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March 6, 2015

Dr. David H. Stull
President
San Francisco Conservatory of Music
50 Oak Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Dr. Stull:

At its meeting February 18-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit to San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM) September 17-19, 2014. As you know, the Visit was conducted under the 2013 Handbook, although it was originally scheduled as an Educational Effectiveness Review. Commission members reviewed the institutional report prepared by San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the supplemental materials requested by the team. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues Provost and Dean Robert Fitzpatrick, Professor and ALO Emily Laurance, and Director of IR Rebecca Sorell. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

This reaffirmation review was conducted in keeping with the 2013 *Handbook of Accreditation*, which requires institutions to address several components in their institutional reports. With regard to each of these components, the team found the following:

1. *Meaning, quality, and integrity of the degree*
The institution rightly perceives studio instruction as the centerpiece of its degree offering, and the mission statement is a suitable proxy for an explanation of the meaning of the degree. However, the assessment of skills needed for performance has not been tracked in a regular or systematic basis. The role and purpose of General Education in a conservatory framework has been a continuing issue with SFCM during its WSCUC reviews. Finally, with respect to graduate education, the institution has started a new track for students who enter with less-than-adequate music literacy skills.
2. *Core competencies, addressed in terms of number expected in this review cycle*
Because the Visit was a modified reaffirmation review, intended as an EER but conducted as an Accreditation Visit, the institution did not specifically assess the Core Competencies.

3. *Educational quality: Student learning and standards of performance at graduation*

The institution identifies studio and ensemble performance and academic coursework as the two major components of the Conservatory's curriculum. Learning in the former is generally measured via the master-apprentice tradition, which lacks the typical specificity required under WSCUC accreditation standards. However, there was evidence that student learning outcomes are being recognized as crucial pedagogic elements, and "the team found a profoundly different attitude among faculty and administrators during the...visit", with respect to the effort of formal assessment. In addition, "the team was very impressed with the plans for the Conservatory's digital portfolio....which involves partnering across the entire institution." Finally, the recitals required of all seniors "are capstone experiences that are extremely well suited to the assessment of course, department and institutional competences," but realizing the assessment potential of these experiences requires the development of rubrics and their application by panels.

4. *Student success*

In response to a recommendation in the 2012 Action Letter, SFCM developed an institutional research function. "Over the last 18 months with [a] new IR Director in place, SFCM has improved the quality and scope of their student success data." Retention rates appear to be improving, although not yet to the level of SFCM's aspirant institutions. There are plans for improving those rates, including the addition of geographically proximate student residences. The institution noted that minority students are not retained at the same level as non-minorities. This same phenomenon occurs with respect to graduation rates, which is similar to those of aspirant institutions. SFCM has established three specific goals to improve its graduation rates, which will require the continued expansion of the IR function. In general, there has been demonstrable progress in addressing issues of student success.

5. *Quality assurance and program review*

SFCM has instituted a formal cycle for program review and completed seven departmental reviews. It is clear that the institution is systematically embracing this process, which many "had been decidedly skeptical of only three years ago." Program review has promoted development of learning outcomes and elevated the expectation that all courses must have syllabi. However, a comprehensive data set, based on formal, systematic data related to direct assessment, is still lacking. In addition, the institution appears not to have a formal process by which to formulate action plans that align review outcomes with budget allocation.

6. *Sustainability and response to the changing ecology of higher education*

SFCM has been challenged financially for many years. Partially in response to these challenges, "President Stull introduced a bold, strategic vision that was...supported by the Board of Trustees in March 2014." This vision includes an

eight-year financial model that addresses key variables. In particular, the institution has focused on enrollment projections, consistent with its reliance on tuition revenue. It has also developed a plan for the use of endowment returns, and elevated its attention to the cultivation of philanthropic funds. A central initiative of SFCM is the establishment of new student residences. The residences are expected to draw more students to the institution, to enhance the student experience, and to generate excess funds to be applied to operations. The Strategic Vision and Plan has become a cornerstone of the institution's future planning in a brief period of time.

With respect to the changing environment of higher education, the team noted the creation of the new degree in Technology and Applied Music "...capitalizes on regional location and the strengths of the Conservatory model." However, the decline in audience interest for western European music remains a concern for the long-term viability of the institution.

San Francisco Conservatory of Music is to be commended for:

Progress in the General Education Curriculum. As noted by the team, "the general education program has finally turned a corner...The plans for a first-year writing sequence as a foundational part of the curriculum as well as the placement of the Western Civilization program in the second year both represent solid efforts in the improvement of this program." Elements in the institution's Strategic Vision and Plan promise further enhancements.

Development of a Systematic Program Review Process. Past Commission reviews have cited the inadequacy of comprehensive program reviews, along with the absence of a formal institutional research function. As noted by the team, "SFCM should be commended for the significant progress made in this area previously filled with conflict and community ambivalence." The establishment of a formal institutional research officer position and the use of data in evaluation are significant steps. The team further recognizes "the potential of the proposed digital portfolio initiative and encourages its development with much enthusiasm."

Improved Focus on the Student Experience. The institution has deftly addressed the previous concerns with the availability of practice rooms, and has incorporated those needs in its plans for expanded student residences. It has also enhanced its attention to "health and wellness [and] tutoring support."

Proposed Multipurpose Residential Facility. The concept and detailed plans for a new student residence hall go beyond traditional housing arrangements. In a city where housing is both limited and expensive, the siting and appointments of the proposed residential facility address "a very specific need for students even as [they address] the larger long-term issues of resource generation, student quality, recruitment, and retention."

The Commission endorses the findings, commendations, and recommendations of the team and wishes to emphasize the following areas for continuing attention and development:

Complete the Building of a Comprehensive General Education Program. As noted by the team, considerable effort has been devoted recently by SFCM to a "reformulation of the core GE courses in the lower division....making possible more ambitious and challenging liberal arts work in the upper division [and allowing] more focused and effective instruction for ESL students." However, "the various initiatives proposed for General Education should be shaped into a more coherent and comprehensive offering." Recent efforts have established a solid foundation. The challenge for SFCM is "to 'connect the dots' for the whole program and communicate the value of the proposed solution to the student body." In concert with the novel visiting scholar seminars and modular class system, the GE program can be a distinctive and defining element of the SFCM undergraduate degree. Finally, the Commission looks forward to a comprehensive discussion of the five competencies at the time of the institution's next reaffirmation review. (CFRs 2.2a and 2.3)

Further Develop and Integrate Learning Outcomes.

While there has been substantial progress in the areas of program review and assessment of student learning, the team noted the need for outcomes, at each level, to be more evolved and coherently linked. This includes such activities as mapping year-to-year repertoire requirements. In addition, the team noted the need for "further development of methods for direct assessment of student learning." Again, while there has been substantive progress in the recent past in establishing these outcomes and developing the foundation for direct assessment, the institution is advised to build on that foundation to create a coherent set of outcomes. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, and 4.4)

Develop an Operational Plan for the Strategic Vision and Plan.

The team acknowledges that SFCM's Strategic Vision and Plan was only recently adopted. There is now "an opportunity to develop a framework for the strategic plan that will further support its realization and community buy-in." These should include specific operational tactics, timelines, milestones, and performance indicators. The team recognizes that the institution is at a "transformational moment," with renewed energy and commitment. Providing concrete direction for the institution's novel aspirations is crucial to their realization. In this same vein, the institution's Board of Trustees should institute a formal and periodic evaluation of the President. (CFRs 4.6 and 3.9)

Strengthen the Operating Budget.

Financial dilemmas have beset SFCM for a number of years. The institution is encouraged to maintain "[its] previously stated priorities of competitive faculty and staff salaries, student scholarships, and balanced budgets." These needs are current and should be engaged on an annual basis, even as the institution develops its future plans. (CFRs 3.4, 4.6, and 4.7)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review team report and reaffirm the accreditation of San Francisco Conservatory of Music for a period of seven years.
2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the Offsite Review in spring 2021 and the Accreditation Visit scheduled for fall 2021.
3. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2019.
4. Request an Progress Report in spring 2018 on the following issues cited in the team report:
 - a. Mapping of year-to-year repertoire requirements to specific musical, technical, and presentational skills
 - b. Further developments in General Education, as noted in the above recommendation
 - c. Further developments in defining and integrating learning outcomes, as noted in the above recommendation
 - d. The extent to which there are syllabi and course learning outcomes for all courses and the extent of alignment among course, program, and institutional level outcomes
 - e. Development and deployment of the planned digital portfolio
 - f. Development and deployment of appropriate rubrics for use in the assessment of senior recitals
 - g. The success or challenges of the three initiatives designed to improve retention rates
 - h. The success or challenges of the three goals related to graduation rates
 - i. The extent of maturation of the institutional research function, particularly as to the development of an institution-wide data set which can be used systematically at the time of program review
 - j. The development of a process to link program review outcomes with budget allocation
 - k. The development of a tactical plan to complement the strategic plan
 - l. The status of the planned multipurpose student residence hall
 - m. The status of the planned capital campaign
 - n. The impact of the planned capital campaign (and other revenue-generating initiatives) on improvement in faculty and staff salaries
 - o. A general discussion of the maturation of the assessment function, now that it has a solid foundation among constituencies.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that San Francisco Conservatory of Music has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability. San Francisco Conservatory of Music has successfully completed the multi-stage review conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is encouraged to

maintain its compliance with WSCUC standards and uphold its commitment to continuous quality improvement.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of San Francisco Conservatory of Music 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 San Francisco Conservatory of Music website and widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in this letter. 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.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that San Francisco Conservatory of Music 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 participation in this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko
President

MEP/cno

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Emily Laurence, ALO
Timothy Foo, Board Chair
Members of the reaffirmation team
Christopher Oberg, Vice President