July 3, 2012

Steven Lavine
President
California Institute of the Arts
24700 McBean Parkway
Valencia, California 91355

Dear President Lavine:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts) March 7-9, 2012. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by Cal Arts prior to the visit, the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2010, and your May 30, 2012 response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues: Jackie Elam, acting provost, and Justine Garrett, assistant provost and accreditation liaison officer. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

Cal Arts’ institutional proposal outlined three themes for this comprehensive review: aligning programmatic and student learning goals within each individual artistic métier, preparing students to conceive and articulate their art making and its relationship to the world around them, and supporting the professional and artistic development of the faculty and staff to enhance student learning. The accompanying goals included refining assessment measures, developing benchmarks of student achievement, and adopting policies related to a number of faculty and staff issues. The accreditation review process was utilized effectively to address all three themes. Cal Arts has created a flexible, comprehensive institution-wide assessment and review system consistent with its individualized approach to arts education. An impressive array of creative and well-planned curricular programs, providing links between students and the world beyond the Institute, has been developed. Support tools for faculty and staff are now in place, including an intranet, revised policies, updated handbooks, a flexible “umbrella” framework for peer review, development workshops, and opportunities for artistic and creative scholarship of faculty.

In addition to these matters, the Commission’s action letter of June 2010 highlighted four major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: decision-making processes, peer review, assessment, and planning and resources. Decision-making processes have been updated, clarified, communicated, and made transparent; a flexible policy for peer review has been created; a comprehensive system of assessment of student learning is in the early
stages of implementation; and a culture of objective, data-driven decision making is in place. Work remains in implementing the new system of assessment and in providing an institutional research function sufficient to support that system. Findings from program analyses also need to be addressed, including the need to support the Equality and Diversity program and the new Student Information System.

California Institute of the Arts is to be commended for taking to heart the recommendations from the CPR, finding “unique hybrid solutions across the whole school, that worked,” and creating conditions for “the collegiality of discourse that was so needed to tackle some highly divisive issues.” As noted by the team, “this Cal Arts is not the Cal Arts we visited two years ago.”

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

**Building a strong institutional research function.** As highlighted in the team report, the institutional research (IR) function at Cal Arts is “the greatest bottleneck to fully implementing a comprehensive assessment and program review system tied to budgeting and decision making.” The institution’s new commitment to data-driven decision making – a “monumental accomplishment” in the words of the team – has outpaced the current “dispersed” IR function, overburdening staff members who carry IR responsibility and pointing to the immediate need for experienced IR leadership, a centralized IR plan and function, and more dedicated resources. The Commission observes that sophisticated, research-based analyses of student success are required as the institution engages in strategic planning and seeks to understand and improve graduation and retention. Noting that a strong IR function is the fulcrum on which program review and assessment are balanced with resources and planning, the Commission expects Cal Arts to place a high priority on providing resources in this area and was encouraged to learn from your May 30, 2012 letter that Cal Arts is in the process of recruiting for an institutional research position. (CFRs 1.2, 2.7, 2.10, 4.3-4.5)

**Continuing to develop and refine assessment and program review.** The Commission concurs with the team’s finding that while Cal Arts has made “remarkable” progress in assessment and program review since the 2010 Capacity visit, the institution is still at the “emerging” stage in these two areas. In particular, course-level learning outcomes are still “unsettled,” assessment language is inconsistent in syllabi, curriculum maps need to be established, program learning outcomes rubrics lack indicators of attainment, and co-curricular programs are just beginning to be assessed. Program review, conducted on a flexible, institution-wide model with various levels of faculty engagement, has historically been connected to specialized arts accreditation, which does not meet all the expectations reflected in the WASC Standards (CFR 2.7). Results of program review and annual assessment reports need to be connected more clearly to planning and budgeting and should inform improvements. The Commission acknowledges the positive results that have emerged from Cal Arts’ recent efforts in assessment and program review and expects the rapid and full implementation of the institution’s newly developed comprehensive system of assessment and review. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 4.4)
Supporting and enhancing diversity. Key aspects of Cal Arts’ mission include “the diversity of voices” and “new forms of expression,” and while 40% of the institute’s students are persons of color, only 14% of the faculty represents racial-ethnic minorities. An Assistant Provost for Equity and Diversity, appointed in 2010, has worked collaboratively to sponsor lectures, host retreats, and develop best practices that will support diversity in various ways. The Commission supports the team’s recommendations about diversity, including providing more support for diversity initiatives, placing more emphasis on diversity in planning and decision making, developing greater faculty competence in diversity issues, encouraging comprehensive curriculum mapping to incorporate cultural diversity and equity issues, and providing time for faculty discussion in this important area. Further, the Commission agrees that Cal Arts needs to implement a revised faculty hiring policy that “appropriately promotes recruitment and hiring of a diverse faculty.” (CFRs 1.5 and 3.2)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of California Institute of the Arts.

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

3. Request an Interim Report in fall 2014 on the issues cited in the EER report: (1) institutional research, (2) assessment and program review, and (3) the equity and diversity initiative. Progress should be demonstrated, as defined above.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California Institute of the Arts has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully 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 Cal Arts’ 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 Institute undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions 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 action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/dh

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
    Justine Garrett, ALO
    Austin Beutner, Board Chair
    Members of the EER team
    Diane Harvey, Vice President and WASC liaison