March 3, 2010

Brother Ronald Gallagher  
President  
Saint Mary’s College of California  
1928 Saint Mary’s Road  
Moraga, CA 94556

Dear President Gallagher:

At its meeting on February 17-19, 2010, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that visited Saint Mary’s College of California (SMCC) on October 28-30, 2009. The Commission also reviewed the Special Visit report submitted by the University prior to the visit and the institution’s February 2, 2010 response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to speak with you and your colleagues. Your comments were helpful.

This visit was conducted to evaluate institutional progress on four issues identified by the Commission in its letter of February 27, 2008, which also communicated the Commission’s action to impose a formal Notice of Concern. With particular acknowledgement of the role of the recently-appointed provost, together with strong support from your office and from the recently-elected chair of the board, the team found evidence of sustained engagement and observable progress in each of the four areas. When compared with findings from several previous visits to the college, the team observed that the institution has moved well beyond defensiveness to serious engagement with WASC’s concerns.

In accepting the team report, the Commission endorsed the findings, commendations, and recommendations of the visiting team. In particular, the Commission acknowledged both the progress the college has made, and highlighted the need for continuing attention in each of the four areas identified below.

Library. The Commission affirms the institution’s resource commitment to the library even as budget constraints have hampered some other campus operations. This has resulted in increased representation by library leadership in key college structures, enhanced faculty involvement with library planning, expanded hard copy and digital collections, and increased hours of operation. While SMCC has moved forward to retain an architect to design the planned new library, the college will need to continue its development efforts toward completing this critical aspect of an academically vibrant institution. (CFRs 3.6, 3.7)

Adult and Graduate Education. The place of graduate programs within a traditional liberal arts college has been clarified and strengthened by such steps as the appointment of a new associate dean for graduate education, a number of new
graduate faculty hires, expanded housing for graduate students, increased budgets, and consolidated planning and governance structures. The Commission commends these efforts and advises their continuing placement as a priority within the institution's strategic planning processes. Such planning should include the support needs particular to non-traditional graduate students. (CFRs 2.2b, 3.11, 4.1, 4.2)

The Education Doctoral (EdD) Program. With the appointment of a new program director for the EdD program, it has become more clearly aligned with, and expressive of, the institution’s mission. This integration is further indicated in recent planning that more fully integrates learning outcomes into courses and research requirements. These outcomes are guiding program faculty in their ongoing work to develop aligned assessment activities. By the time of subsequent WASC reviews, this work should be reflected in measurable indicators of student achievement that are being used to improve learning. In addition, the Commission expects that the college will be able to demonstrate, at the next review, a more complete graduate culture as expressed through policies and practices related to faculty research, advising, and more clearly defined expectations for student theses and dissertation work. (CFRs 2.2b, 2.6, 4.3, 4.8)

Diversity. Of greatest concern to the Commission in calling for this Special Visit, the area of diversity has also received the most focused attention by the provost and the campus as a whole. Framed around the Organizational Developmental Model of Inclusion (ODMI), and driven by the College Committee on Inclusive Excellence (CCIE), the college has assessed its current status on a developmental continuum and adopted specific strategies to move it to the next stages. This has resulted in extensive training, policy revision, and program redesign. The Commission commends these efforts while noting that work remains to be done. The new levels of candor, optimism and promising strategies reported by the team must continue to result in observable and sustained changes in behavior across the institution. (CFRs 1.3, 1.5, 2.10, 3.20)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit team report and continue the accreditation of Saint Mary’s College of California.

2. Remove the formal Notice of Concern.

3. Proceed with the next comprehensive review, with the Capacity and Preparatory Review scheduled for fall 2013 and the Educational Effectiveness Review scheduled for spring 2015. The Institutional Proposal is due on October 15, 2011. The Commission expects that the Proposal should portray the institution’s ongoing plans to address the primary issues elucidated in the Special Visit team report, with particular emphasis on developing the EdD program within a vibrant graduate culture and on continuing efforts in the areas of diversity and civility.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Saint Mary’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.
Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the college undertook in preparing for and supporting this 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,

[Signature]
Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/rw

Cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
    Bethami Dobkin, ALO
    Peter W. Kelly, Board Chair
    Members of the CPR team
    Richard Winn