March 6, 2015

Michael Sweeney, O.P.
President
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
2301 Vine Street
Berkeley, CA 94708-1816

Dear President Sweeney:

At its meeting February 18-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an onsite review of the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT) October 7-10, 2014. Commission members also reviewed the Special Visit report submitted by DSPT prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues Academic Dean Fr. Christopher J. Renz and CFO Ian Brooks. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

Following the spring 2011 Educational Effectiveness Review, the Commission reaffirmed DSPT’s accreditation and scheduled a fall 2014 Special Visit to review progress on strategic planning, financial planning and sustainability, board development, assessment of student learning outcomes, and program review.

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology is to be commended for:

 Presidential Search. The effort to identify and select a new president was conducted in a deliberative and collaborative way. Plans are in place to follow this same pattern in light of the current president’s stated intention to retire, with a promise of continuity in leadership during the search and transition period.

 Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees has engaged in Board development and restructuring to align its efforts with the strategic plan.

Administrative Personnel. DSPT has hired a knowledgeable and experienced CFO to lead the institution in the vital areas of institutional finance. In addition, key administrative positions have been filled with capable individuals in a refined organizational structure.
**Tactical Planning.** The institution has created both an operating plan and a 5-Year Financial Plan to guide its efforts in the coming years. These plans embrace essential elements for DSPT’s future maturation, including marketing, recruitment, and technology.

**Maturing Program Review and Student Learning Outcomes.** Greater alignment among learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels and enhanced attention to program review are evidence of the institution’s commitment to WSCUC standards.

The Commission endorses the findings, commendations, and recommendations of the Special Visit team and wishes to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development.

**Strategic Planning.** The Special Visit team found commendable improvement in strategic planning following the spring 2011 Educational Effectiveness review. The Commission believes, however, that DSPT must “shift its management paradigm to mid- and long-term strategic planning rather than short-term crisis management.” Of particular concern to the Commission is the critical need found by the Special Visit team to develop “a comprehensive enrollment management plan that is grounded by the 5-year Strategic Plan.” (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

**Financial Planning and Sustainability.** As highlighted in the team report, DSPT continues to demonstrate positive strides in its development, use, and analysis of marketing and financial data. The Commission believes that data analysis must also be developed to more accurately predict FTE and both new and departing students. The lack of data, in these areas, has often led to unsuspected annual deficits. The 5-year Financial Plan must also include more aggressive efforts in the areas of marketing, recruitment and fundraising. The Commission further encourages DSPT and the Province to come to a more explicit understanding of the ongoing support that the Province provides in order that the institution can make realistic budget projections on an annual basis. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 4.2, 4.3)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit team report.
2. Confirm the scheduled the Offsite Review in fall 2017 and the Accreditation Visit in spring 2018.
3. Request a progress report in fall 2016. The institution will be expected to address the following: (1) results of DSPT’s recruitment/enrollment efforts, (2) results of DSPT’s fundraising efforts; and (3) DSPT’s general financial condition.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology’s governing board in one week. The
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Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution’s response to the specific issues identified in this letter. 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 the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology undertook in preparing for and supporting this Special Visit 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/mmw

Cc: William A. Ladusaw, WSCUC Commission Chair
    Fr. Christopher J. Renz, ALO
    Eileen Bitten, Board Chair
    Members of the Special Visit team
    Christopher N. Oberg, WSCUC Vice President
    Michael M. Whyte, WSCUC Associate