

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

University of the West

March 8-11

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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

1. Introduction: Institutional Context; Response to Previous Commission Actions

University of the West (UWest) is a private, nonprofit, non-sectarian, co-educational institute offering undergraduate, graduate, certificate, and continuing education programs. Founded by the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, a Chinese Buddhist monk, UWest was originally incorporated as Hsi Lai University in 1990 and opened in 1991 in Hacienda Heights, California. In 1996, the institution moved to its current 10-acre site in Rosemead, a suburb of Los Angeles; in 2004, its name was changed to the University of the West. According to the UWest website, “The university is a pioneering partnership between Chinese and American Buddhists to establish an American university integrating liberal arts traditions and Buddhist wisdom” (*Our History*).

UWest is one of six international higher education institutions founded by the Fo Guang Shan (FGS), or “Buddha’s Light Mountain order, one of the largest Buddhist organizations in the world” (*Our Founder*). The university is the only FGS-affiliated institution located in the United States and “one of only five regionally accredited Buddhist-affiliated institutions of higher learning in the United States overall” (2021 Institutional Report 2).

While a non-sectarian institution, the university’s mission statement reflects its Buddhist background:

The mission of University of the West is to provide a whole-person education in a context informed by Buddhist wisdom and values, and to facilitate cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West. (*Our Mission*)

The university offers programs in religious studies, Buddhist Chaplaincy and Ministry, as well as in business, psychology, liberal arts, and English: four bachelor’s degrees, four master’s degrees, and two doctoral degrees, as follows:

- BAs in Business Administration, English, Liberal Arts, Psychology

- MA in Psychology-Marriage and Family Therapy, MA in Religious Studies, Master of Business Administration, and a Master of Divinity in Buddhist Chaplaincy
- Doctor of Buddhist Ministry and PhD in Religious Studies

In addition to these degree programs, the university offers several certificate and non-degree programs.

UWest is a small university with a total student headcount of 230 during spring semester 2021 (2021 Institutional Report 3). The faculty consists of 15 full-time faculty (FTE) and 44 adjunct instructors, totaling 35 FTE faculty as of spring 2021. As is indicated in the 2021 Institutional Report, “From 2006—the year of UWest’s initial accreditation—until Fall 2020, the university had granted 196 bachelor’s degrees, 471 master’s degrees, and 43 doctoral degrees, as well as 92 post-MBA certificates” (3). The majority of UWest’s degrees in the past fourteen years have been at the master’s level.

B. Description of Team’s Review Process

The team began its review process in advance of the Offsite Review (OSR) on Sept. 8 and 9, 2021, by studying the institutional report and associated evidence available for download on the cloud content management system (box.com) and completing WSCUC worksheets that invited examination of the institutional report under the WSCUC standards and components. During the OSR, the team prepared lines of inquiry and identified commendations based upon the institutional report. The OSR included a video conference call with UWest administrators, in which the team shared the areas that would be further explored during the Accreditation Visit (AV) on March 8-11, 2022. The lines of inquiry were provided to UWest, and the institution subsequently submitted additional information requested in that document.

Before the AV, the team reviewed the additional materials and, in a pre-visit conference call, discussed the materials and determined a plan for conducting the AV. The team considered a preliminary visit schedule drafted by the UWest Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) with respect to individuals and groups with whom the team wished to meet. After further discussion, a final visit schedule was prepared and sent to the team before the actual visit.

The WSCUC visit began on Wednesday, March 9, 2022, with a meeting with the president, followed by a session with the executive cabinet. These two meetings helped set the context for the visit, particularly the challenges and potential opportunities at UWest. Meetings with academic leadership; the Chief Financial Officer; the University-Wide Assessment Council, which serves as the WSCUC Steering Committee; the Board of Trustees; the Financial Auditor; the Student Services Team; and open forums with undergraduate and graduate students filled the day. Additionally, team members completed a campus tour and were welcomed with a Buddhist tea ceremony. The second day began with meetings with members of the faculty, faculty senate executive officers, the Registrar/Financial Aid/Student Accounts, Enrollment and Marketing, the library staff, Institutional Research and Institutional Effectiveness, the Employee Council and other staff members, the IT and Moodle Team, and the Student Success Team and Retention Committee. UWest scheduled some meetings face-to-face and some via Zoom. The online sessions allowed greater participation, which was particularly apparent in the conference with former students who joined the meeting from across the nation and internationally.

Sessions focused on the original lines of inquiry and additional questions developed by the team. At least two team members were present for all sessions, with one team member assigned to be the discussion leader for each session. A confidential email account was established to allow for greater participation from the campus community, and the assistant chair monitored it throughout the visit. The visit ended on Friday, March 11, 2022, with a private meeting between the team chair and president, followed by a public exit meeting in which the final commendations and recommendations were presented. Every session was productive and positive, and the team was very impressed by the level of commitment of all with whom team members spoke.

[C. Institution's Reaccreditation Report and Update: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence](#)

The institutional report submitted by UWest was clear, well organized, and thoughtfully addressed the review areas. The report provided a candid assessment of the institution's challenges and activities it plans to pursue. The quality of the report suggests that preparation was thorough and was completed with the involvement of faculty and staff. The institutional report indicates that town hall meetings were held

explain the significance of accreditation and gain feedback from the broader community. The report also provided direct links to various documents that addressed how the institution is responding to WSCUC expectations and standards. Additional materials and updates were available on box.com, and other information requested by the team was provided promptly.

Section II – Evaluation of Institutional Essays

Component 1: Response to previous Commission actions

UWest publishes all documents related to accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) to promote transparency. UWest applied for accreditation from the WSCUC and attained Eligibility in 1998. It was granted WSCUC Candidacy in 2002. In February 2006, UWest secured Initial Accreditation by WSCUC. In June 2009, the university submitted an Institutional Proposal and a Capacity and Preparatory Report (CPR) in the fall of 2010 for a Site Visit in December of that year. In February 2011, the Commission acted to receive the CPR report, continue accreditation, reschedule the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) from spring 2012 to fall 2014, and schedule a special visit for fall 2012.

The issues to be addressed by the special visit were as follows: Mission clarification and communication problems; Board of Trustees issues; Leadership qualifications; Resources; Academic curriculum issues; Faculty policies and procedures; Assessment infrastructure. The special visit team found that the issues had been primarily addressed and recommended that the EER visit remain in place for fall 2014.

The March 2015 Commission Action Letter reaffirmed UWest's accreditation for seven years while scheduling a special visit in 2017, followed by a progress report, which UWest submitted on May 1, 2019.

The 2017 special visit focused on the following:

1. A completed strategic plan and the initial results following its implementation;
2. Analysis of disaggregated student success data and actions based on this data to increase student success;

3. Further development of a graduate culture, particularly as related to the ThD.

In its June 2017 letter, the Commission noted improvements in several areas but identified the following for further attention:

1. While the institution is striving to develop further its graduate culture, more attention needs to be paid to faculty support. Areas to address include the student-faculty ratio for graduate mentoring (CFR 3.1, 3.2), clarity of expectations for tenure and promotion (CFR 2.8, 3.2), and professional development (CRF 2.9, 3.3).
2. Given the dynamic and rapidly changing environment in higher education and the changing financial position of the institution, University of the West should continue to monitor its goals, subsidiary goals, and metrics and revise these as needed. In particular, taking into account current financial and enrollment levels, the institution should concentrate on developing realistic tactical, operational, and concrete steps in support of its strategic goals (CFR 4.6).
3. Through enrollment management planning, the institution should focus attention on how realistic growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollments will be achieved and how retention will be improved, including branding and outreach efforts (CFR 3.4).
4. The institution should develop and implement a structured process for collecting and using qualitative data to increase student learning and success across diverse student cohorts, with attention paid to the distinct needs of both domestic and international students related to academic preparation and college readiness (CFR 2.10).

In its May 2019 progress report, UWest recapped its response to each area identified by the Commission:

In summary, UWest is working toward the ability to maintain low student-faculty ratios in its graduate departments even after enrollment numbers rebound. Expectations, policies, and procedures surrounding tenure and promotion have been clarified in the revised Faculty Handbook, and faculty have committed professional development funds towards the development and implementation of online course offerings, with a view to the enrollment gains and subsequent professional development opportunities such gains would make possible. The institution is modifying its current strategic plan (as well as its approach to the 2020-2025 strategic planning process) by revisiting strategic priorities and metrics and prioritizing innovation and efficiency in response to the enrollment decline. Qualitative, narrative feedback is being collected and reviewed, and will be used to improve student success both inside and outside of the classroom, with systematic additions to feedback-gathering opportunities planned for the next academic year.

The offsite review and site visit were originally scheduled for spring and fall 2021; the 2021 visits were postponed to fall 2021 and spring 2022 by request of UWest because of several significant leadership changes.

Dr. Chiung-Sally Chou was serving as Interim President and assisting the board of trustees in conducting a

search for a permanent president after the July 2019 resignation of Dr. Otto Chang. In addition, Dr. Peter Rojcewicz, the ALO and Chief Academic Officer for the past four years, left the university in November 2019.

[Component 2: Compliance: Review under WSCUC Standards and compliance with federal requirements; Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators](#)

Every institution under review for reaffirmation is evaluated for compliance with the WSCUC standards and is required to have in place policies and procedures considered essential for sound academic policies. The team's finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that UWest has provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate compliance with all four of the WSCUC Standards of Accreditation. Final determination of compliance with the Standards rests with the Commission. The sections below describe the results of the team's review of each Standard.

Component 2 of the report also includes a review of UWest's Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI) and the extent to which it offers an analytic and reflective overview of the assessment systems in place and what components or processes may need to be developed.

Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

Institutional Purposes (CFR 1.1-1.2)

UWest has a strong mission and core values integrated within Institutional and Programmatic Learning Outcomes for a clear picture of its purpose. The university transparently shares all transfer and degree requirements in its degree roadmaps. These degree roadmaps are very well done, encapsulating all appropriate information for an introduction to the degree. General Education (GE) is clearly delineated from degree requirements. UWest also publishes retention and graduation data on its website (CFR 1.1-1.2).

Integrity and Transparency (CFRs 1.3-1.8)

The university demonstrates Integrity and Transparency through policies and procedures documented in the faculty and student handbooks. The faculty handbook specifically addresses academic freedom policies and practices (CFR 1.3). In discussions with faculty, it appears that the faculty "own" the

curriculum, and they have input into policies and procedures. Faculty from the Business program described a collaborative effort within the department to develop the new Data Analytics option. They used student interest, industry trends, and job opportunities to demonstrate need; they then worked with the Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee (APCC—members are department chairs, administration) at the university level for final approval. The APCC also reviews proposed PLOs for specificity and measurability. The Institutional Effectiveness Manager works with department chairs to ensure PLO alignment with ILOs.

Education is the primary purpose of the University of the West. The university is one of six international higher education institutions founded and partially funded by the Fo Guang Shan (FGS), or “Buddha’s Light Mountain” order. The curriculum includes religion and Buddhism, as well as other degrees that match the mission and core values of the institution. In addition, although the Board of Trustees is actively engaged with the financial viability and the mission of the university, UWest faculty have autonomy in planning and implementing curriculum (CFR 1.5)

Institutional Research is an area of weakness for the university that its leaders are working to improve. There is a clear goal to rebuild the culture of inquiry based on data. Administration recently hired a part-time consultant in this area, and President Ta discussed the importance of data in decision-making. The university is updating and generating reports to inform the campus community and analyze and share (visualize) data for decision-making. Precise analysis of retention, time to graduation, and graduation rates on the university website will help to improve community transparency (CFR 1.6, 1.7).

The university provides a truthful representation of its status, discussing concerns that enrollments have dropped from 400 students to 182 students (CFR 1.6). University members also discuss how enrollments impact their financial standing and business practices. Lack of staff to support faculty and administration in

implementing UWest's educational mission was a common theme in several onsite interviews. The faculty stated it was sometimes hard to balance the need to support students vs. "getting things done," but then described a "roll up your sleeves" teamwork mentality to meet all needs. Given how the school has been so deeply impacted by declining enrollment, it is the perception of the faculty that the administration is relying less on shared governance than might be appropriate. They shared that administration is now more centralized for policy decisions and even sometimes faculty teaching assignments. Although they want to assert greater shared governance moving forward, they were also clear that they appreciate the new stability with leadership and are optimistic for the future.

In terms of diversity, the university seems to have a diversity that fits its mission (CFR 1.4). University members talk about having a commitment to diversity as a pan-Buddhist organization. They have many different Buddhist practices with different ethnic backgrounds represented, as well as Christian and Muslim. They are also partners with other religious organizations in a consortium. The university also values racial diversity.

University representatives were open and honest in their self-study and follow-up questions from site visitors. They have fair and equitable policies and procedures in place and a process for timely and fair responses to complaints and grievances (CFR 1.6)

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions

Teaching and Learning (CFRs 2.1-2.7)

UWest has clearly defined programs that ensure the university's ability to meet its core functions related to teaching and learning (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2a). All degrees at bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels are defined by levels of student achievement that appear appropriate for those degree levels (CFRs 2.2, 2.2b). Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) are required for every course and are also required to be included on all syllabi (*UWest Faculty Handbook* 14) (CFRs 2.2, 2.3). Faculty members are also responsible for developing CLOs, assessing student learning, and demonstrating standards achievement (CFR 2.4). To enhance this process, UWest
Rev 7/2017

has “revitalized” its annual academic program review process to support a more scheduled and systematic assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (CFR 2.4).

UWest is committed to its students’ learning and having them achieve CLOs (CFRs 2.5 and 2.6). However, given the leadership turnover, the heavy workload, and the pandemic, it appears that it has been difficult for UWest to maintain systematic and scheduled assessment of student learning over the past five years, based on review of the annual program reports. Several faculty members indicated that regularizing the assessment process in annual program reports has helped further dialogue about student learning. Regularizing the process might also ensure that assessment is completed. Based on a review of a small sample of assessment reports provided by UWest, it is evident that additional work might also be needed in having students achieve “acceptable” target achievement levels. Such efforts might be aided by the newly formed Program Review Committee; the Undergraduate Transformation Team, which is assisting with undergraduate program assessment; and the University-Wide Assessment Committee. The recent evaluation and updating of the 5-year program review process, with more precise evaluative criteria and a planning master calendar, might also enhance the process (CFR 2.7).

Scholarship and Creative Activity (CFRs 2.8-2.9)

UWest’s *Faculty Handbook* defines teaching, research, and service expectations for full-time faculty, including six tenured, four non-tenured, and five non-tenure-track faculty (UWest Faculty Workload 1) (CFR 2.8). However, in an “effort to make workload expectations more transparent and specific, the Faculty Senate is engaging in a major revision of the *UWest Faculty Handbook*, in collaboration with the CAO, President, and Board of Trustees” (UWest Faculty Workload 1). During the visit, a common concern noted was the lack of administrative support for department chairs, who receive a single 3-unit course reduction per semester but provide a diverse range of work for the university. (The standard course load at UWest is three 3-unit courses per semester.) This revision also would help to foster “appropriate linkages among scholarship, teaching, assessment, student learning, and service” (CFR 2.9).

Student Learning and Success (CFRs 2.10-2.14)

UWest provides disaggregated retention and graduation data for the last four years on its website. However, in the recent past, there has been turnover in the institutional researcher position, which has made it difficult for the university to generate, monitor, and use such data on a consistent basis to improve student learning and success. The university recently contracted a part-time institutional researcher to enhance its institutional research capabilities (CFR 2.10).

Co-curricular programs regularly appear to provide satisfaction surveys to students related to specific programs or activities offered; however, there appears to be little evidence of regular analysis of this indirect data for programmatic improvement. The institutional report, though, indicates that student affairs' learning outcomes have been redesigned to better reflect the institution's mission. The outcomes are aligned with the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education standards. According to the institutional report, this work will help student services develop and implement programmatic assessment (CFR 2.11).

The UWest website and catalog provide "complete information about admissions, degree requirements, course offerings, and educational costs" (CFR 2.12). Students also receive regular academic advising, with the duty shared by the academic adviser and department chairs at the undergraduate level. The respective department chairs and faculty handle graduate advising.

Although small in enrollment, UWest provides academic and other support services such as tutoring, services for students with disabilities, financial aid counseling, wellness support, residential life, student success workshops, international student support, and other appropriate services and programs (CFR 2.13).

The university also has formal policies and articulation agreements with feeder institutions, including participating in the California Community Colleges Associate Degree for Transfer Program and Memorandum of Understandings with Fo Guang and Nanhua universities in Taiwan (CFR 2.14).

Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

Faculty and Staff (3.1-3.3)

UWest has faculty and staff who are professionally qualified, with a substantial and continuing commitment to the institution. Throughout interviews with faculty members, staff, and administrators, it was clear to the team that everyone wears many hats and that additional staff and department resources will need to be provided as UWest grows. In addition to a faculty hiring plan, UWest will need to create a hiring plan for staff that includes prioritization over the next several years to align with the enrollment growth projections of the strategic plan (CFR 3.1).

UWest has performance evaluation plans within both faculty and employee handbooks. The team discovered that faculty evaluations are not consistently completed and that no current evaluation of adjunct faculty exists outside of student course evaluations. Additionally, the team observed that full-time faculty members have significant non-teaching responsibilities compared to their peers at other institutions. During the visit, the team was informed that the faculty had presented a proposal for defining faculty workload to the administration, which the administration shared with the team. Reaching agreement on this issue will be crucial to supporting faculty and student learning and success in the future (3.2).

The UWest Office of the Chief Academic Officer supports faculty by providing research opportunities and workshops. UWest has also begun hosting all faculty and staff workshops on institutional effectiveness where institutional research is reviewed, and training is provided on the use of institutional research data. Along with an institution-wide hiring prioritization plan, UWest would benefit from ensuring sufficient resources for faculty and staff development activities to improve teaching, learning, and learning outcomes assessment (CFR 3.3).

Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources (CFRs 3.4-3.5)

UWest has operated without an overall operational deficit for at least the last three years and has significant cash reserves and available investment assets. UWest also has committed supporting organizations that provide substantial levels of funding on an annual basis. However, over the same period, UWest has experienced progressive declines in enrollment and student revenues, requiring the use of cash reserves and investments that the UWest board authorized to cover the budget shortfalls and meet UWest's ongoing financial obligations. UWest is projecting an increase in enrollment over the next five years and planned continued use of cash reserves to meet the annual operating budget needs. If the aspirational enrollment goals of the five-year financial plan are not met, the institution will be forced to reach deeper into the cash reserves, which would result in a much more tenuous financial situation (CFR 3.4).

UWest has facilities, information, and technology resources that are sufficient to support its academic offerings and the broader needs of faculty, staff, and students. The team learned that there are opportunities for technological integration of various systems with the student information system, "Anthology"; however, adopting them has been prohibitive due to the cost. As part of the recent investment in personnel and activities to support institutional research efforts, UWest will also need to find a way to maintain and distribute institutional research data to the community in useful ways and formats (CFR 3.5).

Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes (CFRs 3.6-3.10)

While UWest has experienced significant challenges with the turnover of top levels of institutional leadership over the past several years, the team affirms that the current UWest administration, at all levels, appears to be characterized by integrity, high performance, appropriate responsibility, and accountability (CFR 3.6).

UWest has established clear roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority within the institution. It is also clear to the team that most members of the UWest community understand the decision-making process, including who they may go to if they have concerns or new ideas to present for consideration. The current

president was hired in 2020, and the community understands her authority and sees her as approachable (3.7).

UWest has a full-time chief executive officer and a chief financial officer whose full-time responsibilities are to UWest. The institution also has other qualified administrators to provide effective educational leadership and management (3.8).

UWest has a very committed governing board that understands its legal and fiduciary responsibilities and provides appropriate oversight of the institution, including hiring and evaluating the chief executive officer. The team affirms UWest for its efforts to diversify the professional profile of the board members, recently bringing on new members who have backgrounds and expertise in higher education (3.9).

UWest maintains a statement on shared governance seeking to include faculty, students, administration, and board members in the governance process. This effort is carried out through the work of various committees under the purview of both faculty and administration. The team affirms UWest's commitment to shared governance and urges the administration to adhere to established policies and procedures for decision-making, particularly related to academic and faculty matters, in support of shared governance (CFR 3.10).

Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

Quality Assurance Processes (CFR 4.1-4.2)

The University of the West is working hard to overcome the twin challenges of leadership transition and the tangible and ongoing effects of the pandemic. While recognizing very real challenges, the university has tried to continue to make progress on WSCUC standards and improvements in data collection and analysis. An accreditation review in 2015, a special visit in 2017, and a university response letter in 2019 all

indicated the intention of the university to collect, analyze and interpret data in aggregated and disaggregated forms.

The Institutional Report of 2021, the Offsite Review of Fall 2021, and the Review Visit in March of 2022 all evaluated current practices of the university as it relates to Standards 4.1 and 4.2. The university has demonstrated intentionality toward implementing an academic program review and educational effectiveness assessment process and implementation framework. There are several specific steps included in building this framework articulated in the institutional report itself:

1. Student Affairs learning outcomes (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education standards 17).
2. Program outcomes are centered on the knowledge, skills, and outlook in the real world (Know, Be, Do 20).
3. Degrees have all been defined with specific learning outcomes and Program Learning Outcomes (21).
4. The University-Wide Assessment Council, established in and operating continuously since 2012, provides a broader framework for assessment and quality improvement (27).
5. A systematic approach to educational effectiveness is being improved and implemented through capstone courses, at graduation, and across the General Education curriculum and Undergraduate Transformation Task Force with standardized evaluation forms and a variety of national assessment resources (35-39)
6. The university has established a goal of standardized writing rubrics across the curriculum and a goal within five years for all GE courses to have standardized assignment rubrics (35-36)

The team visit brought both encouragement and challenge as we saw that with the coming of President Ta and the university's commitment to follow-up on previous recommendations, we are seeing very real progress in many respects, including the retention of a part-time and well-qualified Institutional Research

professional. The University-Wide Assessment Council appears to be operating and developing a culture of analysis. Given the reduced enrollment and the scarcity of resources, we believe the university is making strides. Continued progress in these dimensions should continue to be prioritized. Data collection appears to have increased, but the analysis and utilization of data to drive program offering and refinement decisions appear to remain in an embryonic state across the university.

Federal Requirements

a. Credit Hour and Program Length Review

As per the University Catalog (89)—the Credit Hour Policy: in accordance with established academic standards, UWest defines one credit hour (usually referred to as one-semester unit or just unit) as equivalent to 1 hour of lecture plus 2 hours (undergraduate) or 3 hours (graduate) of preparation per week for a total of 45 hours (undergraduate) or 60 hours (graduate) per semester or the equivalent, as appropriate to intended learning outcomes and as measured by student achievement. Every hour of instruction includes 50 minutes of instruction and a 10-minute break. Courses that fall outside of the traditional description above must require 45 hours (undergraduate) or 60 hours (graduate) of student work to result in the award of one credit hour. Such courses may include, but are not limited to, service learning, online, laboratory, and physical activity courses, internships, directed research, and independent study. Courses offered in less than 16 weeks must fulfill the 45/60-hour requirement as explained above to ensure the same level of student achievement of intended learning outcomes as provided in a 16-week semester. For example, in a traditional 3-unit undergraduate lecture course, this requirement is fulfilled through 15 weekly class sessions held over the period of a 16-week semester and including 3 hours of direct faculty instruction each week with an additional weekly requirement of at least 6 hours of reading, assignments, or other appropriate work completed outside the classroom, for a total of 90 hours over the length of the term. A review of

undergraduate and graduate syllabi confirms that the credit hour and program length guidelines are followed.

b. Marketing and Recruitment Review

Through interviews with members of the UWest administration, including recruitment and marketing, the team confirmed that UWest follows federal regulations on recruiting domestic students, which prohibits Title IV eligible institutions from providing incentive compensation to employees or third-party entities for their success in securing student enrollments.

Degree completion and cost: Within the course catalog section related to each program, UWest provides information about the institution's design for completion timeline. However, no information is provided about the typical length of time to degree based on actual student completions. The catalog includes a statement that if a student does not follow the program's design, it will take them longer to complete. Additionally, UWest provides clear and well-organized marketing information showing the overall cost of the degree for each of the degree programs. This material assumes the student follows the institution's design for completing the program and may not account for the actual time and cost based on the typical length of time to degree.

Careers and employment: Within the marketing brochures and the catalog sections for the graduate programs, UWest describes the kinds and types of jobs that students may be prepared for. The marketing brochures and catalog sections for the undergraduate programs provide a good overview of the program; however, they do not describe the kinds of jobs students will be prepared or qualified for. UWest does not make publicly available information about the employment of its graduates for the benefit of current and prospective students.

c. Student Complaints Review

The policies appear to be in order and consistent with regulations. All grievance procedures are outlined in the catalog, accessible to all students. The catalog differentiates between grievances and general

complaints and refers students to the Office of Student Affairs for general complaints. The catalog provides resources for students regarding the following grievance procedures:

- a. General Discrimination Grievance (114)
- b. Disability Discrimination Grievance (114)
- c. Sexual Misconduct/Title IX complaint (114)
- d. Grade grievances (92)
- e. Title IX Nondiscrimination & Harassment Policies (116)

Students are also given contact information (117) to address concerns to the president or contact WSCUC or the Department of Education for third-party review.

There have not been any grievances that have been reported internally or to WSCUC since the last reaffirmation. Complaints are addressed by the Office of Student Affairs. An example of a complaint resolution was reviewed, and the complaint was dealt with in a respectful, collegial, and timely manner to the student's satisfaction.

d. Transfer Credit Review

UWest delineates transfer credit rules in the University Catalog (79-80). The institution recommends students meet IGETC or CSU GE requirements for certification. Transfer credit for undergraduate lower-division coursework is verified by the registrar, while upper-division coursework is confirmed by the faculty using the catalog or syllabi from the original university to verify content and assessment methods. They accept up to 90 units (70 LD) of transfer for a 120-unit degree, although very few students transfer in more than 70 units. UWest waives GE appropriately for a second baccalaureate degree if the first baccalaureate degree was earned at an accredited institution. The university accepts Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) for a maximum of 15 units by accepting AP credit, Veteran's credit through ACE, and credit by exam.

Summary of Component 2: The team’s findings, which are subject to Commission review, is that UWest has provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate compliance with the Standards and federal requirements. Final determination of compliance with the Standards rests with the Commission. The team identified areas where further attention and development are needed, as noted in the recommendations section of this report.

Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, quality, and integrity of the degrees

University representatives state that they assure the quality of their degrees by 1) direct assessment of learning (addressed in Component 4); 2) commitment to maintaining high expectations while providing simultaneous support to help students to meet those expectations; and 3) providing co-curriculum that enhances the curricular experience. A common statement from students, faculty, and student services staff was the advantage of this small university setting. There was a universal feeling of “home” and “community” that led to assurances that students could not be lost within the system. The University of the West asserts that integrity is maintained via a whole-person approach to student success, including focusing on the student’s physical, psychological, spiritual well-being, ethical outlook, and academic performance. Formal and informal support services and activities for body, mind, and spirit are integrated with the educational mission. They discussed their SEAS (Student Early Alert System) and 4- and 8-week alert programs to support student success but did not expand on how the whole person is assessed or how the integration of the whole person into their academic performance is assessed. The university indirectly assesses many of its student services; however, direct assessment of these programs is still in a nascent state.

The integrity of degrees is also maintained via advocacy from faculty members. It is demonstrated through their commitment to delivering high-quality instruction and ensuring student performance meets stated course expectations. Faculty are expected to follow policies and procedures for academic programs and course proposals. They are also expected to ensure high standards of teaching via their involvement with research, scholarship, and creative activity (RSCA). The university is now considering specific RSCA

standards for faculty. Integrity is also maintained by accurately naming and reporting degrees, concentrations, and minors and a comprehensive evaluation and degree clearance process. Degree Roadmaps offer students a highly transparent review of expectations. The roadmaps are also used for advising, and degree audits for graduation. In addition, graduate students must meet expectations for successfully completing a culminating activity (i.e., comprehensive examination, thesis, or dissertation). Discussions with students during the site visit indicate that many students choose to attend the University of the West because it is one of the few accredited universities to offer Buddhist studies in the nation, and accreditation implied a strong degree of integrity to these students.

A degree earned from the University of the West reflects the university's Mission, Vision, and Values. Students graduating from one of the university's four undergraduate or six graduate degree programs will earn a degree that reflects specific content from that degree area that is also aligned with the Values of "an educational experience informed by Humanistic Buddhist values: becoming people of strong *character*; practicing *compassion*; and building sustainable *community*" (2021 Institutional Report 5). University representatives align the mission and values with the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILO) of "Know – Be – Do." The university is to be commended for operationalizing its ILOs into Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Learning Domains. University representatives also require degree programs to align their Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) with their ILOs, and thus their core values. A review of PLOs reveals that each degree program incorporates and aligns each of their ILOs with their PLOs. Undergraduate Degrees also integrate GE Learning Outcomes and WSCUC Core Competencies into their PLOs. Although PLO direct assessment is required annually, there was no reporting connecting PLOs to ILOs, or specific direct assessment of ILOs. GE PLOs are assessed directly; however, GE assessment is typically a Lower Division assessment. Therefore, it is unclear if WSCUC Core Competencies are measured at the end of the student learning experience.

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Component 4: Educational Quality: Student learning, core competencies, and standards of performance at graduation

The institution has a well-conceived assessment plan. UWest is to be commended for its alignment of Institutional and Program Learning Outcomes for every degree program. In addition, the team recognizes the institution's progress in program-review infrastructure and data collection. The university requires an annual assessment and a 5-year program review. The annual assessment template includes setting a minimum level of achievement and acceptable and ideal targets, but it does not require reporting of that data, just a qualitative summary of findings. This offers an infrastructure to benchmark progress over time that is not being fully utilized. The 5-year program review directly asks how competencies were developed, how they are related to WSCUC Core Competencies, how performance standards are set, communicated, and validated, assessment methods, outcomes of assessment, and closing the loop.

Although the university has developed an excellent assessment reporting process and has anecdotes on how that information is used to revise the curriculum, the follow-up assessment to determine if the curriculum change improved outcomes (closing the loop) lacks transparency. The GE five-year self-study included an assessment of information literacy using the capstone course and final paper assignment as an artifact. Findings revealed that student skills in evaluating the strength of evidence were lacking. The department chair shared the findings with instructors during the GE faculty meeting. Recommendations include adjusting the curriculum in a variety of ways. Results to close the loop will be formally documented after the 2022-23 academic year, when GE has its next 5-year review. Other examples of closing the loop were offered from the Master's of Divinity and the Master's in Psychology programs, although follow-up examination of curricular change as a result of assessment has yet to be completed. It appears that the assessment infrastructure was created recently and continues to be refined. Assessing changes in curriculum or co-curricular activities that are made as a result of assessment analysis (closing the loop) results appears to be requested only during the 5-year program process. Therefore, there are few examples of closing the loop because most programs have not yet completed another five years for their second program review. It is recommended that programs report on their curricular changes and closing-the-loop assessments in annual

reports, which departments are supposed to be doing. In this manner, the faculty will have data and be able to more quickly assess if curricular changes are addressing the issue and, if not, to make further adjustments before the next 5-year cycle occurs.

The commitment of University of the West to focus on the Affective Domain within its academic curriculum (often measured with action verbs such as “value” or “internalize”) is applauded and is crucial to alignment with its Mission and Values. Determination of how to quantify assessment of the affective domain is often difficult. It appears that University of the West has just started to initiate measurement of this domain in fall 2021 when it resumed regular administration of an institutional Exit Survey to indirectly measure students’ self-perceived understanding and acquisition of affective objectives. Preliminary results (out of a sample size of 10) show an average rating of 4.6 out of 5. University of the West states this indicates that its graduating students believe that their time at UWest has helped them to value character, compassion, and community. Caution is advised in interpreting data from a small sample with no comparison to an entry survey and potential sample bias. University representatives plan to continue this survey and add focus groups on exit. Also, beginning in the 2020-21 academic year, the annual program report will include prompts in this area which will include the program PLO to which the course is mapped and grading criteria/rubrics.

In addition to focusing on the Affective Domain, University of the West also clearly weaves its mission and core values into the Psychomotor Domain of “Do.” “Character, Compassion, and Community” are reinforced by co-curricular activities and curriculum-embedded field experiences. They are also integrated within degree requirements, specifically by a service-learning project within the undergraduate curriculum. Although the learning outcomes of student services and offices are offered as an example of assessment of student development within the affective domain, it appears that direct assessment of how co-curricular programs and the focus on the whole person impact academic success is not conducted.

Component 5: Student Success: Student learning, retention, and graduation

In its institutional report, UWest reported aggregated retention and graduation rates as of the most recent

year of fall 2020 (see Table 1 below). Measuring (together) the retention and persistence of first-time, full time (FTFT) first-year students as the percent (%) returned at 75%, below the previous fall 2019 of 89%, but an overall upward trajectory compared to fall 2017 at 55% and fall 2018 at 61%.

| Retention & Persistence of FTFT Freshmen | | | | | | | | | Graduation Rates | | |
|--|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|--------|--------|
| Start | % Returned | | | | | | | | Year Graduated | | |
| | FA 2013 | FA 2014 | FA 2015 | FA 2016 | FA 2017 | FA 2018 | FA 2019 | FA 2020 | 4 Year | 5 Year | 6 Year |
| FA 2012 | 78% | 70% | 67% | | | | | | 19% | 37% | 48% |
| FA 2013 | | 61% | 33% | 28% | | | | | 0% | 6% | 11% |
| FA 2014 | | | 52% | 41% | 41% | | | | 7% | 10% | 21% |
| FA 2015 | | | | 83% | 67% | 67% | | | 17% | 50% | |
| FA 2016 | | | | | 55% | 45% | 35% | | 0% | | |
| FA 2017 | | | | | | 61% | 50% | 46% | | | |
| FA 2018 | | | | | | | 89% | 78% | | | |
| FA 2019 | | | | | | | | 75% | | | |
| FA 2020 | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 1: Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rate Trends (UWest 2021 Institutional Report)

According to the Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for fall 2019 (the most recent data available) disaggregated between undergraduate at 86% and graduate students at 81%, the rates are similar with the 3-year average at 76%. This report is from the institutional research section of the UWest website (see Table 2 below).


|  | | Academic Department Cohorts: Fall to Fall Retention Rates | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---------|---------|---------|------------|------------|------------|
| | FA 2015 | FA 2016 | FA 2017 | FA 2018 | FA 2019 | 8 Year Avg | 5 Year Avg | 3 Year Avg |
| University | 80% | 75% | 75% | 73% | 84% | 77% | 76% | 76% |
| Undergraduate | 85% | 68% | 70% | 79% | 86% | 71% | 75% | 76% |
| Graduate | 75% | 82% | 83% | 68% | 81% | 82% | 78% | 77% |

Table 2: Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates 2015-2019 (UWest website)

UWest welcomed its first domestic undergraduate student cohort in fall 2012 (2021 Institutional Report 53). The team learned that in the first few years following this change in recruitment, UWest struggled with retaining these students. In conversations with UWest staff and faculty members, the team learned that many of these students were ill-prepared to succeed at the college level. Many of these students were first-generation college students from underrepresented minority groups. It was clear to the team that the UWest staff and faculty, who are so dedicated to supporting their students, felt helpless, and their limited resources were overwhelmed by the needs of these students. In response to this, UWest examined their policies and

procedures, identifying critical priorities for the future, ongoing support and success of all students, including:

- Raising the minimum GPA level for incoming first-year students from 2.0 to 2.5;
- Providing structured faculty mentoring for the first two years of the UG program;
- Continuing and expanding supplemental instruction and writing across the curriculum to improve basic skills;
- Redesigning and streamlining the summer Bridge to University program; and
- Improving student use of campus resources through systematic assessment. (2021 Institutional Report 53)

The team applauds UWest for taking these steps to try to ensure that prospective students are prepared for the academic programs they may enroll in and for going above and beyond to support currently enrolled students. Many staff and faculty who took on additional responsibilities to support these students did so on top of their full-time responsibilities, making that particular arrangement unsustainable. The team urges UWest to evaluate the sustainability of this model, requiring significant personal support and resources, and consider determining an appropriate balance of the number of these types of students enrolled in each new cohort vs. support resources available.

UWest has also struggled with graduation rates for full-time, first-time (FTFT) undergraduate students who are well below the regional mean, specifically 6-year rates of 48% for the 2012 cohort, 11% for the 2013 cohort, and 21% for the 2014 cohort. In a letter to WSCUC dated October 15, 2019, UWest described the situation and identified reasons that resulted in these low graduation rates, including students who were unprepared for college-level work, students who had a number of traditional risk factors, and students being advised to take fewer than 15 credit hours per semester due to challenges with balancing commitments inside and outside of the classroom. In addition to conducting qualitative research into this matter, UWest implemented and improved the student support practices offered. The team learned that these rates have

begun to improve; however, since the cohort size of these students has dropped significantly due to the pandemic, they will need additional time to really evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts.

UWest drafted a Retention Plan 2021-2024 (approved summer 2021) to improve the success rates (retention and graduation) of first-time, full-time students. The plan includes new initiatives that represent more focused use of institutional enrollment and student success data to track and evaluate support systems and programs and take a more strategic and intentional approach to the student support resources they already have in place, such as the Student Success Center, SEAS, Wellness Center, curricular changes to support needy students and faculty mentoring. The team encourages UWest to continue implementing the Retention Plan, set clear targets, and develop quantifiable measures to determine success.

UWest defines student success as “. . . when students acquire the skills and knowledge for success in their personal and professional lives, ethically self-reflect on their choices, engage in service to broader society, and embody the values of character, community and compassion” (2021 Institutional Report 40). The report also describes the added key component of “job readiness,” the support for which is reflected in the 2020-25 Strategic Plan Framework CARE, specifically under “E.” These are four strategic areas that UWest has identified to focus on for the next five years. The “C” stands for Campus Engagement: “Our campus will offer a vibrant, inclusive, and engaging culture in which to study, learn, live, work, and excel.” The “A” stands for Academic Quality: “We will expand our educational offerings and improve the quality of our academic programs to better serve current students, improve reputation, and attract prospective students.” The “R” stands for Revenue & Resources: “We will strengthen and improve the university’s financial outlook through enrollment growth/increased tuition revenue, fundraising, and cost-effective practices.” And the “E” stands for Education for a Successful Life: “We will cultivate job-ready and culturally competent graduates by supporting our students at all levels in their self-defined journeys towards success” (UWest Strategic Plan of CARE 2020-25).

In conversations with the UWest Student Success team (Retention Committee and SEAS team), the team learned that the primary motivation behind the addition of “job readiness” to the definition of student success was related to the Business Administration program(s). This was in response to feedback from students, concerns from students and faculty about whether students could find jobs after completion, and declining enrollment in the program(s). UWest is making progress in collecting institutional data and its use in decision-making. UWest took the recommendations of the 2017 visit and has begun collecting qualitative data because of the difficulties with quantitative data with such small cohorts.

The team applauds the hiring of Dr. Shusaku Horibe, the new part-time consulting institutional researcher who has experience in higher education data collection, management, and analysis. With the assistance of Dr. Horibe, UWest is prepared to make good progress in supporting and inspiring the environment of inquiry toward student success. Dr. Horibe can help train the staff and faculty in the interpretation and the effective use of institutional research. The team encourages UWest to develop and invest appropriate resources into the structures around this work so that it will survive and thrive beyond the tenure of Dr. Horibe.

UWest holds high expectations for their students, and it was clear to the team in speaking with students and graduates that the staff and faculty go above and beyond to support their students. As an institution in the Humanistic Buddhist tradition, UWest seeks to provide a whole-person education in a context informed by Buddhist wisdom and values and facilitate cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West (UWest Mission Statement). UWest’s definition of student success aligns well with and is actualized in the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) Know – Be - Do. The team commends UWest for having staff and faculty who emphasize student support and embody the mission, vision, and values through providing excellent engagement and personalized service.

Upon review of the information provided in the institutional report and conversations with members of the UWest community, the team believes that the Student Success Center (SSC) and the Student Early Alert

System (SEAS) that support student success seem to be functioning very well, having clearly defined goals and means of self-assessment. (CFRs 2.11, 2.13) The team encourages UWest to continue developing the systems and processes that have been put in place to improve retention and graduation rates and support student success across the programs.

Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program review, assessment, use of data and evidence

UWest appears committed to quality assurance and improvement based on its revision of both annual academic reviews and 5-year self-studies. The revised annual review process highlights regular scheduling of assessment and data collection. In conversations with faculty members, they indicated that more regularly scheduled assessment processes would generate healthy discussions about student learning and assessment, which is a primary goal of such activities. Besides the annual program review, the 5-year self-study process was reviewed by stakeholders and resulted in the development of new report templates and a 5-year program review calendar (2021 Institutional Report 56-57). According to the institutional report, a goal of the revised program review process is to “better allow faculty leadership to use information to refine and revise curricula, recruit new students, advocate for new or reallocated resources, identify needed professional development, bolster proposals for external funding, or modify faculty hiring strategies and/or activities” (57). The revised process also is designed to provide administrators “with better information to guide strategic decisions regarding program development and resource allocation, including investment in innovative academic experiences and program restructuring, initiation, or closure” (57). These revisions suggest the ways UWest is trying to use data to inform decision-making, planning, and improvement.

Based on the 5-year self-studies, the annual program review examples, and the sample assessment reports, it is evident that UWest understands the need to carry out assessment and make improvements as a result. However, with the changes in leadership, heavy workload, and ongoing effects of the pandemic, it appears that annual assessment activities from 2015 to 2022 have been inconsistent. In reviewing the annual program reviews provided, little is documented on the forms under “Summary of assessment plan for this

year” and even less under “Summary of closing-the-loop activities for assessment from previous year.” One example of assessment and attempts at closing the loop is the GE 5-Year Self-Study Report 2015-20, which discusses specific findings and recommendations by the assessment team. The findings also were shared with department instructors. As a result of discussions related to the assessment, in fall 2018, the department chair “formed a work group with faculty members across diverse courses and a librarian to improve students’ research skills and information literacy” (5). The group then developed an online module in information literacy to strengthen students’ research skills (5). The 2019-20 GE annual program review continues the analysis of the research paper and students’ research skills. The annual report notes that students are selecting “more challenging topics for the research paper, [but] they continue to have grammar and organization issues.” Under Recommendations, one of the recommendations is that faculty need to ensure that students revisit the module that was created. This suggests the ways UWest is attempting to use assessment to foster discussion and enhance its curriculum.

Such regular assessment and closing-the-loop activities seem critical, though, given the results of a small sample of assessment reports provided by UWest. Although only a limited sample, it is evident that additional work might be needed in having students achieve “acceptable” target achievement levels. Such work might be aided by the recent review and updating of the annual reviews and 5-year self-study process, with more explicit evaluative criteria and scheduling of assessment activities (CFR 2.7). Such efforts might also be aided by the newly formed Program Review Committee; the Undergraduate Transformation Team, which is assisting with undergraduate program assessment; and the University-Wide Assessment Committee.

In addition, UWest is trying to enhance its use of institutional data to support and inform decision-making, planning, and improvement. This ability has been hampered in the recent past because of turnover in the institutional researcher position, which has made it difficult for the university to generate, monitor, and use

such data on a consistent basis to improve student learning and success. The university recently contracted a part-time institutional researcher to strengthen its institutional research capabilities (CFR 2.10).

Component 7: Sustainability: Financial viability, preparing for the changing higher education environment

UWest has experienced significant leadership changes and declining enrollment over the last several years, negatively impacting university revenue and leading to the need for budget cuts and new sources of revenue. During these challenges, UWest has been able to meet its financial obligations through outside financial support, sizeable endowment and investments, and healthy cash reserves. UWest is in an enviable position in that it has the ongoing annual financial support of its founding organization, Fo Guang Shan, through the International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS). According to UWest leadership, it has been, at least, the recent practice that if there is an annual budget deficit, IBPS has made a financial contribution to UWest to cover the gap. For FY2020-21, this contribution amounted to approximately 43% of all revenues, exceeding the student-related revenues at 40%, and private foundation grants making up the 17% remainder difference (2021 Institutional Report 68). At the end of FY2020-21, UWest had just under \$10 million in cash and cash equivalents and another \$17 million in restricted and designated investments. (FYE06/30/21 Audit Report Draft 02.23.2022).

Under the leadership of Dr. Ta since July 2020, UWest has cut budgets in light of decreased enrollment, both before and during the pandemic, taken advantage of pandemic relief aid to cover related financial losses, secured additional non-IBPS foundation contributions, and appointed and hired new leadership in the area of enrollment and marketing to achieve an aggressive new student enrollment goal as part of the five-year budget. UWest ended FY2020-21 with a positive change in net assets of nearly \$4 million, despite a 17% drop in net tuition and fees revenues over the prior year (FYE06/30/21 Audit Report Draft 02.23.2022). The strategic enrollment plan targets enrollment of 400 students by 2025 (a 53% increase from fall 2020), resulting in an increase in non-contribution revenue of 117% over the same period (Five-Year Budget Plan FY2021-2026). Even with this aggressive enrollment goal, “the president has recommended

(and the board has approved) the use of \$2 million of cash reserves each year of the five-year budget to balance the budget gap, create a rainy-day fund, and add a budget line item for annual program review requests as well as student retention projects” (2021 Institutional Report 71). The team recommends that UWest prioritize financial sustainability by achieving a balanced budget using evidence-based enrollment projections without reliance on cash reserves (CFR 3.4).

The team appreciates the desires of the president and the board to make strategic investments in high-priority areas through the use of cash reserves; however, the team is also concerned that the enrollment projections may be too aspirational at this time, given the history of declining enrollment, the lack of clear evidence as to why the decline occurred, and the very early stages of the new enrollment growth strategies. In the institutional report, UWest describes its budgeting policy as conservative, with a goal of controlling costs and reducing the risk of overspending; however, the team is concerned that there isn’t a clear plan for allocating resources to support the growth following several years of budget cuts. For example, in the five-year budget, funding for new positions does not begin until FY2023-24 at the point where the five-year enrollment projections predict a nearly 33% increase in enrollment from an average of 261 in 2021-22 to an average of 347 in 2023-24 (Five-Year Enrollment Projection – Budget Office). In these times of projected growth and increased demands for resources, it is critical that UWest create a hiring plan for faculty and staff that includes prioritization over the course of the next several years to align with the enrollment growth projections of the strategic plan and the efforts toward supporting student success (CFR 3.1). UWest uses various information technology systems that are sufficient in scope, quality, currency, and kind across the institution to manage its operations. One significant challenge they face is that a number of their systems have the capability of integrating with their core student information system; however, staff members indicate that making this investment in the additional “modules” of the system is cost-prohibitive at this time. It was clear from the conversations with staff, who already have very heavy workloads, that an investment like this could significantly impact the efficiency of their work to serve and support students.

UWest has received a private \$1 million grant to explore and implement new technology and software, some of which was used to effectively support the transition to remote instruction following the onset of the pandemic. Like many institutions of higher education, UWest has embraced new modes of operation as a result of the pandemic response, such as the IT group using Zoom for desktop support and moving 100% of courses to the Moodle LMS platform and has wisely identified those that have demonstrated great benefit to continue pursuing. In evaluating the needs for hiring over the next several years, it would be prudent also to analyze the information systems' environment to determine what efficiencies could be achieved through integration (CFR 3.5).

In interviews with members of the UWest community from all areas, the team was encouraged to hear of the respect for and appreciation of Dr. Ta's leadership. The UWest community has great confidence in Dr. Ta and the strong vision for the future of the university. After several years of challenges related to leadership changes and budget cuts, the UWest community seems very hopeful for the future. There is tremendous support across the campus for the mission and vision of UWest. In the context of the plans for significant growth, the team encourages UWest to keep the unique and compelling mission in mind as new programs are developed and markets are identified, focusing on what UWest does well. Given the dynamic and rapidly changing environment in higher education and the changing financial position of the institution, UWest should continue to carefully monitor current financial and enrollment plans, revising and responding in support of its strategic goals (CFR 4.6).

[Component 8: Reflection and plans for improvement](#)

The WSCUC review team was universally impressed with the authenticity and sincerity of the faculty and staff of UWest. We believe the leadership is clear about the challenges that have occurred with the leadership transitions of the past, recognizes the challenges of the current pandemic and higher-education ecosystem, and is making progress towards a sustainable future. The university's financial strength is unusual given its relatively small size; this provides the opportunity to address challenges without survival

as the predominant theme. The review team was impressed with the strength and experience of President Ta, the trusting atmosphere that appears evident between the faculty and the administration, and the affirmation of the current student body. Each of these factors bodes well for UWest as it prepares to address the future challenges that remain ahead.

We encourage the UWest board, administration, and faculty to be realistic about the challenges of increasing enrollment without specific marketplace pathways in the degree make-up. As stated previously in the report, we encourage the development of a limited number of degree pathways consistent with the university's mission and values. In addition to establishing specific degree pathways that are marketplace ready, the university must be diligent in establishing relationships with potential enrollment partners (e.g., schools, civic groups, church groups) and employment centers. Rather than pursue an expansive menu of options, the team encourages the UWest team to be focused on listening to key enrollment and employment partners and building a future that is synergistic with the mission and the community.

We further encourage the administrative team and the faculty leadership to commit to twin priorities. First, we believe the administrative team and the faculty should continue cultivating trusting relationships and clarity about the next three years of the future for UWest. We appreciated what we experienced and believe there is strong capacity for a future that is stronger and healthier for the respective teams. Second, we believe the assessment of educational effectiveness will lead to specific program improvement and cultivation of shared understandings between the university and its students. We believe that students who have experienced dynamic and missional programs will be the best recruiters for future student enrollment and creative vision for the future.

UWest is a values-based institution. We believe the future can be bright if the university leadership, faculty, staff, and students remain aligned with its missional priorities. Recognition of the past enrollment and leadership transition challenges must be coupled with increasing program assessment and effectiveness. If UWest can live out its missional values and maintain relational and missional synergy among the faculty,

staff, and students, we believe the future has tremendous potential. We look forward to future teams being able to visit a thriving institution living out its mission in a community where it is highly valued.

Section III – Findings, Commendations, and Recommendations

We are grateful for how UWest members organized so many interviews, especially with remote flexibility, and how they responded to our multiple requests for additional documents. We want to particularly acknowledge your ALO, Vanessa Karam, for her outstanding responsiveness to our requests.

We also want to recognize and affirm the hard work put into the self-study and for participation in interviews. University representatives offered insights into the institution’s progress and plans for the future. As a result of this review, we have better understood UWest’s mission, leadership, faculty, staff, and students.

Commendations

The University of the West is to be commended for:

1. Having a mission, vision, and values that are clear, compelling, and a galvanizing force for the UWest community. This particular strength was evident during our visit and gave credence to the regular use of the words “home” and “family.”
2. Having cohesive administration and leadership who communicate transparently to appropriate stakeholders regarding the health and status of the university and degree program requirements and procedures.
3. Having graduate programs with a strong and consistent blend of scholarship, contemplation, and practical skills. We were heartened to hear regular testimony to this effect.
4. Having staff and faculty who emphasize student support and embody the mission, vision, and values through providing excellent engagement and personalized service.

Recommendations

The team recommends that the University of the West:

1. Implement the five-year enrollment plan using strategies based on market research targeting specific student populations. (CFR 3.4);
2. Continue to value and support the intangible, whole-person Buddhist philosophy and include shared governance to guide curriculum and program development. (CFR 2.1, 2.2, 3.10);
3. Prioritize financial sustainability by achieving a balanced budget using evidence-based enrollment projections without reliance on cash reserves. (CFR 3.4);
4. Through shared governance, create adjunct faculty evaluation policies and implement faculty workload policies. (CFR 2.9, 3.2, 3.3);
5. Proactively use institutional research to improve student-success metrics by developing an evidence-based plan to help faculty and staff analyze students served and barriers to success. (CFR 2.10, 4.2);
6. Continue building the assessment infrastructure and culture, prioritizing the analysis of direct and indirect data, implementing change based on data, and reporting outcomes at the programmatic and institutional levels. (CFR 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1)

Appendices

The report includes the following appendices:

A. Federal Compliance Forms

1. Credit Hour and Program Length Review
2. Marketing and Recruitment Review
3. Student Complaints Review
4. Transfer Credit Review

1 - CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW FORM

| Material Reviewed | Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.) |
|---|--|
| Policy on credit hour | Is this policy easily accessible? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| | If so, where is the policy located? Academic catalog , p 89 (Credit Hour Policy) |
| | Comments: |
| Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour | Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Faculty Handbook , pp 63-64 (Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee [APCC]) |
| | If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| | Comments: |
| Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet | Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Fall 2021 Schedule of Classes |
| | Comments: |
| Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i> | How many syllabi were reviewed? 11 Undergraduate, 7 Graduate |
| | See Syllabi Folder in 2021 Institutional Report Appendix |
| | What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)? Online |
| | What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS ffi BA/BS ffi MA ffi Doctoral |
| | What discipline(s)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Math 030 • Math 112 • CAP 401 • MDiv 640 • Psych 700 |
| | Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Comments: | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated) <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i></p> | <p>How many syllabi were reviewed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SRVLG 100 Service Learning (General Education) • MBA 590 Internship • PSYCH 700/710 Practicum in Buddhist-Multicultural Counseling <p>What kinds of courses? Service learning, internship, practica</p> <p>What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral</p> <p>What discipline(s)? Business, Psychology</p> <p>Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>Comments:</p> |
| <p>Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)</p> | <p>How many programs were reviewed?</p> <p>See UWest Academic Catalog, 2020-2021</p> <p>What kinds of programs were reviewed? All degrees</p> <p>What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral</p> <p>What discipline(s)? All disciplines</p> <p>Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>Comments:</p> |

Review Completed By: Jody Cormack
Date: March 10, 2022

2 - MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulation*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's recruiting and admissions practices.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Material Reviewed | <p>Questions and Comments: Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this table as appropriate.</p> <p>See Sample Marketing Brochures & Flyers</p> |
| **Federal regulations | <p>Does the institution follow federal regulations on recruiting students? <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> |
| | <p>Comments:</p> |
| Degree completion and cost | <p>Does the institution provide information about the typical length of time to degree? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p> |
| | <p>Does the institution provide information about the overall cost of the degree? <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> |
| | <p>Comments: Typical (actual) length of time to degree is not made publicly available.</p> |
| Careers and employment | <p>Does the institution provide information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable? <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> |
| | <p>Does the institution provide information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p> |
| | <p>Comments: Information about the employment of UWest graduates was not publicly available.</p> |

*§602.16(a)(1)(vii)

**Section 487 (a)(20) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) prohibits Title IV eligible institutions from providing incentive compensation to employees or third-party entities for their success in securing student enrollments. Incentive compensation includes commissions, bonus payments, merit salary adjustments, and promotion decisions based solely on success in enrolling students. These regulations do not apply to the recruitment of international students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal financial aid.

Review Completed By: Dawn Dirksen

Date: March 29, 2022

3 - STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulation*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's student complaints policies, procedures, and records.

| Material Reviewed: | Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.) |
|------------------------------|--|
| Policy on student complaints | Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| | If so, is the policy or procedure easily accessible? Is so, where? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UWest Student Conduct Manual p 71-78 • UWest Academic Catalog, 2020-21 p 117 • Title IX-Sexual Misconduct Policy |
| | Comments: |
| Process(es)/ procedure | Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly: |
| | If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| | Comments: |
| Records | Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? |
| | Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? ffi YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly: |
| | Comments: |

*§602-16(1)(1)(ix)

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission's Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.

Review Completed By: Jody Cormack

Date: March 10, 2022

4 – TRANSFER CREDIT POLICY REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulations*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s recruiting and admissions practices accordingly.

| Material Reviewed | Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.) |
|---------------------------|--|
| Transfer Credit Policy(s) | Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for receiving transfer credit? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| | If so, is the policy publicly available? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? UWest Academic Catalog, 2020-21 , p 79-80 |
| | Does the policy(s) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| | Comments: |

*§602.24(e): Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that--

(1) Are publicly disclosed in accordance with 668.43(a)(11); and

(2) Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission’s Transfer of Credit Policy.

Review Completed By: Jody Cormack

Date: March 20, 2022