

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES
ASSOCIATION OF SENIOR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES
ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SENIOR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



March 9, 1999

David Baltimore
President
California Institute of Technology
1200 E. California Blvd.
Pasadena, CA 91125

Dear President Baltimore:

At its meeting on February 24-25, 1999, the Commission considered the report of the evaluation team that visited your campus October 12-15, 1998. The Commission also had available to it the self study prepared by the institution for this visit and your letter of January 4, 1999 in response to the team report. The Commission appreciated your response to this report and the opportunity to meet Jack Richards, Professor of Organic Chemistry. His comments were very helpful.

The Commission commends the institution for utilizing so effectively an innovative topics-based accreditation self study and review. Caltech selected in consultation with WASC three substantive and significant themes: the Honor Code and its effect on student life; undergraduate research and its relation to undergraduate education; and graduate education. The self study also included a data portfolio, with a "roadmap" connecting various portions of this portfolio to the WASC standards. Lastly, the Caltech report included a description of the evolution and status of the "Core Curriculum." The Commission was gratified that this approach resulted in active campus wide commitment and involvement, precipitating a highly effective analysis and critique of your themes as well as a positive team review. The Commission was pleased to observe your recommending "expanded use of topics-based reviews in the future, because it allows institutions to focus their

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attention on the issues of most concern to them” and your commenting that this topics-based self-study “was entirely satisfactory from our point of view.”

The evaluation team found much about the California Institute of Technology to commend. The team found the institution deeply concerned about its students; dedicated to research, teaching and student development with an active learning environment; the faculty are enthusiastic and effective in their efforts to sustain curriculum innovation and improvement. The institution has expanded the diversity of its student body, fostering respect for differences of culture. Additionally, Caltech has committed to integrating technology into every facet of the institution and is now using it effectively in the delivery of instruction. In sum, the team found a bold sense of institutional confidence rooted in a record of academic excellence.

The Commission commends Caltech for its efforts to respond to concerns identified in its last action letter and by the previous visiting team. There has been demonstrable progress, and Caltech is a fundamentally sound institution that is fulfilling its mission effectively. It enjoys a remarkable degree of institutional loyalty at all levels.

The evaluation team identified a number of important recommendations for further consideration by the institution. The Commission endorses those recommendations. In addition, the Commission wishes to highlight a number of areas warranting special attention for the Caltech community to address as it looks to the future.

Inclusiveness and Diversity: The Commission commends Caltech for its commitment to and success in recruiting women graduate students and underrepresented minority undergraduates. It shares the concerns of the evaluation team, however, that “progress is not as positive with underrepresented minorities [at the graduate level], and suggests that Caltech continue to develop strategies to address this circumstance.” The Commission agrees with the evaluation team that campus climate plays a major role in attracting and retaining students. With regard to underrepresented minority students at the graduate level, it is important for Caltech to sustain the initiatives it has taken to enhance the social experiences that contribute to high retention levels. The Commission further notes that the number of women faculty members who could be role models to future Caltech women remains small. The Commission encourages Caltech to continue its efforts to recruit and retain qualified women and underrepresented minorities for its faculty as well. This should be part of the larger, ongoing effort described above.

Curriculum and the Quality of Instruction: The Commission commends Caltech for its record of academic excellence and strong involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in research. The Commission was particularly impressed, as was the visiting team, by Caltech's response to recommendations made during the last WASC visit concerning the revision of the Science Core Curriculum. The visiting team notes that "the revised (Science) Core represents a milestone achievement that has come after the careful deliberation characteristic of Caltech and has resulted in major changes reflecting the mission and goals. Not only does the Institute now offer students an enriched Core Curriculum (but)...the new Core Curriculum has also raised the enthusiasm of the faculty." To guarantee Caltech's continued academic excellence, the Commission now strongly endorses the suggestion made by the team that Caltech undertake the revision of its Humanities and Social Sciences Core with the same deliberation applied to the Science Core.

The Honor Code: The Commission agrees with the observations made by the visiting team that "the Honor Code plays a central role in the life of the Institute . . . it honors and furthers the academic mission, is a source of pride . . . encourages students [and the faculty] to think about what is right and wrong [and] it is the key to Caltech's enviable climate of trust." The Commission sees the Honor Code in a state of dynamic equilibrium, i.e., a state that ensures the relevance of the honor code as the Institute evolves over time. As the student body and faculty change, Caltech should, with the same deliberate commitment illustrated in the evaluation of its Science Core, sustain the Honor Code as the centerpiece of its unique spirit of trust. The Commission would like to see Caltech share its vision of the Honor Code with peer institutions, encouraging a mutual exchange that will help it sustain "the most powerful of all traditions [at Caltech]: that students assume collective and individual responsibility for their own affairs."

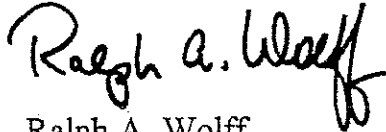
The Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm the accreditation of the California Institute of Technology.
2. Request ten (10) copies of a Fifth-Year report due November 1, 2003.
(Enclosed is a memorandum providing guidance on the format and content of the Fifth-Year report.)
3. Schedule the next comprehensive visit for the fall of 2008. A draft of the self-study undertaken in preparation for the visit will be due July 15, 2008. The final self-study report will be due two months before the site visit.

David Baltimore
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Please contact me if you have questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" at the end.

Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

RW/brn

cc: Marilyn Sutton
David Goodstein
Erwin Seibel
Members of the Team

Enclosure