

March 9, 2018

Ms. Joan R. M. Bullock, Esq.  
President and Dean  
Thomas Jefferson School of Law  
1155 Island Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear President Bullock:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning Thomas Jefferson School of Law (TJSL) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting February 14-16, 2018. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Seeking Accreditation Visit 2 to TJSL September 18-21, 2017. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by TJSL prior to the Seeking Accreditation Visit 2 and the institution's December 11, 2017 response to the team report. At its June 22-24, 2016 meeting, the Commission granted Candidacy to TJSL. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues: Aaron Schwabach, Associate Dean, and Jason Fiske, Assistant 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 Seeking Accreditation Visit 2 team report
2. Continue Candidacy as voted by the Commission at its June 22-24, 2016 meeting
3. Schedule a Progress Report for spring 2019 focused on:
  - a. Financial planning and sustainability
  - b. ABA accreditation status
  - c. Enrollment profile (including applicant pool, admits, and yield along with LSAT scores and GPA), enrollment management and current and future enrollment sustainability
  - d. Institutional research update
  - e. Non-JD Programs including update on the five point process described to the panel
4. Schedule a Seeking Accreditation Visit 3 in spring 2020

### **Commendations**

The Commission commends TJSL in particular for the following:

1. Appointing a new Dean, who brings an appreciation of assessment of student learning, extensive legal education experience in a range of areas, and many fresh ideas and approaches.

2. Developing a proposed strategic plan in a collaborative manner with input from across the institution. This plan holds promise to guide TJSL over the next few years during a time of further change and challenges.
3. Faculty and/or staff having adopted learning outcomes and assessment plans for all programs and beginning to build the capacity and tools to conduct assessment, with pronounced progress in the JD program.
4. Adopting program review policies and procedures.
5. Looking more deeply into the connections among admissions, performance, academic support, and bar pass rates and making promising changes.
6. Creating a greater integration of the different parts of the law school, resulting in more effective work across departments.
7. Retaining an institutional research professional to help build the capacity to collect and understand all kinds of data that will inform decisions and plans.
8. Generating surpluses in very challenging times financially and continuing to manage finances carefully.

The Findings and Recommendations contained later in this letter, which may cross over multiple Standards, along with the visiting team report, provide further guidance on how the institution can come into sufficient compliance to achieve Initial Accreditation.

#### Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

At the June 22-24, 2016 Commission meeting, TJSL was found to be at a sufficient level of compliance with Standard 1 for Initial Accreditation which finding continues.

#### Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions

The Commission finds that that the institution has not demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 2 at a level sufficient for Initial Accreditation, and that CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, and 2.13 need further work.

#### Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

The Commission finds that that the institution has not demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 3 at a level sufficient for Initial Accreditation, and that CFR 3.4 requires further work.

#### Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

The Commission finds that that the institution has not demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 4 at a level sufficient for Initial Accreditation], and that CFRs 4.1., 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 require further work.

## Findings and Recommendations

- 1. Financial Planning and Sustainability:** TJSL continues to demonstrate sound financial management, controlling expenses, realizing surpluses, and receiving clean audits. However, TJSL carries a heavy debt load in proportion to its annual budget, is heavily dependent on tuition and fees, has relatively small reserves, and has no line of credit. It continues to have a negative composite score with the Department of Education, requiring the posting of a large letter of credit. The budgets for this year and going forward are based on some speculative assumptions, including renegotiation of its lease that would result in lower rent; recruitment of smaller but better-qualified incoming classes; and substantial increases of revenue from the non-JD programs, which are small, under-resourced, and operating in a competitive environment. Continued attention to enrollment management is needed to ensure sufficient enrollment and retention of qualified students along with the implementation of the strategic plan. (CFRs 3.4 and 4.6)
- 2. Continued Evaluation and Improvement of the JD Program:** TJSL plans to admit smaller yet better qualified incoming classes, as evidenced by this fall's enrollment of first-year students. Along with promising changes in the curriculum, enhancements to academic support, preliminary work in assessment of the program learning outcomes, and the recent addition of an institutional researcher, TJSL is positioned to better meet its mission of providing a legal education to diverse and underserved populations. However, the impact of changes cannot yet be seen in key measures like bar examination results, and other areas such as academic policies have not yet been addressed. TJSL is obligated to examine and improve each aspect of the pathway from application to law practice, including admissions screening; financial, academic and personal support for students; effective teaching; a sound curriculum; rigorous standards of performance and application of academic policies on probation and disqualification; good bar preparation; development of skills for law practice; and assistance in transitioning from law school into the profession after graduation. (CFRs 2.1, 2.2b, 2.6, 2.10, 2.13, and 4.4)
- 3. Assessment:** In following up on prior Commission concerns, TJSL continued to build its capacity for assessment by adopting assessment plans for the JD program and creating a task force to assess two of the program learning outcomes this year. A full cycle of assessment of all the outcomes will not be done for at least three years. Although the non-JD programs have adopted an assessment plan, work has not commenced. The faculty is encouraged to continue this promising work on the JD assessment and to use the results to inform improvements in curriculum, teaching methods, and student learning. This assessment work needs to be expanded to all degree programs. In addition, publication of the outcomes and learning results is expected under the Standards. No data on retention, completion, and student learning are provided publicly for any of the non-JD programs. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3-2.5, and 4.3-4.5)

4. **Program Review:** TJSJL adopted a program review process for the JD program, to be conducted in conjunction with the ABA accreditation process, which is in spring 2018. Hence there has not yet been a program review for the JD program under the new process. A program review process was adopted for the non-JD programs, but the Commission is concerned with the team's finding that the self-study stage of the review was more like an assessment report than a periodic comprehensive program review, as it covered only a few indicators of learning and completion and did not cover viability, program quality, or faculty-related issues. In addition, the non-JD program review is also scheduled to be conducted in connection with ABA approval, which the Commission found inappropriate in that the ABA does not approve non-JD programs and therefore does not review them in the same thorough manner as is done for the JD degree. Many but not all of the non-JD programs are new. None of the non-JD programs has been subjected to a thorough program review of any kind and would greatly benefit from this important quality assurance process. TJSJL is urged to make adjustments to its processes and plan in keeping with these findings and to be prepared to provide completed program review at its next visit. (CFRs 2. and 4.1)
5. **Institutional Research:** TJSJL contracted with an outside firm to prepare an analysis of bar pass and has used the results to inform changes described above for the JD program. Most important is that TJSJL has appointed a professional institutional researcher. Building on these two important first steps, TJSJL needs to develop plans to undertake studies that will help it better understand and improve student achievement and success. With the enhanced function, TJSJL is positioned to build the plans, systems, and culture that are needed to analyze data and to use evidence to inform policy decisions and planning. (CFRs 4.1-4.4)
6. **Support and Oversight of Non-JD Programs:** At the time of the last visit, the visiting team found that, "While these programs do not yet enroll very many students, they must be properly resourced and supported and treated with the same attention and care that the faculty shows to the JD program. This includes faculty and board oversight of the offerings, implementation of learning outcomes and assessment plans, application of quality assurance processes like new program approval by the board and periodic program review, and careful tracking of student completion and achievement." The Commission shares the team's finding that these concerns have not been effectively addressed. Each offering needs to be examined for compliance with WSCUC expectations about curriculum sequencing, length, nomenclature, admissions criteria, rigor, and learning outcomes. Collective faculty oversight of the program should be clearly established. Data about the programs should be collected, reported and analyzed. The programs need to be properly resourced. (CFRs 1.2, 2.1-2.7, and 2.10)

In keeping with WSCUC review protocols, the required subsequent review and Seeking Accreditation Visit 3 will focus specifically on those issues identified under each Standard (above) deemed to require additional development. (Please also reference the team report for additional context for the Commission's findings.) In keeping with

WSCUC values, Thomas Jefferson School of Law should strive for ongoing improvement with adherence to all Standards of Accreditation and their associated CFRs to foster a learning environment that continuously strives for educational excellence and operational effectiveness.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Thomas Jefferson School of Law's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be 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.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Thomas Jefferson School of Law 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,



Jamiene S. Studley  
President

JSS/do

Cc: Reed Dasenbrock, Commission Chair  
Aaron Schwabach, ALO  
Randy Jones, Board Chair  
Members of the Seeking Accreditation Visit 3 team  
Richard Osborn, Vice President