

March 9, 2018

Dr. Michael McLean  
President  
Thomas Aquinas College  
10000 N. Ojai Road  
Santa Paula, CA 93060

Dear President McLean:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning Thomas Aquinas College (TAC) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting February 14-16, 2018. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit to TAC September 26-28, 2017. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by TAC prior to the Offsite Review (OSR) and the supplemental materials requested by the team after the OSR. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues: John Goyette, Tutor and Dean, and Brian Dragoo, Tutor and Accreditation Liaison Officer (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 new status with WSCUC.

### **Actions**

1. Receive the Accreditation Visit team report
2. Reaffirm accreditation for a period of eight years
3. Schedule the next reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review in spring 2025 and the Accreditation Visit in fall 2025
4. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review for May 1, 2022
5. Schedule an Interim Report to be submitted by November 1, 2022 to address:
  - a. Institutional research capacity
  - b. Integration of TAC's eight virtues into student assessment
  - c. Measurement of student post-completion outcomes
  - d. Recruitment of women tutors and advancement of women in administration
  - e. Board of Directors training
  - f. Organizational structures, decision-making processes, budgeting and administrator engagement in long-term planning involving both the Santa Paula and Northfield campuses

### **Commendations**

The Commission commends TAC in particular for the following:

1. Fidelity to a strong mission that retains a sense of distinction and a unique place in American higher education.
2. A strong tutor camaraderie committed to student engagement and a coherent curriculum, and tutors who are included in the decision-making processes at the educational, administrative, and governing levels.
3. Approaching the reaffirmation of accreditation process with a spirit of inquiry and a genuine interest in improvement.

4. A commitment to substantial and thorough progress on the Commission's previous recommendations, especially with respect to assessment and program review.
5. Student feedback through Don Rags as a significant component of assessment, allowing the college to think carefully about ways to improve the academic program and close the assessment loop.
6. Through the generous investment of donors, a campus with attention to architectural consistency, garden aesthetics, a thoughtful campus plan, and a commitment to stewardship of space.
7. Summer Curriculum Committee meetings--a unique feature of TAC evidenced by high tutor participation--used for tutor development and strengthening educational processes.
8. High retention and graduation rates that speak to the achievement of students and the level of care by tutors and administrators.
9. Significant fundraising capacity supporting operational costs, campus development, and vision for expansion.
10. Resources stewarded wisely to keep tuition and room and board affordable, limit educational debt, and offer generous financial aid to students from all economic levels.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. Ensure that TAC has the institutional research (IR) capacity sufficient to inform institutional review, planning, and decision-making. Securing personnel with exclusive IR responsibility is one strategy to consider. (CFRs 1.2, 2.10, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3)
2. Integrate TAC's four moral virtues and four intellectual virtues into the student assessment process more intentionally. These eight virtues should be included when TAC regularly generates, evaluates, and makes public data on student achievement. (CFRs 1.2, 2.6, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4)
3. Develop consistent and meaningful tools to measure post-completion outcomes, to be able to assess how well these moral and intellectual virtues are realized in the lives of TAC alumni, and to make these data publically available. (CFRs 1.2, 2.6, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5)
4. Recruit more women tutors and advance more women in administration whose presence, perspectives, and missional fit will contribute toward student "enrichment of life as a whole". (CFRs 1.4, 3.1, 3.2, and 4.7)
5. Use external sources to provide Board of Directors education sessions based on higher education best practices to consider changes currently taking place and anticipated to take place in light of TAC's campus expansion and the increasing governance challenges of non-profit organizations; use the assessment of teaching and learning to inform board decision-making. (CFRs 4.3, 4.6, and 4.7)

6. Delineate and clarify organizational structures and decision-making processes between the Santa Paula and Northfield campuses, foster frequent and systematic interaction among TAC administrators about the goals of the five-year plan, including the Northfield campus, and establish budgets that allocate costs between each campus. (CFRs 3.4 and 3.7)

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Thomas Aquinas College has addressed the three Core Commitments and has successfully completed the two-stage institutional review process conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review for reaffirmation, the institution is encouraged to continue its progress, particularly with respect to student learning and success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Thomas Aquinas College's 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 Thomas Aquinas College 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 Thomas Aquinas College 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,



Jamienne S. Studley  
President

JSS/mam

Cc: Reed Dasenbrock, Commission Chair  
Brian Dragoo, ALO  
R. Scott Turicchi, Board Chair  
Members of the Accreditation Visit team  
Maureen A. Maloney, Vice President