July 3, 2012

Pamela Brooks Gann
President
Claremont McKenna College
500 E Ninth Street
Claremont, CA 91711-6400

Dear President Gann:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission took action on the reaccreditation of Claremont McKenna College (CMC), after having deferred action at its February 2012 meeting. The Commission had previously considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to Claremont McKenna College (CMC) November 8-11, 2011, other reports and exhibits related to the comprehensive review of CMC, and your thoughtful response to the team report dated January 2012. In addition, the Commission considered CMC’s progress report of May 9, 2012, which provided a full explanation of CMC’s actions taken to address the reporting of inaccurate data to external agencies, including WASC, by a former member of the CMC administration. This letter will address both the comprehensive WASC review for reaccreditation and CMC’s report on actions taken to address data and statistical reporting.

The institution’s 2007 proposal outlined two themes for this review: assessing learning outcomes in both general education and the major, and planning for growth. Because institutional plans for growth were put on hold in light of the subsequent recession, the bulk of the self-study report for the EER was devoted to the assessment theme. The team found that the report addressed this theme thoroughly and that it was “clear, well organized and appropriately [portrayed] the status and condition of the College.” It is quite clear that CMC utilized this accreditation review process to build an effective infrastructure for assessing student learning. Among the outcomes of this work are the impressive “good will and interest” evinced by the faculty, staff and administration as they have built understanding and skill and created a system and culture that supports assessment of student learning.

In addition to these themes, the Commission’s letter of March 2010 highlighted three issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits. First, the Commission called on CMC to seek a clearer and more strongly shared sense of mission, given some tension on campus about CMC’s purpose as a selective undergraduate liberal arts institution and its emphasis on preparing students as leaders in both business and government. The Commission was pleased to learn that the CMC community seemed better able to embrace both the
“civilization and commerce” elements of its mission and that there is now “better understanding, engagement and support” for this mission.

The Commission also urged the College to study its climate for diversity, with the goal of improving the climate and increasing diversity, especially within the faculty. The Commission acknowledges that CMC has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing these concerns and has taken important steps, including utilizing the results of climate surveys to identify areas needing attention, taking concrete steps to address the needs of specific groups, making changes to the faculty search process, and establishing a Task Force on Campus Climate to continue this work and make recommendations to the president.

Finally, the Commission challenged CMC to accelerate progress in establishing student learning outcomes and the means to assess them, confirming that the EER team would expect to see findings from the initial assessment endeavors. As noted above, the Commission commends CMC for the highly successful and effective manner in which it has addressed this critical undertaking. The team report drew particular attention to the enthusiastic and informed support exhibited by faculty across departments for the assessment of learning, in both general education and the majors. Important assessment tools have been developed and adopted, and findings from assessment for both programs and general education have been collected, analyzed, and integrated in program reviews. Student learning outcomes have been developed not only for all majors on the CMC campus, but also for joint majors that CMC students pursue within the Claremont University Consortium. Also noted for special praise by the team was the Assessment Committee, “whose dedication and commitment of time to this assessment work cannot be sufficiently commended.”

CMC is also commended for its high standards; emphasis on excellence; effective leadership and sound management; distinctive mission; and its dedicated and highly accomplished faculty, administration and staff. Of special note are CMC’s highly successful retention and graduation strategies, including need-blind, no-loan financial aid. With aggregate freshman-to-sophomore retention at 93 percent, and recent six-year average graduation rates above 93 percent, CMC has among the highest such indicators in the country. Further, disparities in rates among subpopulations are small.

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

**Refining and sustaining assessment.** The Commission supports the team’s recommendations for continued development of the system of assessment at CMC to ensure that current efforts are sustained and that findings continue to be used to strengthen students’ learning and improve curriculum and pedagogy. The Commission was gratified to learn from your response to the team report that CMC’s Assessment Committee has already been made a permanent committee with an expanded membership and a clear scope of responsibility. The next stage of development will be refining student learning outcomes and the methods for assessing them, using findings collected over time to improve student learning, and developing efficient and sustainable processes for assessing, collecting and analyzing student learning data. The Commission was
pleased to learn of your commitment to provide funding for faculty and staff development, and to disseminate an Assessment Committee report that will detail results of assessment and outline goals, plans and strategies moving forward. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.4, 4.6-4.8)

**Completing plans to ensure the accuracy of reported data.** The College informed the WASC staff promptly when it learned in January 2012 that a member of its administration had misreported data on SAT scores to a number of outside entities, and CMC continued to communicate with WASC on the steps it had taken to investigate the matter, correct misreported data and develop systems to ensure that this kind of breach of data integrity did not reoccur. The May 9 progress report, which followed an independent audit of the matter by the College’s law firm, summarized these steps and set forth additional steps and plans, including multiple reviews and sign-off on data by different departments; reorganization of admission, financial aid and student affairs functions; a planned risk assessment of data and statistics; and planned guidelines for the use of data in marketing and recruitment. The Commission found that the CMC leadership, including its governing board, was swift, decisive and transparent in addressing this challenging situation. CMC handled the matter with integrity and candor and in keeping with good practices in higher education. It has adopted new systems to ensure the accuracy and integrity of data reported to entities outside the College. The Commission noted that the audit verified that a single individual was responsible for misreporting the data, and had done so without any participation, instruction or encouragement from anyone else at CMC. Given that not all of the planned policies and processes are in place in this area, the Commission asks that CMC report on further implementation of the plans set forth in the May 9 progress report, as noted below. (CFRs 1.7-1.9)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Report and reaffirm the accreditation of Claremont McKenna College.

2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the off-site review in fall 2021 and the visit tentatively scheduled for spring 2022.

3. Request an Interim Report in fall 2014 to address progress in (a) building a permanent organization and structure to ensure the sustainability of assessment processes, (b) utilizing findings from assessment in program review and for improvement and accountability, and (c) implementing new systems and processes to ensure the accuracy and integrity of data reported to the public and entities external to CMC.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Claremont McKenna College has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness and has satisfactorily completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.
In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the Claremont McKenna College governing board in one week.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website in approximately one week. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the College undertook in preparing for and supporting the accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to the institution while assuring public accountability, and we are grateful for your continued support of our process. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the actions of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/tc

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
    Dianna Graves, ALO
    Harry T. McMahon, Board Chair
    Members of the EER team
    Richard Winn, WASC Vice President
    Teri Cannon, WASC Executive Vice President