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PRESIDENT
Mary Ellen Petrisko

March 7, 2014

Mr. Gregory J. Marick
President
NewSchool of Architecture and Design
1249 F Street
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear President Marick:

At its meeting February 19-21, 2014, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) considered the report of the Special Visit for Initial Accreditation team that conducted an on-site review of NewSchool of Architecture and Design (NSAD), November 13-15, 2013. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report submitted by the University prior to the visit and the institution's January 20, 2014, response to the visiting team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you, Karen Gersten, Provost, Nga Pham, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, and Vivian Sanchez, Board Chair. Your observations were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

This Special Visit for Initial Accreditation was scheduled following the award of Candidacy in spring 2012, in order to determine the institution's progress on five remaining issues requiring attention in order for the Commission to grant Initial Accreditation. The team noted NSAD's considerable progress and observed the following with regard to each issue:

Strengthening the systems and processes for the assessment of student learning. The team was impressed with how NSAD has: articulated clear institutional, program and course level learning outcomes; set expectations for student performance; used rubrics and other measures of direct assessment to evaluate student learning; made curricular and pedagogical changes based on the results of these assessments; and put in place an infrastructure (including an Assessment Council and annual Assessment Summits) that institutionalizes assessment. The team concluded that NSAD has provided "considerable evidence to affirm that the institution adopted the practice of evaluating student learning and engaging in evidence-based decision making to promote curricular and pedagogical improvements, to enhance educational quality, and to support student success." (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4)

Refining program review and creating a culture of evidence. NSAD has established a comprehensive program review process. At the time of the visit, all NSAD programs had participated in annual program assessments and the institution had conducted comprehensive program reviews of two of its degree

programs. Protocols, processes and timelines are in place for the review of NSAD's remaining programs over the next several years. The team's report provided examples of how NSAD has used the results of the reviews to make program improvements. In the team's collective judgment, "Over a relatively brief period of time, the institution's culture has transformed toward an embrace of evidence-based decision making, [with] assessment and program review processes that drive budgeting and planning." In addition, the team noted that the institution's commitment to making readily available thorough and up-to-date analyses of data is "a critical component in the foundation of NSAD's burgeoning culture of evidence." (CFRs 2.7, 2.10, 4.3- 4.5)

Understanding student success. The team praised NSAD "for gathering, analyzing, publishing, and making understandable an array of student data"-- retention rates, graduation rates, and time to degree, both aggregated and disaggregated. NSAD reported a six-year average graduation rate of 50% and an average retention rate of 61% and has benchmarked these rates against peer institutions. Initiatives are underway to strengthen retention and graduation based on quantitative analyses and exit interviews of students who leave the institution. NSAD is to be commended, as the team observed, for "using student data effectively." (CFRs 2.10, 4.4, 4.5)

Developing the governing board. New activities include successful orientation sessions and training regarding the roles and responsibilities of board members. The team was impressed by "the growing, shared sense of stewardship and strategic vision among the board's members." The team noted, however, some shortfalls in committee membership that NSAD plans to address. After a review of board bylaws, minutes and operations, the team concluded that the NSAD board "exercises appropriate oversight over institutional integrity, policies and operations of the institution" and commended the board "for its stewardship of NSAD during a time of transition." (CFR 3.9, Policy on Independent Governing Boards)

Clarifying budget preparation and management. NSAD was asked to engage members of the campus community more broadly in the preparation of the budget and other planning processes. A new budget process has been put in place that more directly involves chairs and the faculty and is more clearly linked to strategic planning, assessment and program review. The team commended NSAD's "transparency in budget and planning, and how the community has become involved in the institution's integrative planning." (CFRs 4.2, 4.3)

The Commission endorsed the findings, commendations, and recommendations in the team's report and wishes to emphasize the following areas for attention and development:

Understanding and supporting student success. NSAD has made significant progress in analyzing aggregated and disaggregated retention and graduation data and benchmarking the findings against comparison institutions. The Commission expects NSAD to continue to gather, analyze, interpret and use data about student success, and to

develop, as the team noted, “effective and efficient communication methods by which to share student learning outcome results and student success data on a broad and regular basis.” As NSAD pursues enrollment growth by adding new degree programs, it will be important to have in place a sound retention strategy. Such a retention strategy should include analyses that focus on characteristics of entering students, including demographics such as family status, academic preparedness, and other variables. Understanding the variance in student success is important not only for achieving high retention rates but for guiding decisions about resource allocation for co-curricular and academic support services that can enhance students’ educational experiences. The Commission expects NSAD to offer an appropriate set of student services, based on the needs of its students, to develop strategies to assess the effectiveness of those services, and to use the results for ongoing improvement. NSAD has made impressive progress in the assessment of student learning and program review for its academic offerings. NSAD is lagging, however, in the assessment and review of its co-curricular programs. (CFRs 1.2, 1.5, 1.7, 2.5, 2.10, 2.13)

Strengthening the program review process. NSAD has conducted two pilot program reviews; neither involved external evaluators. NSAD plans to reflect on the pilots and make changes as needed before undertaking additional program reviews. The Commission expects NSAD to incorporate an external evaluation component into its future program reviews. External evaluators can bring some measure of objectivity, a breadth of experience, and a fresh perspective that can enrich the program review process, and, as the team noted, “add value to the assessment of student learning.” (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report and grant Initial Accreditation for a period of five years.
2. Request a follow-up progress report due May 1, 2016. A progress report is not the same as an interim report. Progress reports are reviewed by WSCUC staff and focus on a limited number of issues. NSAD is asked to provide the following:
 - a. Retention and graduation data by entering cohort and degree program, from the 2010-11 cohort through the 2014-15 cohort, aggregated and disaggregated by entry type (e.g., freshman, lower-division transfer, upper-division transfer, graduate student).
 - b. List of program reviews conducted since fall 2013 (academic as well as co-curricular/student services); brief description of how the external evaluation component has been implemented.
 - c. List of current Board members and committee assignments.

3. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review for spring 2017:
http://www.wascsenior.org/resources/mid-cycle_review.
4. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the Offsite Review in spring 2018 and the Accreditation Visit tentatively scheduled for fall 2018.

In taking this action to grant Initial Accreditation, the Commission confirms that NewSchool of Architecture and Design has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness and has met the outcomes of the four Standards of Accreditation at a substantial level. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress.

Accreditation status is not granted retroactively. Institutions granted the status of accreditation must use the following statement if they wish to describe the status publicly:

[Name of institution] is accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, (510) 748-9001.

The phrase “fully accredited” is to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible. The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WSCUC refers to the quality of the institution as a whole. Because institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program at the institution, statements like “this program is accredited” or “this degree is accredited” are incorrect and misleading.

The Commission stipulates that this action encompasses the degrees offered by NewSchool of Architecture and Design at the time of this action, as listed in the attached Consolidated List of Currently Conferred Degrees. In keeping with the WSCUC Policy on Degree Level Approval, NewSchool of Architecture and Design is designated as having an "I" (Individual) status for each of the degree levels currently being offered. This means that all new degree programs initiated by the institution will require prior approval through WSCUC's Substantive Change process. Degree programs that have been reviewed and included under this action may be extended to other campuses of the institution without prior Substantive Change action.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of NSAD's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in them. The 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.

Please note that the Criteria for Review (CFR) cited in this letter refer to the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation*. The *2008 Handbook* continues to be available on the WSCUC website at www.wascsenior.org.

As the institution works on the issues cited in this letter, it should be mindful of the expectations that it will need to meet at the time of its next comprehensive review, which will take place under the revised Standards of Accreditation and institutional review process in the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation*. These expectations build on past practice and include, for example, student success, quality improvement processes such as assessment and program review, planning, and financial sustainability. However, the *2013 Handbook* also includes new foci: the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees; student performance in core competencies at the time of graduation; and institutional planning for the changing landscape in higher education. NSAD is encouraged to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* and to approach its challenges in ways that will address both old and new expectations.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that NewSchool undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC 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 contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko
President and Executive Director

MEP/gc

Cc: Harold Hewitt, WSCUC Chair
Karen Gersten, ALO
Vivian Sanchez, Board Chair
Members of the Special Visit team
Barbara Gross Davis, WSCUC Staff Liaison

Consolidated List of Currently Conferred Degrees

Bachelor of Architecture
Bachelor of Arts in Architecture
Master of Architecture (I)
Master of Architecture (II)
Master of Science in Architecture
Executive Master of Architecture
Bachelor of Science in Digital Media Arts
Bachelor of Arts in Animation
Bachelor of Arts in Game Art
Bachelor of Science in Game Programming
Bachelor of Science in Construction Management
Master of Science in Construction Management
Master of Science in Landscape Architecture
Bachelor of Interior Design
Bachelor of Arts in Product Design