July 15, 2015

Dr. Kristiina Vuori
President
Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute
10901 North Torrey Pines Road
La Jolla, CA 92037

Dear President Vuori:

At its meeting June 17-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) for Initial Accreditation team that conducted the visit to the Graduate School of Biomedical Science (GSBS) at Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute (SBMRI) March 11 and 12, 2015. The Commission also had access to the EER report prepared by the Graduate School prior to the visit, the institution’s April 16, 2015, response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2014. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with your colleague Guy Salvesen, Dean of the Graduate School. His comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

SBMRI’s Graduate School hosted its first visit, the CPR for Candidacy in spring 2009, followed by the EER in spring 2011, thereafter being granted Candidacy. The CPR for Initial Accreditation was conducted in spring 2014; and this fourth visit was conducted in spring 2015. Counting the application for Eligibility submitted in 2007, this has been an eight-year process. The Commission commends the school’s perseverance in pursuit of this goal and for its diligence in implementing improvements following each phase of the process.

In keeping with Commission practice, the GSBS was required to respond in this visit only to the issues requiring attention following the CPR for Initial Accreditation as identified in the Commission’s letter of July 7, 2014, and expressed below:

**Assessment and Program Review.** The team found that the faculty has created a solid set of program learning outcomes (PLOs) and a coherent curriculum map that clearly indicates the alignment between course and program outcomes. Syllabi provided illustrated an understanding of the need for course learning outcomes, and the team was impressed with the collection of evidence at the course level. A Program Review policy has been developed, a self-study involving committees of faculty was performed, and an external review was conducted by a distinguished panel.
While the team found faculty to have built a strong foundation for program assessment and to be demonstrating a sustained commitment to assessment and to program review, program review as defined in the institution’s new policy has yet been conducted, in view of its recent adoption. The team also noted that, although there are plans to assess one program-level outcome per year in the five years between planned reviews, the institution will need to outline the specific direct and indirect evidence that will be used to evaluate each outcome. The team also noted the external review panel’s concern about the need for faculty to clarify the distinctions among assessment at the program level, teaching evaluation, and student grades. The program has already demonstrated a history of collecting indirect evidence from faculty and students, and the team was confident that the distinctions among these factors would become evident as this work progresses.

**Faculty Governance and Development.** The team found considerable evidence that the faculty are exercising collective ownership over the curriculum, as demonstrated by the activation of a faculty senate. Though in its early stages, the role of the senate is becoming more robust. Faculty development is focused on useful skills, such as the creation and use of rubrics. While it is an emerging function within the school, the team noted the institutional commitment to applying needed resources to its continuing development in areas such as pedagogy and assessment.

**Financial Support for the Educational Mission.** The team was impressed with the solid commitments made by the SBMRI in support of the graduate program. These commitments were supported in part by the receipt of a $275-million anonymous and unrestricted gift to the Institute. While the graduate program is a small portion of the Institute’s total budget, the leadership assured that the gift will be used, for example, to ensure bridge financing should there be lapses in grant funding for research units in which students are working. The chair of the governing board also expressed a commitment to create an endowment for the graduate program. The Commission affirms the institution’s progress in this critical area.

**Diversity of Faculty and Students.** The team acknowledged the value of existing diversity initiatives, such as the CSU Fresno pipeline, that have made incremental increases in the number of underrepresented minorities in the GSBS student population. While both students and faculty represent considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity, the team had hoped to hear more specific plans to intentionally recruit underserved populations into both categories. Since initiatives of this type require time to come to fruition, the Commission urges the institution to sustain its efforts to bring underrepresented faculty and students into the distinctive Sanford-Burnham educational experience. More intentional efforts should be initiated to reach students from institutions in the region that are noted for serving underrepresented minorities.

**Student Success.** The Commission joins the team in commending the graduate school for achieving retention and graduate rates, and average time-to-degree rates, that are both commendable in themselves and favorable when compared with data from programs at similar graduate-only institutions. The team noted the alignment of academic support services, such as the exemplary tutorial model, that play a role in achieving
these outcomes.

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

**Assessment and Program Review.** As noted in the team report, program review as defined by the recently-adopted policy has yet to be conducted, and there may be confusion among some faculty regarding program-level assessment, teaching evaluation, and student grades. It will be important to ensure that student learning outcomes assessment be conducted at the program level and include direct measures of assessment regarding achievement of those outcomes. (CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.10)

**Faculty Governance.** As noted in the team report, the faculty senate is a promising though somewhat nascent development. While it is presently establishing its scope and protocols, the need for faculty to have a distinctive voice of their own will become even more evident as the program continues to mature. It will be important for the senate more clearly to distinguish its roles and authorities from that of the long-standing Graduate Program Executive Committee that played an essential role in founding the program. The senate members will want to continue their conversations about a leadership model that best serves the purposes of the senate. (CFRs 2.4, 3.7, and 3.10)

**Diversity Initiatives.** The graduate school is urged to sustain the focus of its several initiatives toward achieving greater diversity. For increased student diversity, for example, seeking extramural funding to continue programs such as the CSU Fresno pipeline would be promising. The leadership is urged to review its current “receptivity” model of faculty recruitment and adopt deliberate strategies to find and welcome a more diverse faculty. The institution should broaden its outreach to varied sources for recruiting underrepresented minority students. (CFRs 1.4 and 3.6)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and grant initial accreditation to the Graduate School of Biomedical Science at Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute for a period of five years

2. Schedule the next Comprehensive Review with the Offsite Review in fall 2019 and the Accreditation Visit in spring 2020


Accreditation status is not granted retroactively. Institutions granted the status of accreditation must use the following statement if they wish to describe the status publicly:

The Graduate School of Biological Sciences at Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute is accredited by the WASC Senior College and
University Commission (WSCUC), 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001.

Federal law requires that the WSCUC address and phone number appear in your catalog.

The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WSCUC refers to the quality of the institution as a whole – in this case, to the Graduate School and not to the Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute as a whole. Because institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program at the institution, statements such as “this program is accredited” or “this degree is accredited” are incorrect and misleading. The phrase “fully accredited” is also to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible.

The Commission stipulates that this action encompasses the degree offered by the Graduate School of Biological Sciences at Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute at the time of this action, which is the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Biomedical Science. In keeping with the WSCUC Policy on Degree Level Approval, the school is designated as having an “I” or “Individual” designation, which means that any new degree programs must obtain prior approval from WSCUC.

Institutions granted Initial Accreditation are required to:

1. Submit an Annual Report in the format required by the Commission.

2. Keep the Commission informed of any significant changes or developments, especially those that require prior approval according to the Commission’s Substantive Change Policy. Please consult the Substantive Change Manual and confer with your WSCUC liaison about any proposed new degree programs and/or changes in governance or ownership, to determine if these matters should be approved in advance by WSCUC.

3. Continue to pay Annual Membership Dues as stipulated when granted Candidacy. An Annual Dues statement will continue to be sent under separate cover.

In taking this action to grant Initial Accreditation, the Commission confirms that the Graduate School of Biomedical Science at Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute has satisfactorily addressed the three Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability, and has successfully completed each aspect of the review conducted under the 2013 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 student learning and success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the Graduate School of Biomedical Science’s governing board in one week. The
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Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the Institution’s website or similar location and thus 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 this action letter also will be posted on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the Graduate School of Biomedical Science undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC 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,

Mary Ellen Petrisko  
President

MEP/rw

Cc:   Bill Ladusaw, Commission Chair  
      Guy Salvesen, ALO  
      Gregory Lucier, SBMRI Board Chair  
      Members of the EER team  
      Richard Osborn, Vice President