

San Francisco Conservatory of Music

David H. Stull, President

Executive Summary

*Executive Summary of the Institutional Report
submitted for re-affirmation of accreditation by the
WASC Senior College and University Commission*

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San Francisco Conservatory of Music
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List of Exhibits

This is a list of the exhibits available to the visiting team from WSCUC. Most of the documents are available on the [Institutional Research website](#). You will need to log in to the Conservatory portal to access them.

- **Exhibit A:** Strategic Vision and Plan
- **Exhibit B:** WSCUC Commission Action Letter
- **Exhibit C:** Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements
- **Exhibit D:** Learning Outcome Assessment Results
- **Exhibit E:** Student Learning and Assessment Committee Proposal
- **Exhibit F:** Undergraduate Writing Sequence Proposal for SFCM
- **Exhibit G:** Graduate Studies in Music Course Proposal (ESL)
- **Exhibit H:** Retention and Graduation Dataset
- **Exhibit I:** Professional Development and Engagement Center Functions
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- **Exhibit L:** Strings Department External Review Statement
- **Exhibit M:** Financial Long-Range Plan
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- **Exhibit O:** Position Descriptions
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1 Introduction to the Institutional Report: Institutional Context; Response to Previous Commission Actions

The San Francisco Conservatory of Music is an independent, private post-secondary institution dedicated to educating young musicians to perform at the highest level and contribute to the cultural life of their communities. Founded in 1917 by Ada Clement and Lillian Hodghead, and accredited in 1960 by President Robin Laufer, the Conservatory welcomed David H. Stull as president on July 1st, 2013.

The Conservatory's strongest assets are our talented and diverse student body and the high caliber of our master teachers. We additionally benefit from a student-centered model of instruction and our residence in the artistic center of San Francisco.

The *WSCUC Commission Action Letter* of February 2012 enjoined us to address the following issues at our institution: general education integration in the curriculum, program review, and assessment of student learning, enhancement of institutional research, financial planning for sustainability, and enhancement of student support. We have addressed all of these issues at the Conservatory, and the results are detailed in the institutional report.

2 Compliance with Standards: Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements

We completed a *Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements* (the review) to evaluate ourselves over the four WSCUC standards and the forty-one criteria for review. The most important issues revealed in this review coincided with the issues discussed at length within the Institutional Report. These included our institutional commitment to accreditation (CFR 1.8), program reviews (CFR 2.7, CFR 4.1), revisions to our General Education curriculum (CFR 2.2a), and substantial enhancement of our student support services (CFR

2.13). The Conservatory has also been working assiduously to develop a financial model that is stable and sufficient to ensure long-term viability (CFR 3.4), and we have been dedicated to establishing budgetary preparedness in the face of the changing world of higher education (CFR 4.7). Finally, we have been establishing an institutional research capacity (CFR 4.1, CFR 4.2) with an office of institutional research established in fall 2012.

3 Degree Programs: Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees

Our degree programs emphasize the highest quality of performance in classical music but also meet general expectations for bachelor's and master's degrees in American colleges and universities. They are marked by the intensity of their individual attention.

To a large extent the quality of our degrees is demonstrated by the high levels of performance of our students and alumni in the public sphere. The quality of our degrees is controlled by our implementation of the standards of relevant professional bodies, standardized assessment practices, student feedback (direct and indirect) and information gathered concerning our alumni.

Our degrees were designed to build ever-increasing skill levels in the studio and to develop collegiate competencies in writing, speaking, and critical thinking in the context of music-specific academic work. We have lately undertaken to revise the structure of our undergraduate curriculum to make it less content driven and more focused on the acquisition of key academic skills. We have also reinstated systematic processes of program review, including methods of information gathering, analysis, reflection, and response.

4 Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation

Since the last accreditation visit the Conservatory has committed itself to the revision of its academic curriculum with an eye towards strengthening core competencies, particularly writing, within our academic programs. This began modestly with a complete overhaul of the Music History curriculum between 2006 and 2010; we are now focused on a similar revision of our General Education curriculum.

Increasingly our curricular decisions are informed by established departmental level outcomes, which we are working to connect to course-level outcomes on the one hand and institutional level outcomes on the other. Tying these departmental learning outcomes to juries will give us rich assessment data to track the progress of our students

over time. We are also devising ways to emphasize the core competencies across the curriculum, including their application to the life of a working musician.

We are considering requiring formal program notes and oral presentations as part of our degree recitals, thus designing a comprehensive degree capstone. These will be paired with the new digital portfolio that will house records and recordings of all major student accomplishments. These can be shared with potential employers and collaborators and can also be assessed at graduation for the benefit of the Conservatory.

5 Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation; and Improvements to Student Academic and Co-curricular Support

We analyzed retention and graduation rates over time, across various subgroups within the institution, and against peer institutions. Where possible, we disaggregated the data by gender, national origin, race/ethnicity, initial scholarship award, and curriculum.

Our five-year average retention rates are 81% for first time freshmen, 83% for undergraduate transfer students, and 91% for master's students and these rates have only improved since 2008. Since 2006 our undergraduate retention rate has been below the average of our peers, but it has been improving, and in the 2012-13 academic year we surpassed the peer average.

Our five-year average undergraduate graduation rate is 67%, with a subtle upward trend within that period. The master's program average was higher, with 86% completion. Over the past five completed cohorts our graduation rates have followed patterns similar to our peers, although with differing levels and amplitudes. And, while historically our graduation rate has been lower than our peers, within the last three cohorts, we have improved relative to them.

This year we began monitoring learning success at the time of graduation (process discussed in Section 6). We implemented an interview and questionnaire for all graduating students, as well as learning outcome assessment for students in departments which have undergone program review. Our graduating students were on average "satisfied" with their development in the competencies ascribed to the Conservatory mission statement (a 2.0 on a scale of 1-5). While the data collected from faculty members are more limited, they tended to have a better opinion of student performance than their students. This disparity was greater among undergraduates than graduate students.

Since our last accreditation visit in 2005 we have improved many student support services. The library has improved the space and collection, added an integrated library system, implemented programs to improve information literacy, hired a full-time archivist, and embarked on a long-term project to digitize, preserve, and provide online access to Conservatory concerts and recitals. We have made changes to facilities policies to provide more practice spaces for our students. We are establishing a tutoring center to centralize and improve our academic support offerings. We are implementing new systems for course management and establishing a digital portfolio, described above. We have established a new professional development center to guide students in their post-Conservatory endeavors and an in-house counseling center in support of student well-being. Finally, we have improved residential offerings in a partnership with Golden Gate Hall, and have embarked on a plan to own and operate a residential hall by the year 2020 to assist students in one of the greatest challenges of attending our institution—residing in the city of San Francisco.

6 Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review; Assessment; Use of Data and Evidence

In fall 2012 the Conservatory revived the practice of program review, and since that time has established a core procedural methodology. Each department will complete a self-study every five years. The faculty will engage in discussion centering on the following topics: departmental mission and learning outcomes, student learning, student success, faculty effectiveness, and curricular improvements. These discussions will lead to a written report, reviewed and approved by the dean and the new Faculty Committee on Student Learning and Assessment, containing action items to address the concerns raised by the program review process. An external reviewer will then assess the report and participate in a site visit to make observations and recommendations, which will be incorporated into the department's stated action items. The reviewer will also provide a written statement to catalog his or her assessment. The dean and DIR will follow up with each department to track progress on action items year-to-year. In addition to departmental review, the Office of Institutional Research will engage in an assessment of the program review process every fifth year of the program review cycle.

After the first two years of program review, all participating departments have revised mission statements and departmental objectives, and they have all thought critically about what they want to provide for their students, and whether or not they are doing so. Outcomes from this process include initiatives to revise the ESL curriculum

and course structure, to restructure the musicianship curricular sequence, and proposals for new courses and course revisions. So far only one department (Strings) has had an external review, which was very positive.

This year we embarked on a project to start tracking student learning and success at graduation. We gave a questionnaire to all graduating students to gauge their perception of their own success in the departmental learning outcomes. A sample selection was given to the departmental instructors for the faculty perspective. The results of these surveys are briefly discussed in Section 5. We plan to expand this initial action until we have a comprehensive system for tracking student success. The faculty assessments will be replaced by jury forms revised to evaluate students based on departmental learning outcomes (which has already started), and a student's digital portfolio will provide evidence of progress over time on various core competencies and institutional learning outcomes.

7 Sustainability: Financial Viability; Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment

While overwhelmingly positive, our move to 50 Oak Street brought financial challenges. These have mainly been met with short-term solutions. In spring 2014 the Board of Trustees unanimously approved President Stull's *Strategic Vision and Plan*, which was subsequently used to develop the *Financial Long-Range Plan*. Both of these documents are intended to guide us to financial stability over the long term.

We are introducing an Applied Music and Composition for Media (AMCM) program in fall 2015, fulfilling several needs in preparing for the changing higher education environment. It will fulfill the needs of a growing market (notably film and gaming) that is currently underserved by traditional musical composition education. And since mixed media programs are rare, there will be high demand for our AMCM degree, so we will be able to offer the program with a lower discount rate, and have more funds available for scholarships in other areas of the Conservatory.

8 Conclusion: Reflection and Plans for Improvement

In the course of this self-study we have learned a great deal about ourselves and the potential of our institution. We have initiated program review and assessment of learning practices, and have developed an office of institutional research. We have made great improvements to student support services. We are renovating the general education curriculum, and course offerings for our first year undergraduate students.

We are also preparing other new initiatives, including a modular term system that will allow us to explore more creative and unusual course offering with shorter class duration. The new residence hall will contain a street level café where students can perform and housing for guest artists and scholars. And we wish to form professional alliances with the many neighboring performing arts organizations.

We feel that the future is bright and filled with exciting opportunities, both artistic and financial. By establishing prudent and sustainable financial planning to achieve our goals, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, under the leadership of President Stull, and the unanimous support of its Board of Trustees led by Chair Timothy Foo, will fulfill its artistic and educational mission with a new conservatory model for the twenty-first century.