REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT

To Columbia College Hollywood

November 7-10, 2016

Chair: Gretchen M. Bataille, President, GMB Consulting Group
Assistant Chair: Peter L. Senkbeil, Provost, Concordia University Irvine
Elizabeth A. Morris, Associate Provost – Accreditation, Assessment & Curriculum, California Baptist University
Cynthia N. Westerbeck, Professor of English, Pacific Union College
Maureen Maloney, WSCUC Staff Liaison

The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The formal action concerning the institution’s status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution, Accreditation History, as Relevant, and Visit........ 2
B. Description of Team’s Review Process ................................................................. 4
C. Institution’s Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and
   Supporting Evidence ............................................................................................. 5

SECTION II – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Clarity of Mission ................................................................................................. 8
B. Cross-Functional Structures ................................................................................ 10
C. Student Success and Risk .................................................................................... 13
D. Assessment and Program Review ....................................................................... 14
E. General Education and Core Competencies ..................................................... 17

SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

A. Commendations .................................................................................................... 19
B. Recommendations ................................................................................................ 20
SECTION I - OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution, Accreditation History, as Relevant, and Visit

Columbia College Hollywood (hereafter CCH) was established in 1952 as the California campus of Columbia College of Chicago, Illinois. CCH separated from the Chicago institution in 1959 and has operated as a private nonprofit college ever since. Originally located in the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, CCH relocated to Hollywood in 1970, then to its current campus in Tarzana in 1997, where it occupies a single 85,000 square foot building that was the former headquarters of Panavision, a well-known camera and lens manufacturer for the film and television industries.

CCH currently offers two Bachelor of Fine Arts programs (in cinema and cinema/television) with eight program emphases, as well as an associate’s degree in cinema. The college’s campus includes recently remodeled general-purpose classrooms, a soundstage, a 3-camera television stage, standing sets for student productions, a theatre, a screening room, video editing suites, a recording facility, a learning resource center, and other support facilities and offices. As of November 2016, approximately 350 students are enrolled at CCH; they are served by three full-time and 67 part-time faculty, as well as an administration and staff of approximately 40. During the past year, approximately 15 new part-time faculty with Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degrees have been hired.

CCH was accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges from 1979 to 2008, and by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design from
2008 to 2015. In 2012, CCH redesigned its curriculum to provide a stronger liberal arts focus and sought regional accreditation through WSCUC via Pathway B. In 2014, WSCUC granted CCH Initial Accreditation for a period of five years. At that time, the Commission called for a Special Visit in 2016 to address five issues that serve as the focus of this team report. These issues are described in the July 7, 2014 Commission Action Letter as follows:

1. Clarity of Mission: “CCH is striving to be a liberal arts college, though there is a tension between this aspiration and the vocational nature of the mission and the needs of the students. The Commission recommends that CCH continue to clarify and develop its identity as a liberal arts college.”

2. Cross-Functional Structures: “CCH’s unstable enrollment over the last three fiscal years, particularly for a tuition dependent institution, challenges stable financial planning and sustainability. CCH should constitute a formalized strategic enrollment management operation ... and develop a comprehensive plan that bridges the institution's academic and financial goals. CCH should also consider forming an executive cabinet that meets regularly to discuss, plan, and execute all of the key initiatives critical to the institution's success.”

3. Student Success and Risk: “The Commission urges CCH to generate multiple years of data about student indebtedness and, where possible, student and graduate placement, show evidence of using the analysis of those data to inform decision-making about retention and persistence.”
4. Assessment and Program Review: “The proposed program review cycle going forward is every two years and not the more typical five- to seven-year cycle. The team expressed concern that the shorter interval does not provide sufficient time to reflect on the information gathered throughout the program review process. CCH should consider building its annual assessment efforts through a longer-term program review schedule that will provide more time for reflection and deeper understanding of continuous improvement.”

5. General Education and Core Competencies: “The visiting team recommended development of the general education (GE) program that is not only integrated with that course of study, but with professional practice to have greater utility for students. Going forward, CCH should align work on general education with the development of the required core competencies to be able to document that students are acquiring knowledge and developing higher-order intellectual skills appropriate to their degree.”

B. Description of Team’s Review Process

The team reviewed CCH’s Special Visit report (described in section I.C., below) and discussed it in a conference call on October 27, 2016. Based on this discussion, the team requested additional information, including updated student enrollment and retention reports, assessment data, current financial statements and budget proposals, information on student career placement, and additional information about faculty credentials and curriculum structure. The team also worked closely with CCH’s
Accreditation Liaison Officer on the schedule for the November 7-10 team visit. During the two intensive interview days (November 8 and 9), the team met with all of CCH’s cross-functional teams, interviewed key administrators and staff, and held open forums with students and faculty. Due to the relatively small size of the CCH’s full-time faculty and staff, as well as the membership overlap on the cross-functional teams, the team interviewed most of the key leaders several times during the visit.

CCH does not currently have any off-campus locations or distance education programs, and the team did not conduct any inquiries related to substantive change. The team was made aware that CCH has submitted a structural change proposal in August 2016 regarding the acquisition of a nationally accredited institution to establish a branch campus in Chicago. The team reviewed some materials related to this proposal but operated on the understanding that the structural change proposal was outside the scope of this Special Visit.

C. Institution’s Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

CCH submitted a forty-page report, together with several hundred pages of supporting documentation. The report itself was clearly organized and well-written; each of the five issues was addressed clearly in a separate section, and the consensus of the team members was that CCH responded appropriately and effectively to each of the issues.
The report was an accurate portrayal of a swiftly changing institution. One critical point that emerged early on was that CCH has undergone a recent and extensive change of leadership. In April 2016, the previous president retired, and the previous dean resigned almost immediately afterward. CCH’s Board of Trustees appointed a new president in April 2016; within three months, he had hired a new vice president for academic affairs, a new dean of curriculum, a new vice president of operations and a new vice president for admissions. The president restructured CCH’s leadership team, which then embarked on an intensive program of reviewing curriculum; hiring many new faculty and staff, including CCH’s first full-time faculty members; remodeling the facility and upgrading equipment; reorganizing the faculty and staff to create cross-functional teams; and working rapidly to respond to each key issue identified in the 2014 Commission Action Letter. As the team reviewed the written report and supporting materials completed in August 2016, it became clear that CCH was an institution undergoing rapid transformation, some of which was very much a work in progress. However, the team was impressed with the energy and speed with which CCH’s leadership was addressing the Special Visit issues and responding to requests for additional information. While a relatively small group of administrators prepared the report, this seemed appropriate, given the focused nature of the Special Visit, the recent leadership transition, and the rapid rate of change occurring at CCH.

In most areas, the institution provided appropriate supporting evidence and conducted effective analysis of that evidence. In some areas, however, the evidence
was incomplete or unclear; for example, the assessment documents provided had been developed by the previous academic leadership. The methodology used to assess student learning outcomes at multiple levels was difficult to understand at first, and it took meetings with CCH’s academic leadership and the director of institutional research before the current and proposed assessment methodologies became clear to the team. Overall, however, the report and supporting materials provided clear evidence of engagement with the Special Visit issues, even if supporting documentation was not yet available, and the team began its visit with a clear agenda for following up on questions of institutional evidence.
SECTION II - TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Clarity of Mission

In its July 7, 2014 letter to Columbia College Hollywood, the Commission stated, “The Commission recommends that CCH continue to clarify and develop its identity as a liberal arts college.” The earlier review process and acknowledgement by CCH verified that the focus of the college had had a disproportionate emphasis on technical skills and career development in media arts. In response, CCH reviewed and revised its mission statement to more fully reflect a liberal arts focus. There were several drafts, reviews of the mission statements of other liberal arts colleges, and discussions with constituents before the new mission statement was adopted by the board. The new mission statement places more emphasis on the use of media to further “storytelling” within the context of the liberal arts and to produce graduates to be “analytical and effective communicators” in a “global community.” This new mission statement is expected to drive curriculum, particularly in the general education area, and to provide a framework for measuring learning outcomes (CFR 1.1, 1.2).

Closely related to the adoption of a new mission statement is a renewed emphasis on general education and core competencies that reflect a liberal arts mission. New courses will be expected to align with the mission and reflect “key competencies in communication, contemporary storytelling in a range of digital media, and analytical and critical thinking . . . . “ In order to effect these changes, members of the Academic Council attended a WSCUC Workshop on the Five Core Competencies and submitted
general education learning outcomes to the dean for approval. Further review of student achievement demonstrated positive outcomes for student learning. The Institutional Report acknowledged that there is more work to be done in refining the number and content of courses. The team agrees that hiring a faculty member to oversee general education and program review was a critical next step and is pleased that the full-time faculty member is now on board. The curricular review process should be expanded to include upper-division liberal arts course requirements as well as the specific courses required for each emphasis (CFR 2.2a).

The team concluded that the framework exists for creating academic programs that produce graduates who have a healthy balance between the skills needed to succeed in the technical and business world of film and television along with a broad understanding of the cultural and social environment in which they work. The team observed that staff members and full-time faculty members who have been hired are receiving support from the administration and are being encouraged and empowered to implement the expectations outlined in the Institutional Report. Additionally, faculty are participating in seminars (and being compensated to do so) about course redesign and Canvas, the newly implemented Learning Management System, to meet the liberal arts focus. In September 2016 faculty members participated in a training session that addressed the mission statement as well as learning more about how to develop effective lesson plans and assessments tied to course learning outcomes (CFR 2.4, 2.6). A new handbook is being developed to ensure that all faculty are aware of CCH expectations, and bylaws are being prepared to guide faculty shared governance.
Additionally, the Board of Trustees has been engaged in the change agenda. New members have been added, enlarging the size of the board and increasing diversity.

The team concluded that CCH has responded proactively to the recommendations in the 2014 Commission Action Letter that focused on rewriting the mission statement to more fully embrace the redesign of general education to reflect a liberal arts focus in the degree programs.

B. Cross-Functional Structures

In its July 7, 2014 letter, the Commission noted that “CCH’s unstable enrollment over the last three fiscal years, particularly for a tuition-dependent institution, challenges stable financial planning and sustainability. CCH should constitute a formalized strategic enrollment management operation … and develop a comprehensive plan that bridges the institution’s academic and financial goals. CCH should also consider forming an executive cabinet that meets regularly to discuss, plan, and execute all of the key initiatives critical to the institution’s success.”

In response to the enrollment management recommendation, CCH developed an ambitious, multi-pronged strategic enrollment management plan, with the assistance of an outside consulting firm. The plan calls for expansion of academic programs to reach new prospective student populations; a geographic focus on the greater Los Angeles area; acquisition of an institution to establish a branch campus in Chicago, in order to expand into a second major domestic market; increased efforts to recruit international students; development of blended and hybrid learning models; pursuit of strategic
partnerships in the film and television industry; implementation of a focused enrollment strategy under the leadership of a new vice president for admissions and a new admissions staff; and efforts to improve student retention and persistence to graduation. While enrollment has varied significantly from year to year over the past six years, both new student enrollment and total enrollment for the fall 2016 term show marked improvement over the prior year (CFR 3.1, 3.4, 3.5).

In response to the Commission’s recommendation regarding cross-functional structures, CCH formed a number of key committees in 2014, including the Executive Committee, which consists of the president and seven senior administrators; the Academic Review Board, which discusses a wide range of issues, ranging from program delivery and curriculum to student satisfaction, academic honesty, and student grievances; the Academic Council, which focuses on curriculum development and improvement; the Student Success Committee and Student Retention Committee, which focus on supporting student learning and improving retention and completion rates; and the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, which handles assessment of learning outcomes and program review (CFR 3.7).

CCH’s new strategic enrollment efforts, under new leadership and a mostly new admissions staff, are enjoying early success, as indicated by a larger incoming class in fall 2016 and a record number of prospective student inquiries and applications for the next academic year. Enrollment efforts have focused mostly on the greater Los Angeles area and include increasing the size of the professional admissions staff, acquiring and using a customer relations management (CRM) software package to track prospective
students, and increasing the number and quality of open house and other recruitment events. Other parts of CCH’s ambitious enrollment management plan have yet to be implemented. These initiatives are diverse, and they will require significant additional resources in order to achieve the stated enrollment goal of 600 students.

CCH’s cross-functional teams seem to address all of the areas in which the college has developed key initiatives. The new leadership (five of the eight members of the Executive Committee, including the president, are new since April 2016) has demonstrated a passion for improving student learning and a swift, team-oriented approach to problem-solving. Students, staff members, and teaching faculty alike characterize the leadership team as responsive to concerns. Since summer the new leadership has moved quickly to improve the learning environment by remodeling parts of CCH’s main facility and by purchasing and upgrading key pieces of instructional and technical equipment (CFR 3.4, 3.6, 3.5).

Given the high degree of overlap among the teams and the relatively small size of the staff, it will be critical for CCH to prioritize its strategic initiatives in order to achieve its goals of stability and sustainability. The future role of CCH’s current and proposed strategic partners will also require careful attention. In addition, CCH should realign its organizational structure to reflect more clearly the duties and responsibilities of the administration and of key committees; this may involve revising job titles and descriptions as well as reducing overlap between committees in terms of both responsibilities and membership (CFR 3.6, 3.7, 4.6).
C. Student Success and Risk

In its July 7, 2014 letter, the Commission encouraged CCH to pay careful attention to student persistence to graduation and to student indebtedness, urging the college “to generate multiple years of data about student indebtedness and, where possible, student and graduate placement, [and] show evidence of using the analysis of those data to inform decision-making about retention and persistence.”

CCH responded to this recommendation by forming the Student Success Committee, which conducted several surveys of student enrollment practices and identified a number of concerns related to completion and indebtedness. Several academic and advising practices (such as permitting students to pursue multiple program emphases, begin internships too early in their programs, and register for courses that did not help them progress toward their degrees) have been discontinued in an effort to improve student persistence. Transfer guidelines have been created to provide more guidance to students about course requirements. Programs for peer tutoring and support for students with disabilities have been initiated. The college launched a financial literacy program to educate students about the consequences of heavy student loan debt, and its annual reports from 2014, 2015, and 2016 show some signs that recent graduates are making more careful decisions about indebtedness. There is a plan to combine tuition and most fees beginning in the spring 2017 quarter, so that students have more exact information about the cost of education. The team applauds these many changes, but it concludes that these initiatives are still too new for
clear evidence of their effectiveness to be available; this issue will require further monitoring over the next few years.

The retention and graduation rate data provided by CCH seem to indicate some improvement in these areas, though year-by-year fluctuations suggest that the college will need to continue to monitor student success closely. The graduation placement and employment data provided by CCH for the last four academic years suggest that 60-73% of recent graduates (depending on the year) are employed in the film and television industry within a year after graduation. The college has made some substantial changes to its Career Development Department since 2014; the results of these changes are not yet entirely apparent. Plans for student success services for international students and for the proposed Chicago branch campus (if a planned acquisition is implemented) have yet to be developed. The team encourages the college to continue to gather data regarding student success and employment, and to focus its efforts on retention of first-year students (CFR 2.10, 2.13).

D. Assessment and Program Review

The previous visiting team complimented CCH on the work done in embracing and developing systems for assessment and program review. They expressed concern, however, that the proposed two-year cycle would not provide “sufficient time to reflect on the information gathered throughout the program review process.” The team recommended that CCH consider developing a longer-term program review schedule to provide more time for reflection and implementation of improvement strategies.
CCH responded to this recommendation by developing new guidelines and procedures for a seven-year cycle that includes results compiled on a quarterly, annual and five-year schedule. As described in CCH’s program review handbook, this proposed process calls for significant attention to evidence-based claims, assessment of student learning outcomes, and alignment with mission and budget. Although there has not yet been time for any program to complete the cycle, quarterly Learning Outcome Improvement Plans have been gathered for winter 2016 and spring 2016 which outline observations, plans for improvement, expected outcomes, and timelines for any learning outcomes that scored below 2.5 in the new student learning assessment process.

Although the team commends CCH for taking so seriously the recommendation to lengthen the program review cycle to fit more closely with higher education norms, there is concern that in its response to that recommendation CCH may have developed a cycle that is now too long - especially in light of the fast changing worlds of film, television, and digital arts. As described in the Special Visit report and the Program Review Handbook, it appears that new program proposals are submitted only in year six, with no mention of when other kinds of revisions to already existing programs are to be reviewed and implemented. During the visit the team learned that there are processes built into the academic structures on campus for ongoing curriculum changes based on the plans for improvement articulated in the quarterly Learning Outcome Improvement Plans, but how and when that happens should be clarified. Consideration should also be given to piloting the new program review for at least two
program emphases prior to the 2018 reaffirmation of accreditation review. The team also recommends that the program review cycle be revised to allow reviews one program at a time to happen on a rotating basis in order to provide sufficient time for formative analysis. This will be especially important as CCH expands its program offerings (CFR 2.7, 4.1, 4.2).

The team is also concerned that the current system of assessing all of the outcomes each quarter for every student may be difficult to sustain. The team was pleased to learn that plans are in place to transition toward a more manageable, reliable, and actionable assessment system based more on direct evidence (CFR 2.7, 4.1).

CCH provided in its report a list of further improvements they plan to make to the program review process in 2017. In preparation for the 2018 reaffirmation of accreditation review, CCH will need to have implemented this new system, and be prepared to provide tangible evidence of its effectiveness, supported by direct evidence of student learning (CFR 2.7).

Currently, Institutional Research is responsible for gathering and disseminating data about student success and learning outcomes. The team noted that IR’s mission must expand to be the repository for all data about student and employee demographics as well as data related to state and federal mandated reports such as IPEDS, OCR and Clery Act reporting. Even if data are compiled and managed elsewhere, IR needs to be the “go to” office for information about all statistical data related to the institution.
E. General Education and Core Competencies

CCH is providing an education that clearly manages the balance between preparing students for the film and television industry and developing the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to civil society. The college has identified key competencies in communication and contemporary storytelling using a range of digital media, and in analytical and critical thinking that guide both program and general education learning outcomes (CFR 2.2a).

As part of its revision of the general education curriculum to ensure that curriculum and learning outcomes are aligned with the college’s mission and that they support and advance the WSCUC core competencies, course-learning outcomes have been aligned with the core competencies throughout the revised general education curriculum (CFR 2.3). Further, a key faculty member has been identified as part of the cross-functional structure to be responsible for general education for purposes of curriculum development and assessment (CFR 2.4). The need for specific criteria to determine general education designations will be necessary to ensure the diverse content and related outcomes typically associated with the humanities, social sciences, or math/science. The team found that CCH’s definition of a humanities course is very broad, while the college’s definition of a social science course is narrow. That is, there is no clear and consistent distinction between the creation of art forms being developed at CCH (i.e., cinema and TV) and the various lenses through which those art forms are being studied (i.e., the liberal arts). As a result, some existing courses deemed liberal arts/humanities may need to be redesigned or recategorized if the content does not
match the new emphasis on the liberal arts (CFR 2.2a). For example, GS 256: Entertainment Law is listed as a general social science course, though it seems more like a program emphasis course. Similarly, GH 253: Hollywood Business Practices and History is listed as a humanities course, but it seems more focused on Hollywood than on historical outcomes.

Alignment between the general education outcomes and the WSCUC core competencies has been established. Student achievement of learning outcomes as part of its general education program review was measured in the 2014-2015 academic year, but the process used and data received only recorded a portion of the story. CCH is in the process of rethinking, revising and restructuring their assessment process to reflect a more manageable, reliable, and actionable system that includes direct evidence of student learning, which will include the cross-functional voice of the Academic Council (CFR 2.6).
SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

Commendations

The team commends CCH for the following:

1. CCH has responded proactively and thoughtfully to the recommendations of the 2014 Commission Action Letter in a short time frame and within the context of a rapid transition of leadership.

2. CCH has created a new mission statement that reflects “storytelling within an exploration of the liberal arts” and describes its intention to operate as an academic institution rather than a vocational school.

3. CCH has demonstrated support for a liberal arts approach to general education and core competencies as exemplified by hiring full-time faculty members, by funding faculty seminars, and by committing to a dedicated program review of general education outcomes.

4. CCH has established a learning community that utilizes cross-functional teamwork to facilitate change that supports both students and faculty. Additionally, part-time faculty have been integrated into the decision-making processes and compensated for assessment training.

5. CCH has made swift improvements to its physical facilities, executive leadership, support staff, and student activities that facilitate collaboration, support student success, and enhance student learning.
Recommendations

The team recommends that:

1. CCH’s program review cycle be revised so that at least one program review occurs each year on a rotating basis, in order to provide formative analysis and enable continuous improvement (CFR 2.7, 4.1).

2. CCH complete a minimum of two program emphasis reviews to pilot their revised process prior to the upcomingWSCUC review in 2018 (CFR 2.7, 4.1).

3. CCH implement its proposed revisions to its assessment program in a way that focuses on a manageable, reliable, and actionable system, including direct evidence of student learning (CFR 1.2, 2.3, 2.7, 4.1).

4. Courses currently labeled as general education be examined, redesigned, and/or recategorized to ensure that the course emphasis is on the diverse content typically associated with the humanities, social sciences or math/science to provide students with the breadth and depth expected of a baccalaureate program. As part of its process, CCH should develop clear criteria for designating which courses belong in the three GE distribution categories (CFR 2.2a).

5. All recommendations from this visit be applied to both campuses of the college, if the proposed acquisition of an additional campus occurs (CFR 1.1, 1.2).

6. CCH’s institutional research function become more proactive and comprehensive, to engage in the effective and efficient production and analysis
of data for academic decision-making, and to take the initiative to meet the needs of the new cross-functional structures (CFR 4.1, 4.2).

7. CCH realign and articulate its organizational structure to reflect more clearly the duties and responsibilities of the administration and of key committees (CFR 1.7, 3.7).