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PRESIDENT
Mary Ellen Petrisko

July 15, 2015

Mr. Charles Desmarais
President
San Francisco Art Institute
800 Chestnut Street
San Francisco, CA 94133

Dear President Desmarais:

At its meeting June 17-19, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit (AV) to San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) April 8-10, 2015. Commission members reviewed the institutional report prepared by San Francisco Art Institute prior to the Offsite Review (OSR) and supplemental materials requested by the team following the OSR, and SFAI's June 4, 2015, response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with your colleagues Dr. Rachel Schreiber, Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Ms. Cynthia Plevin, Board of Trustees' Chair. Their 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. SFAI participated in the Pilot 2 phase of the new Institutional Review Process, and the Commission extends its appreciation to the institution for conducting its reaffirmation review during this initial period. With regard to each of the components, the team found the following:

Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees SFAI's mission combines engagement with the community through meaningful outreach and providing its students with a rigorous education emphasizing the fine arts as one of the few art institutions maintaining this focus. The quality of the degree is therefore dependent on students' fine arts work and the incorporation of community engagement opportunities into their studies, thereby reflecting the mission of the school.

The team has noted that the Curriculum Alignment Matrix, created as a tool to ensure the coherency of student learning paths, does not appear currently to be in use. The institution is encouraged to deploy this self-developed tool to improve the correlation of student learning outcomes with curricular structure.

Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation As a Pilot 2 institution, SFAI was not required to assess core competencies at or near graduation. The team noted that student learning outcomes appear to be enmeshed with course learning outcomes and that "the distinction between the two could be made more explicit" – the former are learning-centered while the latter are teacher-centered. Assessment of individual student performance "appears well established and efficient," but an evaluation at a higher level to determine the extent to which course- and program-level outcomes are achieved as measured through such data as grade studies, persistence rates in individual courses, and disaggregated data on specific student groups was not evident. The team report notes that "SFAI would benefit greatly from the systematic use of data in its already fine assessment work."

Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation The institution notes in its report that retention and graduation rates for full-time undergraduates are "unacceptably low." The five-year average retention rate in fall 2013 was 63%; the fall 2008 cohort five-year graduation rate was 33%, down from 50% for the fall 2004 cohort. The team noted that the fall 2013 single year rate was 69%, which is a promising indicator of improvement, and it may be expected that the rising retention rate will correspondingly increase the graduation rate, but overall these rates still compare unfavorably to like institutions. SFAI has responded to this dilemma by increasing its institutional research capacity in order to identify the key data to help improve retention and graduation rates. The institution is encouraged to continue to develop greater statistical expertise and to use these analyses in its enrollment management function and student success initiatives. The development of an institution-specific definition of student success and the creation of a Retention Steering Committee are evidence of an institutional commitment to bolster student success.

Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review; Assessment; Use of Data As previously noted, the institution does not systematically collect or use data on student performance to inform its decisions about improvements in programs. The team report noted in this regard that "SFAI will need to continue to develop its [Institutional Research] capacity and expertise." There is an established cycle for program review, and the identification and assembly of key student performance data elements will be essential to achieve continuous improvement through those reviews. The program review process would benefit as well from clearly identified budget allocations for the funding of outside reviewers.

Sustainability: Financial Viability and Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment For the seventh year in a row operating expenses have been less than revenues, commendable evidence of a financial stability that SFAI has not always enjoyed. The current fiscal year promises to continue that trend. In addition, the financial statements for the institution have been significantly enhanced with the addition of the Chestnut Street building and art work assets. It should be noted, however, that the institution has significant infrastructure and operational needs, especially in deferred maintenance. The team commends the plan for the expansion of facilities through the

Fort Mason project, but notes that, "as SFAI proceeds with its plan to improve and expand facilities, caution is recommended relative to taking on long-term debt," since any debt that cannot be supported through philanthropy will need to be funded through operations.

Budget allocation and institutional priorities appear to be in alignment, and there is evidence of a solid working relationship between the CFO and institutional constituencies. The institution is encouraged to consider the questions posed on pages 11 and 12 of the team report as it continues its development in a rapidly changing higher education environment.

The Commission endorses the findings, commendations, and recommendations of the team report, and in particular, those recommendations contained on pages 14 and 15 of the report.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the team report

2. Reaffirm accreditation for seven years

3. Schedule the Offsite Review in fall 2021

4. Schedule the Accreditation Visit in spring 2022

5. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review in 2019

6. Request an Interim Report in spring 2017 on the following issues:
    a. Document financial performance through fiscal year 2015-16: has the positive trend been maintained? What impact has the addition of a new facility had on the overall finances of the institution, especially with respect to assuming debt and debt servicing? Has the institution addressed deferred maintenance issues in its current facility? Is enrollment supporting expected tuition revenues? Comment on other developments as appropriate.
    b. Describe additional efforts and results from those efforts in defining and measuring student learning outcomes: how has the IR function been enhanced? How have course learning objectives been distinguished from student learning outcomes? What conclusions have been reached by looking at collected student data (as opposed to individual student performance)? How does the institution use data in making decisions about improvements to programs? Comment on other developments as appropriate.
    c. Document efforts to improve retention and graduate rates, including updates for the 2015 and 2016 cohort graduation rates and the 2015 and 2016 fall retention figures (both for freshmen and overall).

d. Document efforts to improve diversity among faculty and students.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that San Francisco Art Institute has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability. San Francisco Art Institute 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 Art Institute'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 San Francisco Art Institute 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 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.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that San Francisco Art Institute 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
Jennifer Rissler, ALO
Cynthia Plevin, Board Chair
Members of the reaffirmation team
Christopher Oberg, Vice President