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Mary Ellen Petrisko

March 6, 2015

Dr. Nathan Long  
Saybrook University  
475 14<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear President Long:

At its meeting February 18-20, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an Onsite Review of Saybrook University, August 25-27, 2014. Commission members also reviewed the Special Visit report submitted by Saybrook prior to the visit and the institution's December 5, 2014 response to the visiting team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you, Carol Humphreys, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost, and Michael Cairns, Vice President of Finance. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

The Commission scheduled a Special Visit to Saybrook to focus on the following six areas: board governance, mission, strategic agenda, reorganization, finances, and enrollment management. Saybrook is to be commended for producing, as the team noted, a "well written and comprehensive" report that successfully addressed the issues "with transparency and sufficient documentation."

During the Special Visit, the team found much to commend:

**Board governance.** On February 21, 2014, the Commission approved Saybrook's affiliation with TCS Educational System (TCS ES). This new arrangement required significant changes in the structure and processes of governance for the university. As described in the team report, Saybrook has successfully reconstituted its governing board, ensuring that "the control of the university belongs to the Saybrook board." The team was "thoroughly impressed" with the new board structure and the constitution of members. The team commended Saybrook and TCS ES for the new governance model and their "highly collaborative working relationship." (CFR 3.9 and Policy on Independent Governing Boards)

**Mission.** The team determined that the affiliation with TCS ES has not changed the historic mission of Saybrook. In fact, according to the team, Saybrook's mission has "been strengthened by the affiliation," since both entities share common values around issues of social justice and a similar educational approach. The strong alignment of Saybrook to the mission of TCS ES has led to a "smoother transition than anticipated," as Saybrook implemented new procedures, software systems, and administrative reorganizations. (CFR 1.1)

**Reorganization.** The affiliation of Saybrook University with TCS ES necessitated significant organizational changes in areas such as information technology, marketing, recruitment and admissions, business services, and human resources. At the same time these changes were taking place, transitions occurred at Saybrook in presidential and provost leadership. The team applauded the perseverance of the Saybrook community for successfully managing multiple challenges and significant changes in ways that were “remarkable,” “transparent,” and “open,” and that have led to “positive momentum” and “renewed enthusiasm for future possibilities.” (CFRs 1.7, 3.6, 3.7, 4.7)

The team also praised Saybrook “as an institution that embraces the use of data for decision making and planning,” and commended both Saybrook and TCS ES for developing an “innovative” and “high quality” business model that is respectful of the individuality of an institution while providing support and stability to ensure institutional success.

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

**Implementing the strategic plan.** Saybrook paused its work on implementing its strategic plan as a result of affiliating with TCS ES, reconstituting the board, and preparing for a shift in key senior leadership roles. The team observed that Saybrook has a history of making the effort “to write strategic plans, but the institution apparently is not able to execute and fully implement its plans.” The Commission expects Saybrook to make systematic progress on the priorities identified in its strategic plan. Saybrook needs to develop a detailed action plan for implementation that includes refined timelines, required resources, identified lines of responsibility, and clear, specific, observable measures for determining when milestones are achieved. (CFRs 3.4, 4.6, 4.7)

**Strengthening financial stability.** Financial sustainability continues to be a serious, ongoing challenge for Saybrook. The Commission concurs with the team’s assessment that Saybrook’s financial situation “remains fragile, requiring careful management.” While the affiliation with TCS ES appears to provide a “safety net,” the Commission expects Saybrook to give its urgent and highest level of attention to resolving its long-standing problem of financial instability. (CFR 3.4)

**Improving enrollment management.** Central to financial sustainability, for institutions heavily dependent on tuition revenue to fund operations, is a strategic enrollment management effort. As the team noted, “The ongoing issue of enrollment planning is one of greatest importance for the new institutional leadership.” The Commission expects Saybrook to develop a comprehensive, strategic enrollment plan, with appropriate resources, staffing, and metrics that bridge the institution’s academic and financial goals. Successful enrollment management efforts use market research, data, and student-centric interventions to ensure that new student enrollment goals are set and met and enrolled students are retained and graduate. (CFRs 2.10, 3.4)

Because of the number of major changes that Saybrook has experienced over the past year and the need for the university to fully transition to TCS ES, the Commission is rescheduling the date of Saybrook’s Comprehensive Review.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report.
2. Reschedule the Offsite Review to fall 2017 and the Accreditation Visit to spring 2018.
3. Request an interim report due March 1, 2016 that includes:
  - a. Enrollment goals and actual enrollments for fall 2014, spring 2015, fall 2015, and spring 2016
  - b. Explanations for any discrepancies between goals and actual enrollments
  - c. Results of Saybrook's efforts in academic prioritization including programs identified for growth, consolidation, or elimination

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Saybrook's governing board in one week. A copy of this letter will also be sent to the President of TCS ES. 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 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 Saybrook 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/ bgd

Cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair  
Renee Levi, Board Chair  
Michael Horowitz, TCS ES  
Members of the Special Visit team  
Barbara Gross Davis, WSCUC