

July 12, 2021

Ms. Pam MacKinnon  
Artistic Director  
Ms. Jennifer Bielstein  
Executive Director  
American Conservatory Theater  
415 Geary Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Directors MacKinnon and Bielstein:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning American Conservatory Theater (ACT) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting June 25, 2021. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Special Visit to American Conservatory Theater March 11-12, 2021. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by American Conservatory Theater prior to the Special Visit and the institution's May 11, 2021 response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues Danyon Davis, Director of the MFA Program; Peter Kuo, Conservatory Director; and Jack Sharrar, Director of Academic Affairs and ALO. Your comments were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's status with WSCUC.

### **Actions**

1. Receive the Special Visit team report that focused on: (1) strategic planning and financial viability; (2) use of assessment findings for program improvement; (3) assessment related to community engagement; (4) development of governance and representation structures for faculty, staff and students; (5) organizational health, including faculty and staff workload, evaluations and professional development; (6) roles and responsibilities of core faculty; (7) faculty involvement in assessment and program review; (8) grievance policies for students and employees; (9) student indebtedness, and (10) technological support.
2. Issue a Formal Notice of Concern
3. Schedule a Special Visit in Spring 2022 to address all the requirements in this letter, with a focus on Standard 3, particularly CFR 3.4
4. Schedule a Progress Report to be submitted by November 30, 2021 to address:
  - a. a complete, detailed and viable financial plan, including a budget and cash flow projection, for the 2021-22 year. (CFR 3.4)
  - b. an MOU, or similar document, with a partner institution, that ensures the future of the MFA. (CFRs 3.4, 3.7 and 4.6)

- c. a completed 3-5 year strategic plan including an enrollment plan that ensures continuation of the MFA. (CFRs 3.4 and 4.7)
  - d. a completed 3-5 year financial operating plan for the continuation of the MFA. (CFR 3.4)
5. Submit a Teach-Out Plan by October 1, 2021

The Commission commends American Conservatory Theater in particular for the following:

1. Pivoting the MFA program to online modality in an effective and innovative manner.
2. Providing ample and appropriate communications, learning and enterprise management technology to students, faculty, and staff during the COVID pandemic.
3. Developing a robust equity, diversity, and inclusion program that addressed structural issues within the organization, responded to societal imperatives, and engaged students and faculty in challenging and broadening the theatrical canon.
4. Making significant improvements in the atmosphere of the MFA program after a series of challenging transitions in administration, faculty, and staff positions.
5. Enhancing human resources support for more transparent and consistent institutional practices.
6. Fostering timely and helpful counseling sessions that contributed to students' short- and long-term planning and personal finance acumen.
7. Continuing to adapt and develop the Readiness Rubrics to make them a meaningful part of a systematic assessment process that included core MFA faculty and adjunct faculty, as well as increased collaboration with the Education Program.

The Commission requires the institution to respond to the following issues:

1. To ensure the stability and long-term viability of its educational programs, including the MFA, immediately develop a plan for partnership with a local university or create an alternative plan for the 2022-23 academic year. (CFR 3.4)
2. To ensure the stability and long-term viability of its educational programs, including the MFA, promptly complete the development of a 3-5 year strategic plan that incorporates significant input from Conservatory and MFA faculty and staff. (CFRs 3.4 and 4.7)
3. To ensure the stability and long-term viability of educational programs, including the MFA, develop a 5-10 year financial operating plan that closes the institution's structural deficit. (CFR 3.4)
4. Establish and enforce clear written guidelines for timely faculty contracts, as well as sustainable and equitable faculty workloads. (CFRs 3.2 and 3.3)
5. Establish and enforce clear written guidelines for providing professional development opportunities for faculty, including faculty leaves. (CFRs 3.2 and 3.3)
6. Enhance, clarify, and systematize written policies for faculty and students, including processes for handling complaints and grievances. (CFR 1.7)
7. Continue to explore and expand strategies for student post-graduation life that include creating robust portfolios for the digital environment, preparing for all aspects of the business of 21st-century acting, and managing student indebtedness. (CFR 2.13)

A Formal Notice of Concern provides notice to the institution that, while it currently meets WSCUC Standards, it is in danger of being found in noncompliance with one or more Standards if current trends or findings continue. Institutions issued a Formal Notice of Concern are scheduled for a Special Visit within four years. If the issues are not addressed within four years, a sanction could be imposed as described in the 2013 *Handbook of Accreditation*. A Formal Notice of Concern is public information and will be posted on the WSCUC website.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter is being sent to the chair of American Conservatory Theater's governing board. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the American Conservatory Theater's website and widely distributed throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that American Conservatory Theater 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/so

Cc: Phillip Doolittle, Commission Chair  
Jack Sharrar, ALO  
David Riemer, Board Chair  
Members of the Special Visit team  
Susan Opp, Vice President