed for timely and active response to Fellow voice and concern
- f) The benefits of a model that taps into the expertise and wisdom of the community as a whole including trustees, senior management, discipline heads, faculty, staff, fellows, and alumni.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that American Film Institute Conservatory has addressed the three Core Commitments and has successfully completed the two-stage institutional review process conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review for reaffirmation, the institution is encouraged to continue its progress, particularly with respect to student learning and success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of American Film Institute Conservatory's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the American Film Institute Conservatory's website and widely distributed throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support

the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that American Film Institute Conservatory undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to public accountability, and we thank you for your continued support of this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Ellen Petrisko', written in a cursive style.

Mary Ellen Petrisko
President

MEP/cno

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Joe Petricca, Executive Vice Dean and ALO
Howard Stringer, Board Chair
Members of the Accreditation Visit team
Christopher Oberg, Vice President