March 6, 2015

Dr. Charles McClintock
President
Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law
20 E. Victoria Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear President McClintock:

At its meetings February 18-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the second Seeking Accreditation Visit (SAV2) team that conducted an onsite review of Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law (SBVCL) November 12-14, 2014. Commission members also reviewed the Seeking Accreditation Visit report submitted by the institution prior to the visit and its January 12, 2015 response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and Heather Georgakis, Dean and Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Your comments were very helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

This visit was scheduled to evaluate the institution’s status with regard to the Commission’s Standards of Accreditation; the team’s findings are addressed below. The team also inquired into the institution’s response to any issues identified for attention by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Eligibility Review Committee as communicated in the WSCUC staff letter.

The WSCUC Eligibility Review Committee granted Eligibility status to SBVCL in December, 2011. During the first Seeking Accreditation Visit (titled the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) for Candidacy under the previous model), the team found that “the committee’s five recommendations were addressed in the institution’s CPR report. The team found that SBVCL had made progress in each of these areas. However, at the time of the CPR visit, it was too early to determine to what extent the faculty had taken full ownership of curricular and assessment activities, fully defined its roles, utilized data-supported strategies to ensure student success, or moved forward with recent initiatives around assessment and the use of rubrics and similar strategies in program review.” The SAV2 team evaluated SBVCL’s maturity with the committee’s recommendations and embedded their findings throughout their report.

Based on the team’s report and the other information sources as identified above, the Commission has determined the following with regard to the institution’s compliance with each of the WSCUC Standards of Accreditation.
Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

The Commission has determined that the institution has met this Standard.

The Commission commends the institution’s achievements under this Standard for publicly reporting a summary of student learning outcomes for both the Juris Doctorate (JD) and the Master of Legal Studies (MLS) degree programs and including retention information, graduation rates, bar pass rates, current student-faculty ratios, and overall student satisfaction data in the Student Achievement Data Report on the SBVCL website (CFR 1.2).

The Commission also commends SBVCL for demonstrating its response to an increasingly diverse society by exemplifying diversity in its student body. The institution’s 169 JD students enrolled are near evenly split male and female, and 30% are students of color (CFR 1.5).

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions

The Commission has determined that the institution has met this Standard.

The Commission commends the institution’s achievements under this Standard and believes that it has in place appropriate methods to gauge student success and the achievement of student learning outcomes at established standards of performance. SBVCL embeds the assessment of the institution’s three institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) within course examinations and capstone experiences. Students are assessed after they complete the first year curriculum; they will be assessed again when students graduate. Faculty use common rubrics to gauge student competency in each outcome at the levels of “beginning, developing, proficient and highly proficient.” SBVCL’s goal is for students to advance to “highly proficient” on each ILO by graduation (CFR 2.6).

The Commission also commends SBVCL for its improvement in academic advising, including the expansion of advising services and the establishment of a team approach to the faculty’s identification of students who can benefit from extra attention. The team reported that these strategies and improvements came about from a 2014 review of the Academic Advisor Program that included a review of advisors’ reports, student satisfaction data, faculty input, and data about the academic success of at-risk students who consulted with an advisor (CFR 2.12, 2.13).

Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

The Commission has determined that the institution has met this Standard.

Prior to this most recent review, SBVCL’s chief executive officer carried the titles of president and dean of the Colleges. The Commission commends SBVCL for recasting the
position of president to ensure that this person can, as the team indicates, “focus internally on administration and externally on marketing, student recruitment, alumni development, and creating placement opportunities for externships and post-graduate employment.” The person in the former president and dean’s role now serves as dean and professor and in this role “...provides leadership for improvement of degree programs, including the coordination of writing and academic support programs” (CFR 3.8).

In October 2010, SBVCL affiliated with The Chicago School Education System (TCSES), a non-profit corporation, to provide a variety of administrative and support services. This affiliation required a revised governance structure within which the SBVCL administration and Board of Trustees operate. This transition represents one of many levels of engagement and active participation of the Board of Trustees in the proactive leadership of SBVCL. Others include the development of an academic freedom policy for students and a commitment to Board member gender, racial, and professional diversity, an attribute that was noted by the evaluator team (CFR 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 3.9).

**Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement.**

The Commission has determined that the institution has met this Standard.

The Commission commends the institution’s achievements under this Standard for considering and responding to changes taking place or anticipated to take place within the institution and higher education in general. For example, SBVCL’s affiliation with TCSES was pursued “in response to changes on the educational scene that are making it increasingly difficult for smaller freestanding law schools to compete for and appropriately support students.” Another example is SBVCL’s development of a Master of Legal Studies to both meet a need in the community and seek an additional source of revenue (CFR 4.2, 4.3).

In view of the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Seeking Accreditation Visit Report and grant Initial Accreditation for a period of five years.

2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the Offsite Review in fall 2019 and the Accreditation Visit scheduled for spring 2020.


4. Request a Progress Report in fall 2017. The institution will be expected to address the following: 1) the strategic vision for a student enrollment plan; 2) plans to increase diversity among faculty, staff, students, and Board of Trustees members; and, 3) a financial aid program plan.

In taking this action to grant Initial Accreditation, the Commission confirms that Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments
to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness. The Commission also confirms that the institution has successfully completed this review conducted under the 2008 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to comply with WSCUC 2013 Standards of Accreditation and its Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability, and uphold its commitment to continuous quality improvement. It is also expected to continue its progress in the following areas:

Access and Service. SBVCL is commended for and should remain focused on its unique market’s needs and its commitment to access and service to the community (CFR 1.1, 4.5).

Resource Planning and Development Toward Financial Stability. SBVCL should establish a strategic vision for student enrollment, not so much for growth but in order to come back to optimal operating size as soon as possible. Strategies could include growth of existing programs and the development of new programs. Alumni could be solicited to market programs to prospective students and donate support. SBVCL should consider the development of a comprehensive fund-raising plan capitalizing on SBVCL’s forty-fifth anniversary and its upcoming golden anniversary. Finally, SBVCL should develop a financial aid plan to leverage student access to federal financial aid (CFR 2.13, 3.5).

Diversity. SBVCL should develop specific strategies to diversify faculty and administrative positions, and continue to increase diversity among students and board members (CFR 1.5, 3.3).

Student Success. SBVCL should continue collecting and analyzing data including non-academic factors that help predict student performance (CFR 2.10, 2.11).

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:

Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law is accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001.

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. 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 degrees offered by Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law at the time of this action, as listed in the attached Consolidated List of Currently Conferred Degrees. In keeping with the WSCUC Policy
on Degree Level Approval, Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law is designated as having an "I" (Individual) status for each of the degree levels currently being offered. This means that all new degree programs initiated by the institution will require prior approval through WSCUC's Substantive Change process. Degree programs that have been reviewed and included under this action may be extended to other currently approved locations of the institution without prior Substantive Change action. Degree offerings at new locations may need to go through Substantive Change approval, in accordance with the requirements stated in the Substantive Change Manual.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law 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 Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law 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 Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law 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/mam

Cc: William A. Ladusaw, Commission Chair
    Heather Georgakis, ALO
    George Haynes, Board Chair
    Michael Horowitz, President, TCSES
    Members of the Seeking Accreditation team
    Maureen A. Maloney, WSCUC Vice President
Consolidated List of Currently Conferred Degrees
by Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law as of February 20, 2015:

Degree

Juris Doctorate (JD)
Master of Legal Studies (MLS)