

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT**

**To the American Conservatory Theater
San Francisco, California**

March 11-12, 2021

Team Roster

Hélène Garrison, Interim President, Laguna College of Art and Design (Team Chair)
Peter Senkbeil, Vice President/Assistant to the President, Concordia University Irvine (Assistant Chair)
Alex McCafferty, University Budget Director, Santa Clara University
Andrew Wallis, Associate Dean of Academic Planning, Whittier College
Cynthia Westerbeck, Professor of English, Walla Walla University
Susan Opp, Vice President, WSCUC (Staff Liaison)

The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution, its Accreditation History, as Relevant, and the Visit

The American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.), founded in 1965, is the largest theater company in the Bay Area. A.C.T. has operated a professional actor training conservatory since its inception, and it now offers a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Program in Acting – the institution’s sole accredited degree program. A.C.T. qualified as a candidate for accreditation with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WSCUC) in 1978, was granted initial accreditation in 1984, and has maintained it continuously since that time.

A.C.T. ordinarily produces a mainstage season of professional plays under a League of Regional Theaters (LORT) contract with Actors Equity Association, the professional stage actors’ union. It also ordinarily produces an annual season of MFA productions featuring its students. In March 2020, A.C.T. shut down its productions in response to the extraordinary threat posed by the Covid-19 pandemic; one of its plays closed on its opening night after a total of only six performances, including five previews. Since that time, A.C.T.’s performance spaces have remained closed to the public, and it has not produced any mainstage plays during 2020-21. Several MFA productions have been presented online, live and recorded, both as a way for A.C.T.’s MFA students to continue performing to meet the degree requirements of their program, and as a way for A.C.T. to maintain contact with its audiences. A.C.T.’s MFA Program is a three-year course of study that prepares actors for careers on the professional stage, admitting 12 students per year. The director of the conservatory and the MFA program director oversee all aspects of the program, working closely with four other full-time core faculty, plus several dozen adjunct faculty and guest artists, a number of whom are also employed by A.C.T. in other capacities. All students take the same rigorous curriculum, with only a few elective course options. The program’s retention and graduation rates are very high. Instruction in the MFA program was offered solely online for the remainder of the 2019 - 2020 academic year. Instruction has been offered alternately in hybrid scenarios throughout the 2020 - 2021 academic year. Most classes have been online, in addition to some classes being offered outdoors and indoors in person. A.C.T. also made the decision not to admit new MFA students in fall 2020 and again in fall 2021. At the time of the writing of this report, A.C.T. has 24 MFA degree and certificate students enrolled; by fall 2021, after another class graduates, A.C.T. will have a single class of 12 third-year students in its program, down from its typical enrollment of 36.

A.C.T. owns two buildings in downtown San Francisco: The Geary, a 1,025-seat facility ordinarily used for mainstage plays; and the Strand, which features a 283-seat theater and a 140-seat black box

space, used primarily for MFA and conservatory productions, rehearsals, classes, and meetings. In the past twelve months, A.C.T. has left two rented facilities it previously used for teaching, study, rehearsal, student performance, and administration at 30 Grant Avenue and at the Costume Shop Theater; it is currently seeking to exit its lease for both spaces. In addition to its MFA Program, A.C.T.'s Conservatory ordinarily operates four non-degree programs: the Young Conservatory, for students ages 8-19; the San Francisco Semester, for traditional undergraduate students; the Summer Training Congress, for new professional actors; and Studio A.C.T., for working adults. A.C.T.'s Education Department ordinarily offers a Theater in Schools program that serves students in the Bay Area, operated with help from the MFA students. A.C.T. does not offer any distance education programs or operate any offsite locations as defined by WSCUC.

The institution was last reaccredited by WSCUC in March 2018, following a site visit in December 2017. At the time of the site visit, A.C.T. was undergoing significant leadership changes, as its long-serving joint-CEOs -- the artistic director and the executive director -- were both retiring; A.C.T. hired new leaders by fall 2018 after conducting national searches. The Commission granted an eight-year reaffirmation of accreditation and mandated a Special Visit in early 2021, to address the ten recommendations in its March 2018 Action Letter. These recommendations addressed issues of strategic planning and financial viability; enhancement of assessment processes; faculty and staff workload, governance, organizational structure, and communication flow; grievance processes; student indebtedness; and technological support for student learning.

B. Description of the Team's Review Process

After reviewing A.C.T.'s Special Visit Report and supporting documents, the team members met online on January 27, 2021 to discuss their initial impressions of the materials and to organize the virtual site visit, which was conducted March 11-12, 2021. The team identified several areas for further investigation and requested additional supporting documents related to financial viability, assessment of student learning outcomes, and composition of the faculty; additional materials were provided by A.C.T. in a timely manner.

During the virtual site visit, team members interviewed the theater's leadership, including the artistic director, the executive director, and other administrative staff. The director of the conservatory, MFA program director, all core faculty, several adjunct faculty, and a number of academic support staff were also interviewed. Team members met with current MFA students, MFA Program alumni, and the chair and president of A.C.T.'s governing board; they were given access to web links to online

performances that featured current MFA students. The team also reviewed the confidential email account set up for the site visit. The team considered all of the inputs described above in formulating its commendations and recommendations for the institution.

C. Institution's Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

A.C.T.'s Special Visit Report was well-organized and written in a clear and effective manner. All of the senior administrators and core faculty members of the institution participated in the preparation of the report in some way. The team notes, however, that at the time of the report's submission, the position of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) was vacant, and it appears that no representative of A.C.T.'s finance office participated in the report's preparation. During the special visit, the team interviewed the new CFO, who had started two weeks earlier. As of December 2020, both the CFO position and the Director of Human Resources position were vacant, though the CFO position was filled two weeks before the team's March 2021 visit. The team also notes that the previous MFA Program/Conservatory Director, who had served in that role for 25 years, stepped down at the end of 2020. This position was divided in two, and two current core faculty members were appointed to the new positions of MFA Program Director and Director of the Conservatory.

A.C.T. was frank in its written self-appraisal in many areas of the report. The institution began a strategic planning process in 2019, which was making good progress before it was brought to a halt by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. A.C.T. also described the significant efforts it has made in the past few years to strengthen its work in areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), both in the theater's production seasons and in the MFA Program. A.C.T.'s response to the shutdown of all live performances due to Covid-19 is described in detail, and it appears that the theater has done some industry-leading work in creating virtual online performances while continuing to provide performance opportunities for its MFA students to the extent possible.

However, the information provided by A.C.T. in several areas was incomplete; see the discussions of Issues 1 and 2, below, for more details. In addition, the special visit report did not mention a piece of information that seemed to the team to be relevant to A.C.T.'s recent DEI initiatives. In 2019, one of A.C.T.'s former core faculty members filed a lawsuit against the institution, alleging discriminatory treatment; the suit has since been settled, but it was the subject of published media reports in the Bay Area and in the regional theatre community. Given A.C.T.'s strong progress in addressing DEI issues in the past few years and the public nature of the reporting about the lawsuit, the team was surprised that it was not mentioned in the Special Visit Report.

A.C.T.'s report addressed each of the ten issues listed in the March 2018 Commission Action Letter. In most cases, the institution provided clear evidence of progress toward addressing and resolving these issues. In several instances, however, it is the team's opinion that A.C.T. either did not adequately address some of the Commission's recommendations, or that it did not provide sufficient evidence of having done so. These specific instances are described in detail in the team's report, below. That said, the team notes the strong work done by A.C.T. in the past three years in several key areas, in the face of once-in-a-century challenges brought on by a worldwide pandemic.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

***Issue 1:** A.C.T. should develop a 3–5-year strategic plan that addresses physical facilities, programming, and education initiatives, to be accompanied by a financial and implementation plan with a specific timeline.*

Despite A.C.T.'s progress in many aspects of the special visit, numerous financial uncertainties impact both the short and long term future of the whole institution, and the MFA program specifically. The team's review of audited financial statements for the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years indicate a precarious financial position for the institution. The Commission had asked for a 3-5 year strategic and financial plan, and the special visit team requested a five-year operating budget projection, but received only a year-end financial projection for FY21, with no written strategic plan, even in rough draft form. The team has significant concerns about A.C.T.'s financial stability and sustainability, and it finds that the limited evidence of financial and strategic planning puts it out of compliance with CFR 3.4.

Well before the Covid-19 pandemic, A.C.T.'s finances were on a concerning path. In 2018, net assets totaled \$53.7 million, decreasing to \$48 million at the conclusion of the 2019 fiscal year. On a net cash basis, the 2018 operating year lost \$2.7 million, with another loss in 2019 totaling \$5.2 million.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and related stressors have not relieved any pressure on A.C.T.'s finances, with another net cash loss of \$1.2 million in the 2020 fiscal year. Stop-gap measures such as securing a line of credit and the sale of assets assisted with the net margin, but these steps do not represent sustainable paths to longer-term fiscal stability.

The operating budget and projection for fiscal year 2021 shows a modest surplus, mostly due to one-time governmental sources in the form of federal Covid-19 relief stimulus programs. Challenging operational decisions also contribute to the projected surplus, including but not limited to layoffs, temporary reductions in non-salary expenses, and increases in unrestricted donations. A budget for

fiscal years 2022 and beyond was not provided, but during committee interviews, A.C.T. leadership stated that additional government Covid-19 relief funds and the sale of non-strategic assets are part of the plan for budget balancing in the next two years. In addition, A.C.T.'s leadership has expressed the opinion that in-person ticket sales, its primary source of earned revenue, will return slowly over time, perhaps over several years.

Most critically for finances related to the MFA program, the two primary solutions being pursued were A) engaging with a university partner that would bear all or most of the cost of the program, similar to the model currently used by Brown University/Trinity Repertory Company (identified by A.C.T. as a peer competitor), or B) identifying a high net-worth donor to provide a substantial endowment for the MFA program. A.C.T.'s leaders expressed the view that option A is the most viable, yet they were unable to provide specific updates on this effort due to the request for confidentiality by the two potential institutional partners. Based on the team's interviews, it appears that A.C.T.'s last substantive communication with either partner occurred just after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, when all parties agreed to suspend negotiations. The team is concerned that A.C.T. seems to have taken few substantive steps toward resuming talks with its potential partners, though the leadership mentioned that they had scheduled an initial meeting with a third prospective partner for late March.

Furthermore, the strategic planning process that A.C.T. began in 2019 was discontinued in early 2020 and has not yet been restarted. The team sympathizes with the institution's difficult situation due to the Covid-19 crisis, but it expresses concern that there seems to be little sense of urgency regarding the future of the MFA program, which has faced financial difficulties in the past. While A.C.T. is making plans to continue instruction for its one remaining class of 12 third-year MFA students for 2021-22, the institution has not provided a clear plan regarding its intentions for the program beyond that point.

As noted earlier, the team finds that A.C.T. is out of compliance with CFR 3.4, and it recommends that A.C.T. provide updated documents relating to its finances and its strategic planning, so that the financial stability and sustainability of the institution can be evaluated moving forward.

Issue 2: While A.C.T. has created an overall framework for assessment by developing the readiness rubric and using it to assess individual student performance, A.C.T. should also use assessment findings generated with the rubric for academic program improvement in curriculum and pedagogy.

It appears that A.C.T.'s faculty and administration know their students well and are deeply engaged in student development. They appear responsive to global strengths and deficits of their cohorts and adapt accordingly. The readiness rubrics have become a core part of the student assessment process, providing a set of vocabulary and values that is shared by students, core faculty,

and adjunct faculty (CFR 2.4). This was evidenced in the written report and corroborated by faculty and administrators in our conversations during the site visit.

While this process is working well for individual student assessment, the use of that data for program-level assessment and improvement is less systematic. It is clear that all faculty are keenly aware of the need to complete and submit their readiness rubrics; it is less clear how that data is compiled, disaggregated, and shared with the faculty in conversations about program-level improvement. For example, the institution did not at first provide any assessment data to the special visit team. Upon request, we received five A.C.T. Readiness Assessment Charts that provided helpful disaggregation of data by factors such as race and gender (CFRs 2.10, 4.2). This collection and examination of the data should continue on a systematic basis and be readily available for the purposes of both internal and external review.

In contrast to the limited data the team received prior to the visit, discussions during the visit with educational leadership in both the education program and MFA indicated a positive attitude towards assessment and ongoing discussion of potential collaborations. The team encourages A.C.T. to better use existing data and to pursue new assessments as it explores potential changes to its education, and as it relates to preparing its students to enter a career (CFR 2.5). Informed choices about matters such as digital portfolios, the education program, and the overall curriculum will be strongest if they are based on data (CFRs 2.2, 3.7).

The special visit report indicated that some adjustments had been made in 2019 to ensure that the rubrics accurately reflected and reinforced the values of the institution. This kind of reassessment is encouraged to continue to ensure that the rubrics are a living document that align with recent changes in the mission and values at A.C.T., especially in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Overall, the team finds that there is evidence of positive attitudinal change towards assessment at A.C.T., but that little formal institutional work has been done beyond the readiness rubric. We therefore encourage the institution to harness this positive vision and collaborative spirit surrounding assessment and to incorporate assessment tools into its workflows.

Issue 3: The MFA Program should collaborate with the Education Program on matters of academic program assessment, particularly around curricular elements related to community engagement and devised work.

Significant improvements have been made in this area through increased communication and planning between the MFA program and the education programs. Of particular significance is the fact that a staff member from the Education and Community Programs is now invited to participate in the

oral panel evaluations for MFA Program students. While the team was pleased to learn of the existence of a separate Citizen Artist rubric, even greater alignment might be possible by expanding definitions of Collaboration and Professionalism in the A.C.T. Readiness Rubrics to include elements related to community engagement as well as rehearsal and performance spaces.

The team encourages A.C.T. to explore overlapping or complementary tools by which it can better assess student needs and development while also engaging in processes of continuous improvement (CFRs 2.4, 2.5).

Issue 4: A.C.T. should develop processes of governance and representation structures for faculty, staff, and students that ensure clear, transparent, and timely communication with the administration.

A.C.T. leadership has made a significant effort to enhance governance and representation structures as well as communication (CFR 3.10). The artistic director and executive director hold monthly company meetings in addition to weekly meetings with the senior team. Transparency and communication have been enhanced as reflected in the weekly email update sent to all constituents. The appointment of a new director of the conservatory in January 2021 further allows direct avenues for feedback between conservatory programs and the theater. The director of the conservatory and the MFA program director both sit on the senior team and are thus aware of significant company issues. In addition, the appointment of a new MFA program director gives a clear reporting structure; this individual supervises the heads of faculty, as well as associate and adjunct faculty. Heads of faculty now participate in hiring adjunct faculty, along with the MFA program director. Adjunct faculty almost unanimously praised the new structure and their direct access to the heads of faculty. Another positive action toward good communication and practices within the organization was the hiring of a new human resources director with an open-door policy. Though this individual has since left A.C.T., the interim director of HR continues to uphold the open-door policy.

Within the MFA, communication has also improved, and students feel that they now have easy access to the artistic director and the executive director. Additionally, students have an MFA class representative, homeroom meetings, and a faculty advisor assigned to each. Faculty advisors sit on the senior team and represent the needs of the students. Students interviewed were mostly positive about interactions with administration, but they noted that the administration, while it clearly wants to include everyone in discussions, will sometimes delay or even fail to give answers.

Students strongly appreciated that MFA faculty members were able to pivot quickly to a completely digital environment. They noted the increased opportunities for one-on-one work with

faculty, and they were positive in their assessment of what they accomplished this year under the leadership of the faculty and staff who helped them with technological issues and an altogether different training/performance context. In fact, the necessity of developing digital portfolios during the pandemic led them to realize that this new approach was a positive and unexpected outcome of being forced to suspend in-person work and that it should be incorporated into the curriculum in the future. They expressed that they will be more prepared for new opportunities in film and TV than they would have been without the digital work of the past year.

A significant development at A.C.T. and in the MFA which highlights a positive response to previous concerns among the students is the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Students noted with gratitude the great strides that have been made in the last few years. There is at present a much greater variety of perspectives that include Latinx, Black, and transgender issues and opportunities. Students feel that they have a voice that is valued (CFR 1.4).

Issue 5: *A.C.T. should invest significant effort in improving organizational health, particularly as it relates to faculty and staff workloads, and to faculty evaluation and professional development.*

A.C.T.'s own special visit report indicates that the institution is aware that its progress in addressing this recommendation has been uneven. A.C.T. has noted that the faculty evaluations scheduled for 2020 have been postponed due to Covid-19, and that lines of authority and responsibility in managing faculty workload remain unclear. Regarding faculty workload, A.C.T.'s report notes that despite some reorganization of administrative duties during 2018:

More often than not, however, the faculty have had to negotiate their workloads with production directors and stage managers directly, with no intervention from those monitoring the hours. There is a gap in overseeing the entire workload of faculty members ... Faculty need clarity on the process for managing or monitoring the faculty production workload in order to improve communication with conservatory production stage managers, who set production schedules (p. 18).

During the team's visit, adjunct faculty generally expressed satisfaction with A.C.T.'s communication regarding their workloads, noting that these were addressed through semester-by-semester hourly contracts. By contrast, the core faculty interviewed expressed concerns about both their workloads -- two of them directed plays in fall 2020 that were not included in their contracts -- and their contract status going forward (see Issue 6, below). All faculty acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic required significant additional work from them in moving a face-to-face graduate acting curriculum completely online. Staff workload issues also appear to remain, though this is difficult to

assess accurately, given the large number of theater staff who have been laid off during the past year (CFR 3.2).

A.C.T. has made some progress in the area of faculty professional development; core faculty are now eligible to apply for two weeks per year of paid professional development, which must be approved in advance by the director of the conservatory. At least three core faculty have been able to take advantage of this opportunity so far (CFR 3.3).

However, the team finds that overall, A.C.T. still has a long way to go in addressing this recommendation. While the Covid-19 crisis has certainly delayed some of A.C.T.'s well-intentioned steps in this direction, faculty workload and evaluation issues in particular have been only minimally addressed since the 2018 Commission Action Letter.

Issue 6: A.C.T. should clarify the role and responsibilities of core faculty to strengthen faculty leadership.

The arrival of a new artistic director and a new executive director at A.C.T. in 2018 signaled a positive direction for the entire company, including the MFA program. Likewise, the appointment of a new MFA program director in January 2021 provided the core faculty with a direct reporting line that clarified their roles. It is worth noting, however, that four of the five previous core faculty resigned before or during the transition, leaving only three core faculty to bear the teaching load of the MFA, along with adjunct faculty, and suggesting a potential issue with faculty workload, discussed under Issue #5. The other three individuals who currently hold core faculty status at A.C.T. are the artistic director, the MFA program director, and the director of the conservatory.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, beginning March 2020, was significant and challenging for A.C.T. in every aspect of its operations. In the MFA, it resulted in profound disruptions to the working conditions of the core faculty. Not only was their workload increased out of a necessity driven by the new digital reality, but the status of their annual contract renewals for 2021-22 was still unclear at the time of the team's visit in mid-March 2021, which was clearly the source of some anxiety. The reduction of A.C.T.'s enrollment to a single cohort of 12 students in fall 2021 appears to complicate further the issues surrounding faculty load and staffing.

It is clear that A.C.T. leadership was and is struggling with maintaining the operations of the MFA program, as shown by the drastic step it has taken of investigating the possibility of a partnership with a local university, already started before the pandemic. This exploration, launched by the board, was suspended early in the pandemic and is about to be reactivated. Meanwhile, the core faculty live in uncertainty as to their future with the program (CFR 3.2).

Issue 7: *A.C.T.'s faculty should be empowered as a group to develop enhanced assessment and program review processes that lead to regular improvements to curriculum and pedagogy, and that address the changing nature of the field of theater.*

A.C.T.'s faculty are to be commended for the many ways they quickly adjusted their pedagogies to address the new demands created by the Covid-19 pandemic. These adjustments required significant communication and collaboration. The institution-wide DEI initiatives have also required and fostered new channels of communication as faculty and leadership have worked together to find ways to integrate these principles into the curriculum (CFR 1.4).

Plans for the next formal five-year program review were understandably delayed due to Covid-19, now rescheduled for 2021-22. In the meantime, A.C.T. should develop mechanisms for regular, ongoing, systematic internal program review that includes faculty-wide evaluation of the aggregated data from the readiness rubrics. This process will allow the institution to close the assessment loop by making meaningful change based on that data, while also giving faculty a voice in continuous improvements to curriculum and pedagogy (CFR 2.7).

Issue 8: *A.C.T. should develop comprehensive, clear, and linear grievance policies and processes for both employees and students and communicate them clearly.*

Since the 2017 WSCUC team visit, the institution has made progress in the way it handles employee and student grievances. A.C.T. provided copies of the grievance and problem resolution policies that appear in its MFA student handbook and MFA faculty handbook, as well as a complaint process document that is shared with its employees. The institution has also contracted with an external firm, Red Flag Reporting, to provide a confidential hotline for reporting concerns related to “fraudulent activity/theft, misconduct, safety violations, and unethical behavior/employment practices (i.e. discrimination).”

During the visit, A.C.T. employees indicated that the institution came through a time of turmoil in its human resources (HR) department -- at one point, it had had six HR directors within three years. Several employees credited a recently-departed HR director with making significant improvements to institutional culture regarding complaints and grievances; her open-door policy and her handling of employee concerns “made it clear that there was an avenue to go to that was anonymous.” The recently settled lawsuit brought against the institution by a former core faculty member was mentioned as a catalyst for improvements in this area. A.C.T. employees assert that the institution documents

complaints and provides follow-up responses to complainants, though these are not always handled consistently.

Despite these changes, the team notes that some concerns remain. The grievance policies refer to five different A.C.T. employees who might receive complaints; while this provides employees and students with options (which is important if their complaint is against one of those individuals listed), the team is concerned that this could also lead to communication breakdowns in getting complaints resolved in a timely and appropriate manner. In addition, the HR director credited with improving this system has left A.C.T., leaving the institution with one full-time employee in this area. The team encourages A.C.T. to place continued focus on strengthening its institutional culture in this area and providing sufficient personnel resources to make sure that its policies are communicated and applied effectively (CFR 1.7).

Issue 9: *A.C.T. should develop a plan to address student indebtedness issues as articulated by members of the administration and the Boards.*

Since the 2017 visit by the WSCUC team, A.C.T.'s staff and other constituents have considered the student indebtedness issue, including a presentation to the MFA board concerning broader cost-of-living issues. During the virtual team visit, a number of other challenges were also discussed. In addition to the general cost of living in San Francisco, A.C.T. also faced stiff headwinds regarding the fierce competition for MFA students; for example, Yale University offers full ride scholarships to its entire MFA cohort. In meetings with A.C.T. financial aid staff and separately with student alumni, this program and its scholarship system was mentioned as a strategic issue in A.C.T.'s ability to attract students to the MFA program and in managing the indebtedness of its graduates.

Prior to the 2021 WSCUC virtual visit, the A.C.T. board had determined that a strategic partner would be required to ultimately address this need due to the institution's limited financial resources. As mentioned in earlier sections of this report, progress on this potential partnership is unknown to the special visit team due to confidentiality requests from the potential institutions. The team was pleased to learn about some of the short-term, small-scale improvements A.C.T. has made, such as opportunities for MFA students to earn income for performing in the mainstage season (pre-Covid) and to participate in one-on-one financial counseling sessions with the director of financial aid (CFR 2.13).

As noted by the A.C.T. board and leadership, it appears that the institution must identify a university partner in order to adequately address student indebtedness in its MFA program over the long term.

Issue 10: *A.C.T. should enhance its technological support for student learning, such as providing email accounts for students and improving Wi-Fi access.*

The team reviewed A.C.T.'s report, met with key staff, and queried students about technology on campus. Notably, A.C.T. achieved improvements related to student email addresses, human resources support systems, on-site wifi availability, and more. Most recently, A.C.T. also evidenced support in this area by adapting quickly to the needs of faculty and students as it responded to the Covid-19 emergency by acquiring appropriate licenses, software, and library database access.

Overall, students expressed satisfaction with the electronic and technology support they were receiving. An interesting and perhaps felicitous side-effect of the pandemic was the opportunity for students to have a digital footprint. As a result, they expressed near unanimous enthusiasm for the development of an electronic portfolio or similar digital resumé requirement that would supplement their education and help them transition to the work environment post graduation. The team therefore encourages the institution to discuss this topic, as it would seem to address a student need and potentially serve them well (CFR 2.13).

Staff members also noted the institution's good work in providing technology support during COVID both in terms of teaching and as it related to human resources functions.

Overall, the team finds that A.C.T. has addressed this recommendation successfully.

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE

Not included.

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The team commends A.C.T. for the following:

1. Pivoting to online modality for the MFA program in an effective and innovative manner.
2. Providing ample and appropriate communications, learning and enterprise management technology to students, faculty and staff during the COVID pandemic.
3. Developing a robust equity, diversity, and inclusion program that addresses structural issues within the organization, responds to societal imperatives, and engages students and faculty in challenging and broadening the theatrical canon.

4. Making significant improvements in the atmosphere of the MFA program after a series of challenging transitions in administration, faculty, and staff positions.
5. Enhancing Human Resources support for more transparent and consistent institutional practices.
6. Fostering timely and helpful counseling sessions that contribute to students' short and long term planning and personal finance acumen in addition to any potential graduate degree debt burden.
7. Continuing to adapt and develop the Readiness Rubrics to make them a meaningful part of a systematic assessment process that includes core MFA faculty, adjunct faculty, and increased collaboration with the Education Program.

The team makes the following recommendations to A.C.T.:

1. To ensure the stability and long-term viability of its educational programs, including the MFA, A.C.T. should immediately develop a plan for partnership with a local university or create an alternative plan for the 2022-23 academic year (CFR 3.4).
2. To ensure the stability and long-term viability of its educational programs, including the MFA, A.C.T. should promptly complete the development of a 3-5 year strategic plan that incorporates significant input from Conservatory and MFA faculty and staff (CFR 3.4, 4.7).
3. To ensure the stability and long-term viability of its educational programs, including the MFA, A.C.T. should develop a 5-10 year financial operating plan that closes the institution's structural deficit (CFR 3.4).
4. A.C.T. should establish and enforce clear written guidelines for timely faculty contracts, as well as sustainable and equitable faculty workloads, in order to avoid burning out faculty (CFR 3.2, 3.3).
5. A.C.T. should establish and enforce clear written guidelines for providing professional development opportunities for faculty, including faculty leaves (CFR 3.2, 3.3).
6. A.C.T. should enhance, clarify, and systematize written policies for the faculty and students, including processes for handling complaints and grievances (CFR 1.7).
7. A.C.T. should continue to explore and expand strategies for post-graduation life that include creating robust portfolios for the digital environment, preparing for all aspects of the business of 21st-century acting, and managing student indebtedness (CFR 2.13).



Pam MacKinnon | Artistic Director
Jennifer Bielstein | Executive Director
Peter J. Kuo | Director of the Conservatory

May 11, 2021

WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)
1001 Marina Village Parkway
Suite 402
Alameda, CA 94501

Dear Members of the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC):

American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) is in receipt of the final Report of the WSCUC Team Special Visit, March 11 and 12, 2021.

A.C.T. expresses its sincere thanks to our institutional liaison, Susan Opp; Team Chair Hélène Garrison, and to all the members of the visiting team for their care, attention to detail, and rigorous assessment of A.C.T.'s Special Visit process. A.C.T. particularly appreciates that the majority of the visiting team who served on our 2017 reaffirmation visit returned for the Special Visit. Their academic and administrative experience and interests were well suited to A.C.T.'s mission and purpose.

A.C.T. leadership reaffirms its commitment to excellence in actor training and values the visiting team's commendations and recommendations. We look forward to meeting with the WSCUC Commission in June 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Pam MacKinnon", followed by a long horizontal line.

Pam MacKinnon,
Artistic Director and Joint-CEO

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Bielstein".

Jennifer Bielstein,
Executive Director and Joint-CEO