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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 9, 2012

Mark Schulman
President
Saybrook University
747 Front Street, 3rd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94111-1920

Dear President Schulman,

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an on-site review of Saybrook University March 28-30, 2012. The Commission also reviewed the Special Visit report and exhibits submitted by the University prior to the visit and the institution's May 23, 2012, response to the visiting team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and Provost Dan Sewell. Your comments were very informative in helping the Commission understand the progress that Saybrook has made.

The Special Visit arose in connection with the Commission's action in June 2008 to reaccredit Saybrook for seven years and issue a Notice of Concern. At that time, the Commission cited four areas of concern and asked Saybrook, at the time of the spring 2012 Special Visit, to demonstrate progress in:

- strategic planning (particularly prioritization of initiatives and new program development) (CFRs 4.1-4.3);
- financial stability (particularly fundraising and enrollment management) (CFRs 3.5, 4.2, 4.3);
- student retention and completion (CFRs 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, 4.5);
- educational effectiveness efforts at all levels (CFRs 2.2-2.7, 4.1-4.8).

As noted below, the Commission found sufficient progress in each of these areas to remove the Notice of Concern, though continuing monitoring of the institution is warranted. In receiving the team report, the Commission reviewed the status of the institution in each area.

Strategic planning. The Commission commends Saybrook for making significant strides in strategic planning. While past planning efforts have been described as informal, inconsistent, lacking widespread community engagement, and missing mechanisms for tracking progress, the team confirmed that recent planning efforts have "fully engaged" the University community, incorporated structures "to implement and monitor progress," and now "[appear] to be embedded in the thinking and processes of the institution." Included in Saybrook's strategic efforts are goals to strengthen enrollment management, create a multidisciplinary university with strong academic programs, and increase resources. The team found "evidence of actions and evaluations being undertaken according to the plan," with "the most success" in enrollment management and the multidisciplinary initiatives. Although the goal to increase revenue "has mostly gone unrealized," the team concluded that, "strategic planning now seems to have taken on a central role in the institution."

Financial Sustainability. Financial sustainability remains a challenge for Saybrook. The Commission continues to be deeply concerned about the institution's heavy dependence on tuition, coupled with shortfalls in fundraising and lack of diversified revenue streams. Enrollment management is critical to the financial stability of Saybrook and, as the team found, the numbers of students "have generally been flat." Saybrook's financial situation is still "fragile" and requires careful management.

Student retention and graduation. As the team noted, student retention and graduation are not only "critical elements of educational effectiveness, but also of financial health." Current year-over-year retention is 85%, up from 81% the previous year. Surveys of students have led to improvement in services and increased responsiveness by staff and faculty. Combined persistence and graduation rates have increased from 52% (2008) to 65% (2011) for master's programs in psychology, human science, and organizational systems and from 54% (2008) to 69% (2011) for PhD degrees in those same areas. The team concluded that overall, "Saybrook has made modest improvements in its retention and graduation efforts."

Educational effectiveness. In terms of educational effectiveness, the team found "much improvement." A robust institutional research capacity, carefully crafted assessment plans, and an ongoing program review process led the team to observe that Saybrook "is embracing a culture of evidence-based decision making, as well as [a commitment] to continuous improvement and learning."

The Commission endorses the findings, commendations, and recommendations of the Special Visit team and recommends that the following matters cited by the team be given close attention:

Building financial strength and sustainability. As the team observed, "Strengthening the financial picture is key to sustainability." The Commission remains troubled by Saybrook's financial condition. The University will need to continue careful monitoring of expenses; make steady progress in enrollment growth; and diversify its funding base through private contributions, grants and contracts, or other revenue streams in order to achieve financial viability and to fund its academic endeavors adequately. (CFRs 3.1, 3.5, 3.7)

Improving strategic enrollment management. As stated in the team report, the most direct way to achieve fiscal stability and growth is "through new student enrollments in programs that can provide the greatest return on investment..." Saybrook is tuition-dependent and relies on student enrollments to sustain itself. As a result, "there is an urgency to grow enrollments and secure greater financial health." The Commission expects to see by the time of the next review a realistic enrollment management plan, informed by a unifying vision (identity and branding) and that includes strategies for marketing, recruitment, and retention. (CFRs 3.1, 3.5, 4.1-4.3)

Clarifying the administrative structure and achieving cost savings. Saybrook has recently taken steps to "simplify and clarify its administrative structure" throughout its three colleges. The Commission expects Saybrook to continue to develop ways to more fully integrate, administratively and fiscally, its off-site locations into University operations and continue to explore ways that procedural, structural and organizational changes can reduce budgeted expenditures. (CFR 3.8)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report and continue accreditation.
2. Remove the Notice of Concern.

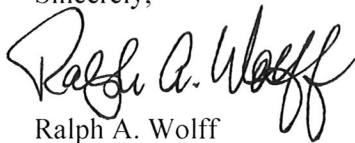
3. Reschedule the date of the comprehensive re-accreditation review from spring 2015 to fall 2014. The off-site review will take place in fall 2014 with the self-study report due 12 weeks in advance. The site visit will tentatively take place in spring 2015.
4. Request an interim report in fall 2012. The interim report should address the issues highlighted in this letter and the team report, and include data and documentation of the following:
 - a. Financial information: Latest financial audit and FY13 budget with actual expenditures to date and an explanation of any variances.
 - b. Enrollment data: Overall and disaggregated by college and program as compared to goals, including new and continuing students and the latest retention and completion rates.
 - c. Fundraising results: Data to include asked/outstanding gifts; anticipated/pledged gifts; realized/funds collected.
 - d. Fiscal impact of changes: Fiscal impact as a result of procedural, organizational and structural changes implemented since March 2012; anticipated fiscal impact of timelines for additional planned changes.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the co-chairs of Saybrook's governing board in one week.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website on Friday, July 13. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC 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,



Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/bgd

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
Dan Sewell, ALO
Renee Levi and Norman Boone, Board Co-Chairs
Members of the Special Visit team
Barbara Gross Davis, Vice President