July 15, 2015

Mr. Jonathan Burke
President
Laguna College of Art + Design
2222 Laguna Canyon Road
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Dear President Burke:

At its meeting June 17-19, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit (AV) to Laguna College of Art + Design (LCAD) March 18-20, 2015. Commission members reviewed the institutional report prepared by Laguna College of Art + Design prior to the Offsite Review (OSR) and any supplemental materials requested by the team following the OSR. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues Helene Garrison, Vice President of Academic Affairs and AIO. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission’s deliberations.

This reaffirmation review was conducted in keeping with the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation, which requires institutions to address several components in their institutional reports. With regard to each of these components, the team found the following:

**Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees** As a focused-program institution (art and design) the purpose of the LCAD degree is readily understood, and the mission statement further clarifies that purpose: “to provide students with the skills and concepts necessary to pursue an advanced degree in a given field or to matriculate successfully into professional work.” The quality of the degree may be measured indirectly by the high levels of career placement of arts graduates (slightly over 75%), and observed in the well-curated gallery linked to the institution’s website. The degrees are founded in a commitment to traditional representational art, which provides the base for growth in a variety of art fields and promotes alignment among the elements of disparate programs.

**Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation** With respect to student performance, “the institution has consistent, high-levels of student achievement upon graduation” when considering the metric of employment placement. The institution provided ample evidence of its commitment to student learning outcomes.
However, the measurement of Core Competencies, a key element in this area, currently lags behind Commission expectations: “It is unclear whether students met the standard for performance [writing competency]...at graduation.” Further discussion of the need to bolster data collection and analysis in a systematic and regularly scheduled fashion is discussed in a following section.

Student Success: Student learning, Retention, and Graduation: The visiting team found retention and graduate rates to be at respectable levels and improving slightly, with variances between such cohorts as full-time freshmen and transfers. However, there did not appear to be an institutional-level group or committee dedicated to matters such as retention and student success. This absence is consistent with a lack of institutional resources focused on the gathering of evidence for use in planning and decision-making. With respect to co-curricular initiatives, the team report noted multiple initiatives in support of student success, such as increased personal counseling and the creation of tutoring labs for increasing writing proficiency.

Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review; Assessment; Use of Data and Evidence The LCAD institutional report candidly stated: “LCAD does not have a dedicated full-time institutional researcher on staff, and...efforts to analyze and utilize collected data are still nascent.” When coupled with the team’s conclusion that it “could not verify that a systematic program review process is in place,” the institution lacks both the human resources and organizational structure to engage in the necessary definition, measurement, analysis and action on the multiple dimensions of quality assurance as stated in the Standards. This does not mean that the institution lacks a clearly defined sense of quality. There is abundant summary evidence of student accomplishment and program success, but that evidence is not accompanied by data that are systematically examined and used regularly to inform decision-making. Again, LCAD has been forthright in its own assessment of this dilemma: “a self-critique of the endeavor [program review] demonstrates that there are weaknesses in the oversight of the process.”

It also appears that there is an over-reliance on student grades and critiques of student work as evidence of student learning, with no significant data on student learning outcomes having been collected. Neither is there evidence that a “narrative of student progress through the degree programs is kept or monitored.” These collective deficiencies place the institution significantly behind expectations as expressed in the Standards relating to this component.

Sustainability: Financial Viability: Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment In contrast to the lack of progress and evidence in the quality assurance area, the institution has made significant steps in terms of financial viability. It has more than doubled its cash reserves and carefully monitors its expenses. Growth in enrollment, principally in design-related programs, has fueled this increased fiscal strength. The institution has an ambitious plan to grow its enrollment and permanently expand the campus. The realization of these strategic initiatives may depend on a robust institutional research function to inform key decision-makers, given the primary role of enrollment management and the need to retain students who have been attracted to the institution. The technology infrastructure appropriately supports the academic programs and the
technology strategic plan is calibrated to the institution’s needs. With current proposals for new programs, LCAD has committed to a continuation of its fundamental strengths.

The Commission endorses the findings found in the team report, and the commendations and recommendations of the team contained on pages 29 – 32 of that report.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the team report
2. Reaffirm accreditation for seven years
3. Schedule the Offsite Review in fall 2021
4. Schedule the Accreditation Visit in spring 2022
5. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review in 2019
6. Schedule a Special Visit in spring 2017 to focus on the following issues (which are further detailed in the team report itself):
   a. Establishment of a robust Institutional Research function (CFR 4.2)
   b. Creation of a systematic program review process with appropriate policies and practices in support of that process (CFR 2.7)
   c. Creation of systems and appointment of personnel to promote the collection, analysis, and use of evidence (data) in support of institutional continuing improvement (CFR 4.3)
   d. Use of evidence in strategic planning, across all levels of stakeholders (CFR 4.6)
   e. Results of an examination of the organization structure to support a culture of evidence (CFRs 3.1 and 3.7)
   f. Creation of systems to promote educational assessment focusing on the course level (CFR 2.2)

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Laguna College of Art + Design has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability. Laguna College of Art + Design has successfully completed the multi-stage review conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to maintain its compliance withWSCUC standards and uphold its commitment to continuous quality improvement.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Laguna College of Art + Design’s 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 Laguna College of Art + Design 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 theWSCUC 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 Laguna College of Art + Design 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/cno

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair
Helene Garrison, ALO
Patricia O’Brien, Board Chair
Members of the reaffirmation team
Christopher Oberg, Vice President