



February 9, 2018

David Vasquez-Levy
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Dear President Vasquez-Levy,

The Board of Commissioners met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in February 2018 and included on its agenda Pacific School of Religion's recent comprehensive visit and the resulting report by the evaluation committee.

After reviewing the information in light of the pertinent Commission Standards and *Procedures*, the Board voted:

1. To reaffirm the accreditation of Pacific School of Religion for a period of ten years, with the next comprehensive evaluation visit in fall of 2027, one term before the period of accreditation expires on March 31, 2028.
2. To approve the following degree programs:

Master of Divinity
Master of Arts (Social Transformation) [Academic MA] (*see 7a below)
Master of Theological Studies [Academic MA]
Doctor of Ministry

[Note: the school also participates in the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees offered through the Graduate Theological Union, but these are listed under the GTU's accrediting history]

3. To approve the following extension site:

Office of the Hawaii Conference of the United Church of Christ (1848 Nu'uanu Ave, Honolulu, HI 96817), as a complete degree-granting site for the Doctor of Ministry degree.

4. To grant approval to offer comprehensive distance education: Yes
5. To encourage that attention be given to maintaining and enhancing these distinctive strengths:
 - a. Institutional commitment to and embodiment of diversity that permeates the institution, as demonstrated by the senior leadership, faculty, students, and other stakeholders. This diversity not only extends to race but also global representation, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, and socio-economic status, in ways that are rarely seen in graduate theological education. In the midst of this inter-cultural environment is the shared practice of open and honest exchange among all constituencies, with the overall goal being spiritual and social transformation.

- b. Culture of innovation, as evidenced by the school's investment in the Ignite Institute, its exploration of certificate programs and stackable credentials, its various centers and partnerships, and its understanding of theological education as being relevant in the public sphere. This includes clear attention to the school's geographical placement (including the three "valleys" of Silicon, Central, and Bay Area/East Bay) and to its selection of senior leaders who embody the mission and possibilities of the school in new ways.
 - c. Quality and commitment of faculty and staff, and the overall engagement and passion that all members of the community express toward the school.
6. To encourage that attention be given to the following areas of needed growth during the next period of accreditation, with each area linked to a specific Standard.
- a. Institutional environment (Standard 8, section 8.5). Given the numerous transitions and uncertainties in recent years (internal and external to the institution), the school should carefully attend to the development of an internal institutional environment that fosters resilience and that nurtures employees in their work. The school should also continue to give attention to ensuring that it engages the number and qualities of personnel needed to implement the programs of the school, in keeping with its purpose (Standard 8, section 8.1), as well as to developing practices of communication and collaboration that strengthen the bonds of trust between institutional stakeholders, including board, administration, faculty, students, ecclesial bodies, and other partners (Standard 7, preface).
 - b. Educational assessment (Educational Standard, section ES.6). While the school has attended carefully to student learning outcomes and degree program assessment, it should continue to refine these plans and processes in order to ensure that they are as simple and sustainable as possible while adequate to answer fundamental questions about educational effectiveness.
 - c. Distance education (Educational Standard, section ES.4). As the school continues to serve new constituents, and as it adapts to the changing service offerings from the Graduate Theological Union, it should continue to attend carefully to best practices in distance education. Recognizing that ATS defines distance learning as occurring when a course is offered without students and instructors being in the same location (Educational Standard, section ES.4.1), the school should develop policies and practices that ensure consistent educational experiences regardless of modality (synchronous video, asynchronous design, hybrid, or residential). As part of this, the school should carefully review all of the expectations of the Educational Standard, section ES.4, and should consult with Commission staff as appropriate.
 - d. Cooperative use of resources (Standard 8, section 8.6). Given the discontinuation of the shared service offerings by the Graduate Theological Union, the school should give close attention to developing resources (on its own, through partnerships, or via outsourcing) that provide needed support for student services, financial management, institutional advancement, information technology, and other infrastructure. The school should also engage in evaluation of these new arrangements to ensure that they continue to effectively meet student and institutional needs and that they meet all federal and legal expectations (Standard 2, section 2.2).
7. To require the following reports addressing areas of needed improvement, with each action below linked to one or more specific Standards:

- a. To require a report by May 1, 2018, clarifying whether the Master of Arts in Social Transformation is to be understood as a Commission Standard B [Professional MA] or Commission Standard D [Academic MA] degree program. Prior to submitting the report, the school should consult with Commission staff regarding the expectation of each of these Standards, including those related to nomenclature, residency, and program content.
- b. To require a report by February 1, 2019, regarding continued progress toward financial equilibrium. The report should include the FY2018 audit, the FY2018 management letter (if available), the school's analysis of its FY2018 operating revenues and expenditures, budget projections for FY2019 and FY2020, and a discussion that addresses the school's progress toward increasing its enrollment, achieving its ambitious fundraising goals, reducing its operating deficits, repaying its endowment borrowings, developing a financial contingency plan, and reducing its endowment draw. The report should include an update on the school's plans and progress regarding its real estate holdings, and should demonstrate that it has developed a clear financial plan for how the proceeds of any property sales will contribute to long-term institutional vitality (Standard 8, sections 8.2.1.1, 8.2.1.2, 8.2.1.3, and 8.2.1.4).
- c. To require a report by April 1, 2019, regarding institutional purpose, planning, and evaluation (Standard 1). This report should demonstrate that the school is able to articulate a clear mission and intentional guiding vision that permeates all stakeholders of the institution and that serves as the framework for comprehensive institutional planning and evaluation (Standard 1, preface and section 1.1). Particular attention should be given to the ways in which this mission and vision inform and support institutional decision-making (with particular attention to programs offered, allocation of resources, and constituencies served) as well as ongoing evaluation procedures for institutional vitality (Standard 1, section 1.2).
- d. To require a report by February 1, 2021, regarding continued progress toward financial equilibrium. The report should include the FY2020 audit, the FY2020 management letter (if available), the school's analysis of its FY2020 operating revenues and expenditures, budget projections for FY2021 and FY2022, and a discussion that addresses the school's progress toward increasing its enrollment, achieving its ambitious fundraising goals, reducing its operating deficits, repaying its endowment borrowings, developing a financial contingency plan, and reducing its endowment draw (Standard 8, sections 8.2.1.1, 8.2.1.2, 8.2.1.3, and 8.2.1.4).

Actions of the Board of Commissioners are effective as of **February 2, 2018**. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Debbie Creamer, Director
Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation