



February 27, 2008

Ronald Gallagher, FSC
President
Saint Mary's College of California
1928 Saint Mary's Road
Moraga, CA 94556

Dear President Gallagher:

At its meeting on February 20-22, 2008, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that visited Saint Mary's College of California (SMCC) on October 29 - 31, 2007. The Commission had access to the Institutional Presentation for the Special Visit review and the team report from the visit. It also had access to the previous two action letters from the Commission dated March 1, 2005 and March 6, 2006. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to speak with you; Nancy Sorenson, Dean of the School of Education; Carole Swain, Vice Provost for Mission and Dean for Faculty Development; and Bethami Dobkins, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Your comments were helpful.

This special visit was the second of two special visits required following the 2004 Educational Effectiveness Review. The first special visit in fall 2005 focused primarily on planning and support for the new EdD program. This second visit, in addition to a follow-up appraisal of progress on the EdD program, also focused on adult and graduate education, library resources, and diversity. The team found many indicators of progress, as well as areas for continuing attention, in the each of the four assigned areas. The Commission also noted appreciatively the process leading to the selection and appointment of a new Provost subsequent to the team's visit. This letter will address these findings for each of the four areas.

Library Resources. Following multiple expressions of concern by WASC teams going back to the 1980s, this team was pleased to see a multiyear development plan in operation to increase acquisitions, library staff, instructional technology, hours for student access, and physical space for the library and its related functions. Funding for the first three years of the plan has already been expended, with demonstrated impact.

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Even with these changes however, further progress is needed to move the library to a more central position within the culture of the College. The team noted that the hours of access and study space per student still lag behind peer institutions, and about a third of the library's books are housed in an off-site storage facility. Architectural renderings and seed money for planning a new or expanded library are provided for in the 2007-2008 budget. The Commission likewise endorses the team's recommendation that "Saint Mary's increase library collections funding well beyond the projected end date" of the current plan, which is scheduled to conclude in AY2011-2012. In so doing, the College will need to demonstrate that it is actively collaborating with the academic departments in developing and implementing its acquisition plans. Noting the positive steps taken, the Commission still highlighted that concerns about the library were expressed since 1980. The College will need to demonstrate that these current library initiatives are real and will be actualized (Criteria for Review 3.6).

Adult and Graduate Education. The role of adult and graduate education at SMCC has been both promising and problematic. While intended to reach a more extensive and mature audience of learners, the various manifestations of this initiative have not always found a resonant home within a traditional residential liberal arts college. As a result, the College has made the decision to eliminate, scale back, or realign many of these programs, and is providing new academic leadership for them. At the same time, since several of these initiatives are quite recent and their impact is not yet entirely clear, the College will need to monitor these new directions and provide the necessary support to ensure their success. The team noted that discussions are occurring among faculty regarding the role and priority for adult and graduate education on the campus, and, while such discussions are healthy, there remains no consensus. Leadership is needed to bring the discussions to a resolution well before the next site visit to support resource allocation decisions and establish future directions for the College (CFRs 3.5, 3.11).

Edd Program Follow-up. Following the 2005 special visit to appraise the EdD program, the Commission found enough progress in key areas to warrant lifting the freeze on enrollments that had been imposed in 2004. The 2005 visit team also identified several areas of the program that still required attention. Specifically, these were: (1) Continue the development and use of student learning outcomes aligned with professional expectations; (2) Monitor student progress in the first two years of the program; (3) Integrate qualified disciplinary faculty to teach in the EdD program and to serve as dissertation chairs; (4) Recruit a more diverse EdD faculty; and (5) Enhance EdD faculty retention through supportive structures and processes. These recommendations were affirmed by the March 2006 Commission letter.

The Special Visit Report prepared by SMCC for the current visit gave attention to progress in the EdD program in several areas, including an increase in the EdD faculty to reduce workloads, definition of program-level learning outcomes, and formation of a Dissertation Chairs' Committee. The team was concerned, however, that several key recommendations from previous Commission letters were not addressed. These include actions to monitor and support learning through formative assessments at several intervals in the doctoral program rather than relying so heavily on end-point summative assessments; setting and explicitly aligning course-level student learning outcomes with program- and institutional-level outcomes and with professional competencies; and adhering to the target dates for conducting a full program review for the EdD

curriculum. In all, EdD progress since 2006 received scant reporting (five paragraphs in the institution's report), and this mostly of recent actions, absent the level of priority warranted for such an important new program. The team observed that, "... while there was much progress in addressing the concerns about the EdD program in preparation for the 2005 special visit, momentum was lost shortly thereafter. . . We strongly recommend the firm adherence to deadlines to accomplish the needed tasks."

The Commission also strongly endorses the recommendation of the team that the EdD program be assigned its own leadership, rather than continue as a sub-set of the School of Education's administrative structures. Designated EdD leadership could bring the level of focus and follow-through that is necessary for this program to move beyond the "emerging" stage of development that characterizes its present status. For any subsequent WASC review, leadership for the institution and for the EdD program must give evidence of doing more than supporting extended discussion and planning; it must produce evidence of completed work in each of the areas identified above. (CFRs 2.2 and 1.3)

Diversity. It is in the area of diversity that the current Special Visit team expressed the most concern, even alarm. As far back as the 1980s, WASC teams have been speaking directly about the gap between the institution's espoused values and the actual climate and behaviors found at the institution. The institution's 2007 Special Visit Report included a 26-page appendix, "Institutional Diversity Assessment Using Proposed MCOB [Multicultural Organizational Development]" (Appendix 3.1), framed around the 12 observations and recommendations on diversity from the 2004 Educational Effectiveness team. This was followed by a one-page table, "Diversity Continuous Action Plan (DCAP)" (Appendix 3.2).

The Diversity Assessment is candid and evidence-based and reinforces the seriousness of the situation at SMCC. The College acknowledged that it had taken "some clear preliminary steps," (p. 3) including a presidential directive to reconvene the Celebrating Diversity Committee, and the appointment of a Vice President for Mission, with responsibilities to oversee diversity initiatives. In addition, several campus conversations on diversity were initiated in spring 2006. SMCC participated in the Irvine Foundation Grant and the AAC&U "Bringing Theory to Practice" grant, both of which supported planning for diversity, though the 2004 team reported "the attitude toward the scholars from the Irvine Fellows Program is unhealthy at best."

As noted by the College, even after all these years of attention, its steps were "preliminary." The one-page Diversity Continuous Action Plan (DCAP) identifies 35 initiatives, activities, or continuing emphases generated by the Celebrating Diversity Committee. It does not appear, however, that these items have risen above the level of brainstorming to become actionable initiatives, complete with budgets, deadlines, and designated accountable parties. While a number of initiatives, including focused workshops, were identified in the DCAP, the institution's own report notes that "the College has not yet determined the best means to implement these workshops." The special visit team report further notes that:

...most efforts were made just prior to the 2007 WASC Special Visit, giving the impression that those substantial efforts in building an environment of cultural

competency at Saint Mary's since 2004 have not been accomplished. . . It has been more than two years since the WASC recommendations and little action for improving the cultural competency of the institution has been taken. As previously stated, this is a grave concern given the nature and expanded history of concern in this area...

After some two decades of discussion and planning at SMCC, the Commission is deeply concerned that there is so little evidence of tangible results in terms of a change in actual behaviors and attitudes on campus. The team reports: "It is quite evident that the College community is well aware of the serious nature of this WASC-identified concern but there is little evidence that actions to date have gone beyond "awareness" on a large-scale basis." The College has made a pronounced commitment to diversity, and it is a key part of its mission and role in preparing students for global and domestic diversity. The Commission cannot say that the College's own statements of commitment are being realized. Moreover, the Commission joins with the team in asking, "Does the College meet the Criterion for Review 1.5? Does the institution demonstrate commitment to the principles enunciated in the WASC Statement on Diversity?" The Commission does not find sufficient evidence to suggest so. Given the length of time this issue has been before the Saint Mary's community, the matter now needs to be seen as urgent, requiring immediate attention and moving beyond words and future plans.

Another aspect of the team's report related to diversity is also cause for concern. While it appears that SMCC features its admittance of under-prepared students as evidence of a diverse student body, many of whom are students of color, it is less clear how well SMCC supports their ongoing academic success in terms of retention and completion rates. IPEDS data indicate that SMCC has a six-year graduation rate for all students of 73.5% (2005 data), while the ten year average rate for African Americans is 56%. Though these rates are near mid-scale for comparable institutions, it still speaks to a critical gap. SMCC does have plans and funding allocated for programs beginning in July 2008 to address support for the academic progress of its under-prepared students. The Commission, however, is concerned that, once again, the institution has been slow to identify and respond to this challenge. The College also needs to determine if there are other groups that need special attention, and review graduation rates in its various programs to determine if adequate student support is being provided. In light of this, the Commission is not satisfied that SMCC meets the expectations of CFR 2.10: ". . . the institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students and assesses their needs, experiences, and levels of satisfaction. This information is used to help shape a learning-centered environment and to actively promote student success."

The Commission questions how leadership can have allowed diversity matters to be limited to years of mostly sporadic planning and discussion, without producing significant changes in the experiences of its stakeholders. In its action in February 1990, the Commission concluded that "Diversity remains a serious concern . . ." The November 2004 team spoke of "witnessing rude and disrespectful behavior to staff, faculty, and students of color" and that "the College took no responsibility for orienting its faculty to its role in carrying out the College's mission in this regard." The Commission concludes that SMCC's leadership at all levels, including the Board, has yet to demonstrate the attention, commitment and attention to results that will lead to a

culture of respect, civility, and cultural competency in keeping with the institution's own Lasallian core principles, its stated commitments to diversity and to good institutional practice (CFRs 1.3, 1.5, 3.9, 3.10). The Commission was pleased to learn that this matter is of first priority for the new provost, and that a number of follow-up steps will be taken. Given the longstanding nature of these issues, the Commission will need to see that these efforts, and new leadership, will make a real difference. If not, it is prepared to issue a sanction.

The Commission recognizes that in the past several years the College has faced a number of challenges. Nonetheless, when diversity concerns are combined with those discussed earlier regarding intermittent, ineffective, and slow attention to the library, adult education, and the EdD program, the Commission finds there is a need for clearer, more sustained leadership at all levels of the institution, from the Board, administration and faculty to see that these longstanding issues are addressed. As a result, the Commission finds the institution does not reflect the conditions outlined by CFR 1.3: "The institution's leadership creates and sustains a leadership system at all levels marked by high performance, appropriate responsibility, and accountability."

Therefore, the Commission has acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Special Visit team
2. Issue a formal Notice of Concern
3. Request a Special Visit in fall 2009, focusing on progress in addressing the issues cited in this letter.

This action provides notice to an institution that, while it currently meets WASC Standards, it is in danger of being found in noncompliance with one or more Standards if current trends or findings continue. Institutions issued a formal Notice of Concern will have a special visit within four years to assess progress. If the issues are not addressed, a sanction will be imposed, triggering the two-year rule as described on page 54 of the *2001 Handbook of Accreditation*.

A formal Notice of Concern is not made public by the Commission. This means that it is neither published in the *Directory* nor identified when members of the public call for information on the accreditation status of the institution.

The Commission also requests a meeting between WASC staff and representatives of the institution, including senior leadership, faculty leadership, the ALO, and the chair of the Board of Trustees within 90 days following receipt of this letter. The purposes of the meeting are to further communicate the reasons for the Commission action, to learn of the institution's plan to achieve wider notice within the institution of the action taken by the Commission and the reasons for it, and to discuss the institution's plan for responding to the action.

The Commission further requests that a meeting be held with the governing board of the institution, as part of one of its regularly scheduled meetings, at which the issues underlying this action and the Board's role and response to the Commission's concerns can be discussed.

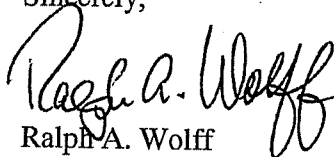
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WASC has identified Board consultants to assist in this role. Please contact Ray Lui in the WASC office to schedule these meetings.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the institution's governing board in one week. The 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 them.

Please contact me if you have any questions about the Commission's actions or the contents of this letter.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter
Board Chair
Bethami Dobkins, ALO
Members of the team
Richard Winn

Enclosure