

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

To Laguna College of Art and Design

March 17-20, 2015

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Reaffirmation of Accreditation

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The Visiting Team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WSCUC Senior College and University Commission. The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by the publication on the WSCUC website.

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## **SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of the Institution and its Accreditation History**

Laguna College of Art and Design (LCAD) was established as the Laguna Beach School of Arts in 1961 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 1966. In the ensuing years, LCAD has developed into a strong regional art and design school offering 5 BFA degrees, one post baccalaureate certificate, and 2 MFA degrees serving 525 FTE students. (A third MFA in Game Art has been approved by WSCUC). As stated in LCAD’s Mission Statement (Institutional Report, page 5), the primary focus of the institution is to “empower a new generation of creative leaders” by preparing students for careers as creative artists and designers in a multicultural world (CFR 1.1). Fundamental to their mission are the key concepts of “creativity, diversity, skill, representation, concept development, innovation in technology, and readiness for life-long learning and careers” (Mission Statement, Institutional Report, page 5). These concepts guide their vision in which LCAD aspires to produce “great artists, designers, thinkers and leaders” who, at graduation, will be career ready and able to take advantage of career opportunities. Moreover, these graduates will be culturally aware citizens who will make significant contributions to society (Vision Statement, Institutional Report, page 5). LCAD is accredited by WSCUC and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

LCAD exists in an energetic and exciting art community and enjoys significant community support. For example, the City of Laguna Beach provides financial support of the “Big Three” arts organizations in town through its Business Improvement District tax: The Laguna Playhouse, Laguna Art Museum, and LCAD. In turn, LCAD enriches the local community through its public gallery exhibitions and lectures, and via its partnerships with a number of civic

and non-profit groups. Collectively, these efforts make significant contributions to the public good (CFR 1.1).

- LCAD was initially accredited in 1997.
- Recent Commission activity includes a full review in 2004-2007. Commission action of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) of 2004 was to continue accreditation, to reschedule and add time to the fall 2005 Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) visit (moved to 2006), to provide an update on progress made on issues identified in the action letter, and to schedule a special visit to be conducted in fall 2005.
- The focus of the special visit was to follow up on issues related to strategic and financial planning, institutional leadership and preparation for the EER.
- In spring 2005, LCAD requested and was granted permission to move the special visit to spring 2006 and the EER to spring 2007.
- The Special Visit occurred in spring 2006 and the Commission acted to continue with the EER scheduled for spring 2007.
- Following the spring 2007 EER, the Commission acted to reaffirm accreditation and to schedule the next CPR for spring 2014 and the next EER for fall 2015.
- Additionally, the Commission requested an interim progress report due in fall 2008. The focus of this interim report was to address enrollment management, strategic planning and fundraising issues.
- The Interim Report Committee Action of 2008 accepted the interim report with recommendations regarding program review of the MFA program. During this period, three degree programs were approved via substantive change proposals.

- The MFA in Game Art was recently approved as an online program, although the institution thinks of it as a low-residency program.
- Modifications were made to the reaccreditation schedule in 2012. In order to adhere to the new WSCUC review process, the CPR scheduled for spring 2014 was changed to a fall 2014 Offsite Review (OSR) and the EER scheduled for fall 2015 was changed to a spring 2015 Accreditation Visit (AV).

## B. Description of Team's Process

- The OSR/AV Visiting Team was provided access to the LCAD report and supporting documentation in September 2014.
- Each member examined the materials and completed an independent assessment of the documentation using the Visiting Team worksheet template provided by WSCUC.
- The independent assessments were compiled by the Assistant Chair for use during the Visiting Team phone conference, held on October 15, 2014; items to be discussed during the OSR were identified during this conference call.
- The OSR was held in Oakland on November 18-19, 2014. The Visiting Team discussed and further examined LCAD documentation, identified lines of inquiry, and communicated this information to the LCAD President, VPAA, and CFO via a video conference on November 19, 2014.
- LCAD provided most of the requested information, which was reviewed by the OSR/AV Visiting Team prior to a February 11, 2015 conference call.
- Each Visiting Team member evaluated documentation relevant to the lines of inquiry and submitted these evaluations to the Assistant Chair who compiled them for use during the phone conference.

- During the phone conference, the Visiting Team decided upon specific procedures and foci for the visit, reviewed/modified the visit schedule, and agreed to divide areas of coverage for our interviews.
- Team members worked on assigned sections of the preliminary outline of the Team Report and submitted them for compilation on March 6, 2015. The draft outline was provided to the Visiting Team prior to the AV on March 11, 2015.
- The AV took place March 17-20, 2015. At this time the Visiting Team conducted interviews with individuals (e.g., President Burke) and groups (e.g., Steering Committee, Board of Trustees, full-time and part-time faculty, students). The Visiting Team also reviewed documents and other evidence supplied to them in the Visiting Team room. Additionally, a confidential email account was provided to LCAD during the visit and the team considered the information provided in emails submitted.

### **C. Institution's Reaccreditation Report and Update: Quality and Rigor**

As described in the Institutional Report (page 10), LCAD undertook a multistep process to prepare for the current review.

- They began with a campus visit by their WSCUC Liaison, Christopher Oberg, in fall 2013, to obtain a better understanding of the new review process.
- They then established an Academic Task Force that consisted of the Chair of the Faculty Senate, chairs of the academic programs, and the VPA - who also serves the institution as ALO. (As is not uncommon in small institutions, many staff members wear many hats. Several participated in the preparation of the institutional review in more than one capacity.)

- The VPAA/ALO requested that all chairs bring department materials on curriculum, assessment and program review to their meetings. The VPAA/ALO then initiated the review under the standards. Four task forces were formed for the self-study: trustees, full-time faculty (most of whom are also program chairs), staff and senior staff. Each task force separately reviewed the standards and had a scribe record their discussions. This effort coincided with the strategic planning that was underway on campus.
- The VPAA was the principal redactor of the self-study. The Chair of the Faculty Senate (who is also the Chair of Liberal Studies) wrote the Core Competency section of the report; the Registrar (who is also the Director of Institutional Research) and Director of Student Life also participated in creating the report. The report was sent to the President and Board of Trustees for comment. The report is largely the work of the VPAA/ALO and senior staff, with input from program chairs, and the Board. Faculty and staff reported low levels of involvement to the Visiting Team. (CFRs 1.1, 1.3, 4.6).

During the Off-Site Review, the Team found this to be an exceptionally candid and inclusive report (CFR 1.8). The Team was impressed by LCAD's clear statement of all Commission actions and thoughtful tracking of the actions over time (IR pages 11-13). Moreover, LCAD gave serious and thorough responses to previous WASC reviews conducted in 2005-10. The Institutional Report had a number of strengths that were highlighted in the OSR, including evidence of financial stability (CFR 3.4), demonstrated quality of hires and plans for future hires, and successful placement of students in careers. After reviewing the Standards, the Team

concluded that in its best estimation LCAD would meet the Commission's definition of compliance with all standards.

Their diligent work to develop a strategic plan and address financial stability (CFRs 4.6 and 4.7) has been successful in that, in the judgment of the members of the Visiting Team with financial expertise, they are on solid financial ground and are grappling with the right financial issues. The professional credentials of the faculty are very strong in their respective fields and the Institutional Report indicates robust plans for future staff and faculty hires. The Team was especially supportive of LCAD's plan to hire a full-time Institutional Research professional in January 2015, although LCAD reported during the AV that was not yet accomplished. Finally, LCAD students are benefitting from LCAD's strategies in that they have a good record of overall retention (CFR 1.2) and they have demonstrated exceptional success in terms of placing students in their chosen career fields.

The OSR Team identified several areas of inquiry that were then pursued during the AV. These issues are addressed in the context of the essays presented in the Institutional Report. These issues focused on (a) strategic directions including fundraising and student success; (b) assessment, benchmarking and new program development; and (c) faculty issues regarding shared governance and benefits (i.e., unionization issues and Health Care) raised in the Institutional Report. The OSR Team received most of the documents it requested in response to the lines of inquiry (e.g., NASAD action on the approval of the new MFA, the Faculty Policies Manual, and the 2007 NASAD Team report, and a brief summary of the written communication core competencies assessment) ahead of the AV.

Additional items that were provided during the AV were the A/133 Report for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2014 and current versions of the four federal checklists. The Visiting

Team was not provided with the analysis of the written communication core competency assessment because, as far as the Visiting Team could ascertain, it does not exist in the form the Team sought.

LCAD took a candid approach to the self-study and review. They examined their history using available documentation to inform their impressions. The data available, largely in the financial and student success areas, confirmed their assessment of their current status in these domains. However, in the judgment of Visiting Team members, the lack of data collection and analysis regarding student learning suggests that their conclusions regarding the educational effectiveness of their programs may be premature.

## **SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS**

### **A. Component 1: Response to previous Commission actions**

LCAD did an exceptional job of outlining the issues raised in previous Commission actions and reviews (CFR 1.8), and their responses to them. These issues fall into the following categories: (1) strategic planning; (2) financial stability; (3) Institutional Research/program review/assessment; (4) peer review processes for LCAD employees; and (5) defining the role of the Board. The Visiting Team found extensive, impressive progress on all but the third of these issues. The Visiting Team's concerns about Institutional Research/Program Review/Assessment are addressed in Component 6 of this report.

- Issue 1: A prominent issue raised in previous Commission Reviews and Actions focused on LCAD's strategic planning in the areas of Development, IT, and Enrollment Management. The report provides sound evidence that the campus has undertaken significant efforts to address these concerns and they have largely been successful. Over the past two years, LCAD administrators, board members, and faculty and staff have worked together to develop a rolling 5-year strategic plan. This plan reflects their commitment to increasing enrollment to 650 FTES, improving the quality of the student body, expanding physical facilities through purchases rather than leases, commitment of the board to support and generate fundraising efforts necessary for expansion, and commitment to improving the student experience. Priorities of the plan are highlighted in six key goals (Institutional Report, page 7):
  - (1) Academic Excellence; (2) Admissions and Enrollment Management; (3) Information Technology Efficiency; (4) Financial Strength; (5) Development Growth; and (6) Campus Development.

- Issue Two: This concern is more fully addressed in Component 7 below however, to summarize, this has been their most successful effort. LCAD has seen a steady annual increase in operating surpluses. Cash reserves have increased from \$680K to \$1.8 million.
- Issue Three: All three areas under this umbrella (Institutional Research, Program Review and Assessment) remain underdeveloped. A review of this issue appears under Component 6 of this report. To summarize, assessment and building a culture of evidence have been concerns of the commission since 2005. The EE visit was postponed from 2005 to 2006 due to the unexpected departure of the previous president (Institutional Report, pg. 10). A Special Visit was conducted in 2006 in which the Team found that substantial progress had been made since the EE visit in March 2005 (Commission Action Letter, July, 2007). However, "concerns noted were the heavy dependence on external reviewers for the college's program review, the lack of an overall assessment plan, and failure to track results over time to achieve program improvements." (Institutional Report, pages 11). In 2006 a special visit found "a much-improved institution" but "the team found challenges in the institutional research capacity of the college and recommended 'building an appropriate culture of evidence with improved information collection, analysis, and communication systems...'" (Institutional Report, pg. 11) In the judgment of the Visiting Team, the current review shows that LCAD has made initial progress in their institutional research and assessment activities. LCAD has made good faith efforts to address previous commission concerns about these areas, but notes most processes are in their nascent stage and are not yet institutionalized.

- Issues 4 and 5: Two remaining issues were (1) the need to establish a peer review process for faculty, staff and administrators, and (2) the development of a better definition of the role of the Board of Trustees. The Special Visit and Recommendations of the Commission in 2006 noted the implementation of a peer review process for faculty, staff and administrators and “significant improvement and clear definition of the role of the Board of Trustees” (Institutional Report, page 11; CFR 3.8). These concerns were effectively addressed before this AV, and the Visiting Team was able to confirm that both processes are operating smoothly.

## **B. Component 2: Compliance with the Standards**

In preparing for the OSR and AV, the institution created four separate task forces to complete Reviews under the Standards. These were faculty, staff, board of trustees, and the President and his direct reports. The institution identified as its own weaknesses the same areas that the team would also later identify.

During the OSR the Team arrived at the conclusion that - interpreting the commission's standards to the best of its abilities - the institution would be found to be in compliance with all four. During the AV, the Visiting Team came to believe that the institution is making good faith efforts to address all CFRs, but may not completely understand the full implications of a group of tightly inter-related CFRs in Standards 2 and 4 that have to do with a "culture of evidence."

The Visiting Team came to believe that the institution had made less progress on these CFRS than the institution itself holds, and is probably not currently in compliance with CFRs 2.7, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.6. As a result, The Team has revised its opinion to suggest that LCAD is only marginally compliant with Standard 4 and could be in danger of falling out of compliance in the near future. The reasons for this position are discussed in Component 6.

### C. Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, quality and integrity of degrees

Student levels of achievement, career placement, professional success and institutional reputation suggest that the student body and the public understand the institutional definitions of its degrees and that the degrees have a history of integrity. (CFR 1.2) The Institutional Report states "In broad terms, the BFA and MFA degrees promise to provide students with the skills and concepts necessary to pursue an advanced degree in a given field or to matriculate successfully into the professional world" (page 14). The Visiting Team believed this to be an accurate paraphrase of the mission and vision statements, and found during the visit that this was the general understanding throughout the institution.

*Prima facie* evidence of student learning is most easily found in a superbly curated gallery which links from the landing page of the college website. (CFR 1.2) The judgment of the content area specialists on the Visiting Team is that the overall quality of student work clearly achieves the technical and professional goals of each program. Exceptionally high levels of career placement of arts graduates - the employment rates for LCAD grads are just a bit above 75% - and alumni success would offer validation of this conclusion (Appendix 58).

The meaning of a degree can also be seen in its expression of "the outcomes for students and the institutional mechanisms that support those outcomes" (2013 Handbook of Accreditation, Revised, page 29). LCAD has established four "larger" ILOs: The ability to be (1) both creative and innovative; (2) to employ analytical and problem solving skills; (3) to discover practical application of knowledge and synthesize experience and knowledge back into one's own life; and (4) heightened levels of humanistic traits (Institutional Report, Appendix 5 &

5a). These are defined with approximately forty component bulleted sub-points, although their exact purpose was, to the Team, murky.

The college offers programs at three levels (BFA, Post-Baccalaureate, and MFA) with distinct "learning outcomes and standards of performance" (Institutional Report, page 22); the number of student learning outcomes in the programs ranges from 5 to 32 (Institutional Report, Appendices 5-13; CFR 2.2). Most programs listed learning outcomes on the website in the program overviews, thereby making them publically available.

LCAD communicates plainly about its programs to the public. The college provides degree requirements for all programs, both graduate and undergraduate, in clear and accurate manner (CFR 2.2a & b). This information is available from multiple sources including the website, the catalog, and on the student information system (CFR 2.2). Additionally, the institution makes its graduation data public as it is easily accessible from the Consumer Information page on its website.

A discussion about assessment and program review processes (CFRs 2.3-7) is deferred to Component 6 in this report to avoid excessive repetition.

**D. Component 4: Educational Quality: Student learning, core competencies, and standards of performance at graduation**

LCAD is clear about its mission and the educational and professional outcomes of its students. It is a traditionally academic art college that aims at "success in their chosen fields and [applied arts] careers" for its students (Institutional Report, page 53). In the judgment of the content area experts on the Visiting Team, the institution has consistent, high-levels of student achievement upon graduation (CFR 2.6) which speaks to a very strong culture and shared sense of the artistic outcomes the faculty aim to impart.

In its Institutional Report, LCAD discussed its approaches to assessment and program review (Institutional Report, pages 37-39). This discussion provides evidence that they are genuinely concerned with seeing that their students are provided with effective educations leading to learning outcomes that will enable them to participate in the professions for which they have trained or become independent, practicing artists.

Despite this clear dedication, however, the institution does not have the capacity for a more formalized process at this time. This point will be taken up again in Component 6 (in assessment and program review processes (CFRs 2.3-7) to avoid excessive repetition.

Whereas there is clear evidence of involvement by multiple constituencies in the strategic planning process, the evidence of on-going involvement in routine planning and assessment is less clear. Department Chairs who are responsible for program review and development receive no reduced time from their full-time responsibilities for teaching, advising and facility maintenance. This leaves little capacity for the work of program review and assessment. The lack of capacity is exacerbated by the absence of professional assistance and support in collecting and analyzing data (CFR 4.6).

It is clear that a consensus exists as to the ‘future direction’ of the college – an exceptionally strong traditional foundation program leading to proficiency in ‘traditional representational art’ which serves as the base for subsequent highly focused and specialized student work in all departments. It appears that substantial agreement exists among all constituencies that this core artistic value informs the planning and development of new academic programs and is the core basis for determination of all student learning outcomes.

#### **E. Component 5: Student Success: Student learning, retention, and graduation**

##### *Definition of Student Success*

LCAD has a deeply shared understanding of student success that is in alignment with the college’s mission, values, and character. Student success is focused on technical proficiency, achievement of institutional learning outcomes, career readiness, and job placement. As in many other areas, LCAD will benefit from solidifying this definition of student success in writing and in formal structures and assessment procedures.

##### *Retention Rates*

Overall retention rates are improving at LCAD, with a fall 2012 to fall 2013 rate of 81.9%, and a fall 2013 to fall 2014 rate of 82.2% (CFR 1.2). In this case, the college is defining “retention rate” as the percent of students in the incoming class, both first-time freshmen and transfer students, who return the following fall. The current retention rate for first-time freshmen is 76.4%.

As the Institutional Report (page 42) notes, the registrar investigates and documents the reasons reported by undergraduates for their attrition, and most students report leaving for financial reasons. The institution is also paying close attention to attrition by major and has made significant strides in working with faculty and chairs on improving these numbers for programs

with higher attrition. They found, as at many institutions, that undeclared students attrit at a higher rate than declared students. Their solution to this problem was to require students to declare a major upon admission to the college. The Visiting Team found no evidence of an organized committee focusing on student retention and success. A sustained focus on increasing retention could positively impact student success and benefit the institution by increasing overall enrollment without investment in new recruitment.

#### *Graduation Rates*

LCAD provides five years of retention and graduation rates (Appendix 53 and 53a; CFR 1.2). For the classes entering in fall 2004-fall 2008, the average 4-year graduation rate for first-time freshmen is 34%, and the 6-year graduation rate is 52%. Over that same period, the average 4-year graduation rate for transfer students is 45%, and the 6-year graduation rate is 56%. The institutional report notes a significant drop in graduation rates for the class entering in 2008. The administration infers this drop is due to the economic recession and a greater number of students needing to stop out for financial reasons.

The transfer graduation rates are low when compared to the FTF graduation rates. Although the report addresses this briefly (Institutional Report, page 40), it does not offer thoughts on how to improve transfer graduation rates. Given the fact that an increasing percentage of LCAD's undergraduate population is made up of transfers, it would be useful to focus specifically on student success for this group (CFR 2.14). During the visit, members of the administration expressed to the Visiting Team their recognition that there needs to be a bigger conversation about transfer student retention and completion in their future.

LCAD provides graduation rates disaggregated by gender and race and ethnicity (Institutional Report, Appendix 51). The graduation rates for students of color are, on average,

below the graduation rates for white students. Unfortunately, because of the small student population and modest percentages of students of color, the raw numbers of students of color in each cohort are such that the disaggregated graduation rates do not provide much useful data.

#### *MFA Completion Rates*

The MFA completion rates reported by LCAD are acceptable. They appear slightly lower than rates for peer institutions, but considering the very small number of students, percentages are easily shifted by one or two students. The evidence of successful outcomes is quite positive; according to the report, a survey of MFA graduates one year out shows 91% of respondents are working in an arts-related field.

#### *Co-curricular Initiatives to Support Student Success*

For a small institution, LCAD appears to provide an adequate level of support for student success (CFR 2.13). The college offers tutoring labs for writing as well as studio practices. This year, registering students into their courses was transitioned from faculty advisors to registrar office staff. This change is commendable and has allowed for more streamlined and accurate administrative processes in registration and has freed up the faculty to provide more mentoring and career counseling.

The student and residential life staff is growing and are evolving to support a more holistic and integrated approach to co-curricular activities. Student Life has also been building its student support services with increased resources for personal counseling and mental health services and services for students with disabilities. LCAD is working to support student success by maintaining an emergency scholarship fund for students who find themselves unable to close the financial gap in other ways.

In terms of outcomes and evidence of satisfaction, LCAD maintains a career services office that works closely with students on their professional development, and each major has a required professional studies course. The director of Career Services maintains a database on recent grads and their professional activities. The overall employment rates for LCAD grads are around 77%, with an understandable discrepancy between Fine Arts majors and Design or “commercial” arts majors. The college also conducts annual surveys of student satisfaction, but little information is shared in the report about the results of these surveys. During the visit, it became clear that an institutional researcher on staff would allow the college to better utilize data gathered from home-grown surveys or national surveys. Administrators with whom the Visiting Team met admitted that, at the moment, the data too often are not utilized because no one currently has the capacity or skill to mine the data for useful evidence. This observation is related to a much larger discussion of Institutional Research capacity in Component 6 of this report.

#### *Summary*

Overall, LCAD has many recent successes in the realm of student success, including improving retention numbers, strong job placement statistics, and the development of a career services office. However, as the school grows, it will require a greater reliance on institutionalized systems supported by strong IR to push student success to the next level.

#### **F. Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program review, assessment, use of data and evidence.**

##### *Institutional Research*

LCAD is small, and intimate, which is the source of many of its strengths and recent successes. Cultural assumptions are widely shared. Communication can be quick. Discussion is apt to be inclusive. Curricular change can be responsive to the unique skills of the available instructors and implemented quickly.

The corresponding weaknesses are that discrete functions are sometimes invested in the same person or people, and the informality of processes means that they are not institutionalized. Because of the layers of duties many individuals carry out, analysis of assessment data and program reviews falls to the same people who did the review and are being reviewed. Consequently, Institutional Research is not a separate function carried out objectively by trained professionals, but a regular part of the duties of largely untrained administrators and faculty chairs. As indicated above in the Review under the Standards, it is the opinion of the Visiting Team that because of this condition the institution would probably not meet the commission's definition of compliance with CFR 4.2.

This concern will not come as a surprise to the institution, as it was evident in their candid self-assessment. The relevant part of the institutional report reads: "LCAD does not have a dedicated full-time institutional researcher on staff, and that efforts to analyze and utilize collected data are still nascent. The registrar holds the title of Institutional Research Director but the registrar's primary expertise is not research. The Registrar and the Chief Academic Officer are the major architects of the various lines of inquiry, but as experienced amateurs, not as professionals." The report went on to say that "Fortunately, budget resources have been made available to the college in the FY14-15 budgets and an associate registrar/institutional researcher will be hired in January. In spite of the limitations of current staff, significant strides have been made in gathering data and using it for program improvements" (Institutional Report, page 39). During the AV, however, the Visiting Team learned that LCAD had been unable to find a qualified candidate who could serve as both associate registrar/institutional researcher. They had hired a half-time associate registrar and were temporarily addressing the IR issue by hiring a

quarter-time consultant whose duties had just begun when the team arrived. All parties indicated this was a temporary measure.

As noted in the introduction to this report, this issue has been a trailing concern since 2006 and the Visiting Team found that it has serious ramifications for all levels of assessment and program review. During the AV, the administration, faculty and staff were unanimously committed to LCAD's continued growth and improvement, but as LCAD continues to increase in size and scope, the Visiting Team believes that systems of review and assessment will become increasingly crucial.

LCAD has achieved steady growth and improved stability in the past five years. Data and evidence regarding enrollment (in contrast to data obtained from evidence of student learning), is carefully collected, reviewed and integral to both strategic planning and on-going program review. It is the Visiting Team's unanimous observation LCAD would benefit by applying similar systems of review and assessment to its academic programs.

Whereas its progress in student career placement, enrollment and finance is highly commendable, without a more formal and effective Institutional Research capacity, including regularly scheduled review of student learning outcomes and program effectiveness, the College's plans for continued growth and expansion may become unsustainable.

#### *Assessment Processes at LCAD*

Consistently throughout the Institutional Report, and confirmed in the Visiting Team's observation during the visit, the institution indicated it has qualitative processes in place for assessment, program review, and quality assurance. However, it is not clear if the relevant data come to the attention of responsible parties and are used to "close the loop." (CFR 4.1)

Without suggesting that the Team found the institution to have any serious defects in place, the Team noted the lack of unambiguous evidence that rigorous procedures document. (The assessment expert on the Visiting Team opined that the extent to which student work meets the specific learning outcomes articulated by LCAD faculty is not clear. In particular, summary data on student performance on the Core Competency of Written Communication was not provided in the report; consequently, it is unclear whether students met the standard for performance, as stated in the student learning outcomes, at graduation. )

LCAD has a long established and clearly defined sense of quality. For the academic programs, it is defined in both professional and academic terms. There is a strong culture of student critique and clear evidence of student achievement in studio areas. Quality is defined as essentially figure-based and graphic imagery that is representational and narrative. These traditional values for artistic expression are well exemplified in student art work, and are at the core of the college's academic mission. These approaches are very well focused but perhaps lack a certain level of breadth and diversity associated with most professional art colleges. (CFR 4.1)

Portfolio review is the primary means of assessment of student success and achievement in studio areas. This review occurs programmatically at different points in a student's career, depending on the specific degree program. All students are assessed in the admissions process, in advancement reviews and again at graduation. As far as the Visiting Team could determine, no narrative of student progress throughout the degree programs is kept or monitored. In short, faculty review of individual student learning through primary assessment of the work is a major means of assessment, but there is no corresponding data-driven analysis of collective outcomes. The Visiting Team acknowledges this is difficult to establish in studio arts and design areas. All degree programs DO take this assessment of student work very seriously, and in the judgment of

the subject area experts on the Visiting Team, the evidence suggests that at present the overall quality of student work clearly achieves the technical and professional goals of each program.

Several departments utilize formal or informal professional advisory boards to correlate student performance and achievement with industry demands – particularly in graphic design, animation and game design (Institutional Report, page 54). It is unclear to the Visiting Team how input from advisory boards is assimilated into academic programming and utilized in overall program review. Academic assessment of students' skills is less well established and relies on un-documented faculty review and by grades in required writing classes. The core competency in written communication was accessed holistically and longitudinally by a single person.

The Visiting Team is also concerned that the assessment system has an overreliance on critiques of student work and student grades as evidence of student learning.

### *Student Learning Outcomes*

Student learning outcomes have been established for each program and for the larger institution (CFR 2.2). Programs have developed curriculum maps (CFR 2.5) and there is discussion of assessment across the campus (CFR 4.3). However, the student learning outcomes and curriculum maps discussed in this report appear to the Visiting Team to have been recently developed. To date, no significant data have been collected about student performance using the student learning outcomes. (On a minor note, the Team also observes that the ILOs do not currently reflect all Core Competencies – which is (at this stage) not yet required under WASC standards. They may need revision to include all five areas going forward, however.

Collectively, the evidence reviewed suggests that whereas LCAD has very clear ideas about its ultimate goals for students and holistic review of student work supports contentions that

they may be meeting their goals, LCAD is in the early stages of defining specific aims of its degree programs with regard to student learning, and rigorously documenting outcomes.

#### *Program Review*

The Visiting Team could not verify that a systematic program review process is in place. According to the Educational Effectiveness Checklist (Institutional Report, Appendix B) dates of the last program review are given only for one undergraduate program, the general education program, and two master's programs (CFR 4.1).

Although it appears that programs throughout the institution have been reviewed since the last accreditation visit, and again in conjunction with a 2007 NASAD reaccreditation process, this process was unclear to the Visiting Team during the OSR and AV largely because it is not standardized across the institution. The timing and the areas of review vary considerably from program to program; as do the uses to which the results are put (CFR 2.7). The Visiting Team could not confirm a connection between assessment data and program review (CFRs 2.6, 2.7.).

The Visiting Team is merely confirming what the institution already suggests is at issue with the Program Review process. Relevant portions of the Institutional Report read: "a self-critique of the endeavor demonstrates that there are weaknesses in the oversight of the process. Programs are assessed annually by the faculty and the chair of the department, sometimes also by advisory boards, but reports are inconsistently produced to document the process and the findings. It is only when an external reviewer is invited to consider the program that a more formal report is generated. This method fails to 'close the loop' because it keeps within the departmental group the findings and the solutions to any problems that may exist. Furthermore, the college has not created until now a schedule of external program reviews" (Institutional Report, page 54).

*Faculty Involvement in Assessment and Program Review*

The self-study did not extensively discuss faculty involvement in setting standards and assessing outcomes (CFR 2.4). During the site visit the Visiting Team was able to verify the involvement of the small full-time faculty. Involvement by part-time faculty members varied widely by program and when it occurred was almost exclusively handled informally.

As a result, the faculty's role in student assessment and analysis of data is inconsistent (CFR 2.4). Whereas there was every indication, in the Visiting Team's observation, of excellent student/faculty interaction and an on-going culture of critique, it was less clear that faculty had a consistent voice in the academic review of programs and review of data regarding student success (CFRs 2.7, 4.6).

As LCAD now develops an ambitious strategic planning process and anticipates the initiation of several new academic programs, the role of evidence-based data for student learning and program assessment should develop and expand, which will require broader participation from the faculty.

*Related Issues*

The Visiting Team noted that the meaning of the degree was articulated in the Institutional Report in terms of institutional goals rather than student learning outcomes. Although evidence exists elsewhere of mechanisms to achieve outcomes, and of a strong institutional sense of the particular meaning of its degrees specific to the unique approaches of this institution, reorienting this discussion going forward would be beneficial to achieving clarity for assessment processes.

Additionally, some confusion exists because evidence-based data for student learning is sometimes conflated with enrollment management issues (e.g. recruitment and retention) in discussion of developing programs and improving student learning.

**G. Component 7: Sustainability: Financial viability, preparing for the changing higher education environment***Financial Viability*

Increasing operating efficiencies and improving margins to ensure sustainability is central to LCAD's future. The increase in enrollment has permitted this improvement in margins. For example, recent growth has been in design programs and not in fine arts programs. LCAD has been able to capitalize on this growth. LCAD's ability to adequately fund its academic and student programs, operations and plant facilities depends largely on sustaining enrollment at an adequate gross margin. The increase in student enrollment has allowed operating efficiencies with a positive impact on margins. LCAD's planning task force has established an enrollment ceiling of 650 FTE, a challenge due to lack of available land in the Laguna Canyon. LCAD's financial position is no different from other small art colleges in the US – perhaps it is even on the stronger side.

Cash reserves have grown from \$680K to \$1.8 million over the last five years. During the same 5 years, tuition revenues have doubled. The expansion in enrollment and 5% per year tuition increases are responsible for this strengthening of LCAD's financial position. The Capital Campaign will allow LCAD to acquire the Big Bend Campus buildings and eliminate some rental expense. Collectively, these actions will allow the net surplus to improve further and will allow LCAD to weather any short term drop in enrollment.

There is some exposure to sustainability due to some offices having only one staff "layer" – a typical challenge faced by small institutions.

LCAD depends on technology in its academic programs and the board allows depreciation to be spent on Capital Expenses. The technology strategic plan is solid.

Recent growth has been in design programs and not in fine arts programs. LCAD has been able to capitalize on this growth.

LCAD has not been able to increase its endowment since the last review.

*Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment.*

A great strength of this review cycle has been the extensive planning, especially financial and strategic planning (CFR 4.6), and the careful thought about the changing landscape of higher education, especially for schools of art and design (CFR 4.7). This discussion dominated the institutional self-study. It was thorough and insightful, clearly involving all stakeholders (CFR 4.5). The college has addressed very real dangers with candor and courage. It goes without saying that this process must continue as circumstances continue to evolve. NASAD's deferral of a decision on a new degree proposal is the type of unanticipated circumstance that can have a ripple effect across multiple planning assumptions. The Visiting Team particularly encourages a review of the financial assumptions about increasing enrollment through graduate programs given this turn of events.

**H. Component 9: Reflection and plans for improvement**

LCAD concludes their Institutional Report with an extremely thoughtful and honest analysis of the successes and challenges they have faced since the last review and will encounter moving forward (Institutional Report, pages 57-60). LCAD's summary comments focused on two main areas: established success and self-improvement. The report notes that successes include FTES growth, efforts to establish a culture of evidence, strategic planning activities, and use of Advancement Review as assessment evidence of student learning.

It is the overall opinion of the Visiting Team that this view of successes is accurate. However, although LCAD made some initial efforts to articulate learning outcomes and map

curricula, assessment processes have not yet become institutionalized. While it is a very high priority for many individuals, institutional commitment to this concept has not yet found its way into the strategic plan where it would be represented both by budgetary commitments to institutional research and the professional development of faculty and staff.

LCAD underscores that in order to improve, the institution must undertake efforts to ensure that FTES growth weathers economic downturns, assessment data for improvement must be analyzed and the conclusions applied, and fundraising must increase to address the fact that the ratio of 96% earned income (almost entirely tuition) to 4% raised income is too low. The institution concludes that the ongoing challenge will be “how to best support the momentum of the college through prudent management of resources and successful fundraising” (Institutional Report, page 60). Collectively, this analysis indicates that LCAD used the occasion for self-study to thoughtfully reflect on who they are, and who they would like to be in the future.

### **SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW**

#### *Commendations:*

- LCAD is very clear and focused in its mission and has achieved excellent results in terms of the technical and professional education of its students in art and design.
- The creative art and design work of LCAD students reflects consistently high standards for technique and professionalism. The college's record of career placement, especially in the areas of animation, design & digital media, and game art, is exemplary of a first magnitude college of art and design.
- There is a clear sense of commitment to educational excellence throughout the institution. Students, staff and faculty seem equally committed to LCAD's vision of technical achievement and artistic quality.
- LCAD's faculty includes nationally recognized leaders in every area of its curriculum. The college's emphasis on professional achievement and excellence is clearly reflected in its faculty.
- The sense of community and mutual support and encouragement is clearly expressed throughout the school.
- LCAD has overcome significant existential obstacles to achieve a consistent record of financial stability and enrollment growth. It has achieved new levels of organizational success and sophistication as it transitions into a new level of administrative and organizational and academic complexity. It has gone from being a small, to mid-sized independent art college and now faces great challenges as it approaches the future.
- At all levels, from staff, to faculty, to administrative leadership and trustees, LCAD values student learning above all other issues. The college understands that serving

students' artistic, academic, and professional needs is a central function and most important activity.

### *Recommendations*

LCAD is currently at a crucial point in its development as a major college of art and design. Anticipating significant increases in enrollment, and essential expansion of infrastructure which will make the school potentially vulnerable to unforeseen financial exigency, LCAD should develop a professional level of Institutional Research capacity to inform its present critical steps in achieving its current Strategic Plan. Acquisition, analysis and on-going review of data is important in the areas of enrollment management, development, educational assessment and strategic planning itself. Without an effective and comprehensive culture of effectively utilizing information and evidence, LCAD's strategic plan may be at risk.

The recommendations of the Visiting Team are heavily focused on Standards 2 and 4, especially those tightly inter-related CFRs that have to do with creating a culture of evidence which relies on collection and review of objective data (CFRs 2.3-2.7, 4.2-4.7). As noted in the Review under the WSCUC Standards, it is the opinion of the Visiting Team that the institution is probably not in compliance with CFRs 2.7, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.6 – support for which is provided in Component 6.

- In its broadest form, the major recommendation is to move on all fronts to create a comprehensive culture of evidence by (1) establishing a robust IR function (CFR 4.2), (2) providing professional development for faculty and staff so that they are trained in assessment and program review (CFR 3.3), and (3) establishing institutionally systematized policies on the gathering and analysis of data. (CFR 4.6) The Visiting Team

recognized nascent steps on all fronts, but believes it will need to be a higher priority moving forward.

- The academic administration of the college has recently changed dramatically by the flattening of the structure. Although the positions in the organizational structure still existed, there were no serving academic deans during our visit. Program Chairs were all also full-time faculty members without any release time from teaching duties to carry out their administrative obligations. That might be the right organizational solution, but the current levels of concentration of duties and functions in the office of the VPAA are demonstrably unsustainable. Faculty development and program review have been, at least temporarily, impeded by the current structure. A review of this situation may include re-establishing the role of academic deans, or re-conceptualizing the role of program chairs, or both, to provide the guidance and support necessary for institutionalizing a culture of evidence. (CFRs 3.1 & 3.7)
- Many of the issues which are at the heart of CFR 4.3 might be vastly improved by a more robust Institutional Research function. Small steps are underway, but given the focus on this issue in the 2006 commission action, the Visiting Team encourages a greater presence of this concern in the strategic plan and a higher priority placed on resourcing this important function. The prioritization of the building of a reserve is very commendable, but loss of a significant focus on institutional research may be a cost of this financial improvement. The team recommends the fulfillment of the hiring plan for IR indicated in the Institutional Report. It is also noted that the greatest need for IR relates to its academic applications in assessment and program review, which is not the current focus of institutional efforts. (CFRs 4.2, 4.3)

- LCAD should continue to monitor the approval process of the low residency MFA in Game Design, and other planned programs. The institution needs to examine the implications of developing programs, especially graduate programs, that do not follow the current residency pattern (or even the same emerging format), on support functions like the registrar's office, housing, and student services (CFR 3.1)
- In this report, The Visiting Team observed that the assessment of evidence of student achievement beyond recording of grades is not evident in the area of general education. In studio areas, review of student achievement of learning outcomes happens largely at the departmental level. Educational assessment is primarily at the course level rather than comprehensive periodic review, assessment and discussion as students progress through the programs. The team recommends quick action to fulfill the promise of the procedures already begun. (CFR 2.2a)
- Learning outcomes for all programs should be accessible on the website. (CFR 2.2)
- The team recommends the implicit duty of the registrar to provide periodic review of credit hour assignments be made into explicit policy (CFR 2.2).

## APPENDICES

### A. Federal Compliance Checklists (See attached)

1. Credit Hour Review – The college demonstrates compliance. The procedure for period review is in the duties of the registrar. The team has recommended that this implicit procedure be codified into formal policy.
2. Marketing and Recruitment Review – The college demonstrates compliance.
3. Student Complaint Review – The college demonstrates compliance, but (according to the VPAA) has only recently developed a policy on central retention and review of records of student complaints. No records were made available to or examined by the Team.
4. Transfer Policy Review – The college demonstrates compliance.

**1 - CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW FORM**

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.)
Policy on credit hour	Is this policy easily accessible? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Where is the policy located? <i>on the website under "General Info"</i> Comments:
	Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Does the institution adhere to this procedure? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES : <i>10</i> Comments: <i>ALD/VPA has verbally indicated that the procedure exists and is enforced.</i>
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
	Comments:
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? <i>3</i>
	What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)? <i>both</i>
	What degree level(s)? <i>BFA</i>
	What discipline(s)? <i>Game Art</i>
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Comments:	
Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated) <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? <i>1 (only 1 provided); 1 petition for independent study</i>
	What kinds of courses? <i>Student Internship Program</i>
	What degree level(s)? <i>BFA</i>
	What discipline(s)? <i>All BA programs</i>
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Comments:	
Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)	How many programs were reviewed? <i>8 (all programs offered)</i>
	What kinds of programs were reviewed? <i>Animation, Design + Digital media</i>
	What degree level(s)? <i>BFA, Post bac, MFA</i>
	What discipline(s)? <i>Animation, Design, Digital media, Game Art, Illustration, Fine Arts, Poetry, Design</i>
	Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Comments:	

Review Completed By: *Sharon Harrell PhD* + *Ent Date*  
 Date: *3/19/15*

**2 - MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW FORM**

Under federal regulation\*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's recruiting and admissions practices.

Material Reviewed	Questions and Comments: Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this table as appropriate.	Verified Yes/No
**Federal regulations	Does the institution follow federal regulations on recruiting students?  Comments:	Yes
Degree completion and cost	Does the institution provide accurate information about the typical length of time to degree?  Does the institution provide accurate information about the overall cost of the degree?  Comments:	Yes Yes
Careers and employment	Does the institution provide accurate information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable?  Does the institution provide accurate information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable?	Yes Yes
	Comments:	

\*§602.16(a)(1)(vii)

\*\*Section 487 (a)(20) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) prohibits Title IV eligible institutions from providing incentive compensation to employees or third party entities for their success in securing student enrollments. Incentive compensation includes commissions, bonus payments, merit salary adjustments, and promotion decisions based solely on success in enrolling students. These regulations do not apply to the recruitment of international students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal financial aid.

Review Completed By: Melanie Corn  
Date: 3/19/15

**STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW FORM**

Under federal regulation\*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's student complaints policies, procedures, and records.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)	Verified Yes/No
Policy on student complaints	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints?	Yes
	Is the policy or procedure easily accessible? Where?	Yes
	Comments: Policy is in the student handbook	
Process(es)/procedure	Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? Please describe briefly:	Yes
	Does the institution adhere to this procedure?	N/A
	Comments: LCAD has created a committee structure to review complaints, but no members have yet been appointed and (as of the date of the visit) the committee had not met.	
Records	Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? Where?	Yes
	Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? Please describe briefly:	Probably
	Comments: A system for centrally collecting complaints in the office of the VPAA, and of reviewing them, has been recently created, but as of the date of the visit no records had been collected. The new system has not yet had any application.	

\*§602-16(1)(1)(ix)

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission's Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.

Review Completed By: Kurt Daw

Date: 3/19/15

#### 4 – TRANSFER CREDIT REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulations\*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's recruiting and admissions practices accordingly.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)	Verified Yes/No
Transfer Credit Policy(s)	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for receiving transfer credit?	Yes
	Is the policy publically available? If so, where?	Yes
	Does the policy(s) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education?	Yes
	Comments:	

\*§602.24(e): Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that--

(1) Are publicly disclosed in accordance with 668.43(a)(11); and

(2) Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission's Transfer of Credit Policy.

Review Completed By:

Date:

3/19/18

