

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT

University of the West
Rosemead, California

April 25-27, 2017

Team Roster

Philip Clayton, Claremont School of Theology, Team Chair

Susan Platt, Executive Director of Assessment Emerita, California State University,
Long Beach, Team Assistant

Risa Levitt Kohn, Professor and Chair of Religious Studies and Classics, Chair of
Humanities, Director of the Jewish Studies Program, San Diego State University

Steve Schapiro, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs, Fielding Graduate University,
Santa Barbara

Geoff Chase, WSCUC Liaison

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

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SECTION I - Overview and Context

A. Description of University of the West, Its Accreditation History, and the Visit

1. Overview of University of the West

University of the West is a private, nonprofit, non-sectarian university. It was founded in 1990 by Grand Master Hsing Yun, the founding master of Fo Guang Shan (“Buddha's Light Mountain”), a Buddhist organization with 250 branch temples around the world and some 200 associated centers, chapters, and colleges. As a leader in Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Shan supports cultural projects, educational institutions, and a variety of charity work. Each of the post-secondary schools established by Grand Master Yun expresses the values of “humanistic Buddhism,” and each combines Buddhist teaching and practice with academic disciplines and grant a variety of degrees.

University of the West is associated with a sister campus in Taiwan, Buddha’s Light University. Through Fo Guang Shan it also has links to a large network of temple-sponsored research centers where scholars from many countries engage in research projects. 

Grand Master Hsing Yun was President of University of the West from 1990 to 1997 and is now President of the Board of Trustees, serving as one of 15 board members.

The mission of University of the West is to:

1. Provide a ‘whole person’ education in a context informed by Buddhist wisdom and values; and
2. Facilitate cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West.

According to its statement of institutional values, “Belonging to a university community founded on Humanistic Buddhist principles means:

- Becoming people of strong CHARACTER who behave ethically, cultivate awareness of self and others, and develop wisdom.
- Practicing COMPASSION and working with others to relieve suffering and promote equality.
- Building a sustainable COMMUNITY by embracing diversity and achieving harmony through common purpose.

The UWest Institutional Learning Outcomes are summarized under three headings:

Know: Students integrate broad knowledge from across multiple academic disciplines, fields, and topics, demonstrate deep knowledge of their chosen profession or field of study, and apply their understanding of multicultural perspectives and practices.

Be: Students embody a love of learning and articulate a personal mission based on an explicit values system that integrates a community identity with an ongoing cultivation of personal development.

Do: Students demonstrate mastery of core academic competencies, the ability to apply creatively the methods and practices of their chosen profession or field of study, and exemplify personal, professional, and social ethics.

The university seeks for students to “master a body of knowledge, acquire analytical and creative problem-solving and learning skills, cultivate moral and cultural discernment and develop personal and social responsibility.” Its strategic vision is “to model Whole-Person Education through engaged and interdisciplinary learning in all programs; an exceptional, caring faculty and staff who fulfil our unique mission; and service projects seeking to improve local and global communities. UWest graduates will practice social responsibility, value diversity, and pursue lifelong learning and spiritual growth.”

University of the West currently offers undergraduate, graduate, certificate and continuing education programs to 329 students (headcount) through six academic departments. The four Bachelor of Arts degrees are in Business Administration (concentrations in Accounting, Computer Information Systems, International Business, and Marketing), English (concentrations in Literature and TESOL), Liberal Arts (customized concentrations), and Psychology.

UWest offers a total of six graduate degrees through four academic departments. The Buddhist Chaplaincy Department offers a Master of Divinity (MDiv) in Buddhist Chaplaincy and a Doctor of Buddhist Ministry (DBMin). The Religious Studies Department offers a Master of Arts in Religious Studies and a Doctorate in Religious Studies. The Business Administration Department offers a Masters of Business Administration and graduate certificates in Business Administration. The Psychology Department offers a Masters of Arts in Psychology.

2. University of the West Accreditation History

Since February 16, 2006, University of the West has been accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The March 6, 2015 Action Letter from the Commission reaffirmed its accreditation for seven years, until 2021, with an accreditation visit scheduled for fall 2021. The letter notes that “In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that University of the West has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability.” Its regular Mid-Cycle Review report is due in spring 2019.

The Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) took place in 2010, and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) on October 27-29, 2014, following receipt of the UWest self-study.

The March 6, 2015 Action Letter also specified that a WSCUC Special Visit Team should conduct a Special Visit in spring 2017. This special visit was requested to evaluate the institution's progress in the areas of strategic planning, analysis of disaggregated student success data, and development of graduate culture.

3. The Special Visit

Specifically, the Commission Action Letter (CAL) dated March 6, 2015 mandated that the Special Visit in spring 2017 should focus on three action items:

- a. A discussion of the completed strategic plan, including the process by which it receives final approval, the development of an accompanying tactical (or operational) plan to achieve its goals, and the results of the first period of its implementation
- b. A discussion of analysis done on disaggregated student success data, to include the conclusions reached from that analysis and the actions taken based on those conclusions
- c. A discussion of enhancements taken to further the development of a graduate culture, in light of the institution's programmatic direction towards expanded graduate offerings (e.g., the ThD proposal).

The WSCUC Staff Liaison for University of the West, Vice President Geoff Chase, put together a Special Visit Team to carry out this visit. The Visit Team consisted of:

- Philip Clayton, Claremont School of Theology, Team Chair
- Susan Platt, Executive Director of Assessment Emerita, California State University, Long Beach, Team Assistant Chair
- Risa Levitt Kohn, Professor and Chair of Religious Studies and Classics, Chair of Humanities, Director of the Jewish Studies Program, San Diego State University
- Steve Schapiro, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs, Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara

The team reviewed the UWest Special Visit Report 2017, the Strategic Plan 3.0 (dated April 11, 2016), a wide variety of appendices prepared by the institution, and the UWest website. The history of accreditation visits was examined, and the team read and analyzed the accreditation reports and Commission Action Letters. Finally, the team had access to a confidential email account with postings from the broader UWest community.

In preparation for the visit, the team met by telephone, together with the Staff Liaison. The documents were analyzed, team members were assigned to individual action items, and questions were prepared. On April 5, the team chair and assistant chair met by phone with the UWest president and ALO. In the afternoon and evening of April 25, 2017, the team met in person for final analysis and preparation.

B. Description of the Review Process

The review took place on April 26 and 27, 2017. The chair and assistant chair worked closely with the ALO from UWest to compose the schedule and arrange meetings with individuals and groups. The visit was structured around the Commission's three action items listed above.

The team met with numerous campus stakeholders to clarify issues identified in the Commission Action Letter (CAL) and discussed in the UWest Special Visit Report. Specifically, the team met in person with the UWest President, ALO, Executive Team, Strategic Planning Group, Academic Affairs Leadership Team, the Assessment and Retention committees, faculty, Student Affairs Leadership, students, and members of the Board of Trustees (by phone).

The visit hosted by UWest was well organized. The meetings offered the opportunity to make a thorough assessment of each of the action items. The institution addressed the three issues of the WSCUC team with clear and in-depth responses. The team concluded that the discussions were wide ranging and thorough, and that the UWest administration, staff, and faculty had been fully transparent in its responses to the queries.

C. The University of the West Special Visit Report

The Special Visit Report was well organized and clearly written. The visit team concluded that the report accurately portrayed the history, current condition, and future plans of the institution. A wide variety of stakeholders was involved in repairing the report. Conclusions and recommendations from virtually every area of the University were included.

The Visit Report was organized around the three action items from the Commission, which allowed the team and ALO to structure the day following the major sections of the report. Each section utilized appropriate methodologies and offered full presentations of the evidence together with realistic analysis. Where evidence was not consistent with the institutions mission and goals, divergences were noted in the report and steps were outlined for overcoming inconsistencies. In several cases, the institution reported that corrective action had already been taken.

SECTION II - Three Issues

The visit team met with numerous campus stakeholders to explore the three action items identified in the Commission Action Letter (CAL) and discussed in the UWest Special Visit Report. In this section, the visit team provides an analysis of its findings before and during the Special Visit.

Issue A: Strategic Planning Processes

In its Action Letter of March 6, 2015, the Commission requested that attention be paid to “a discussion of the completed strategic plan, including the process by which it receives final approval, the development of an accompanying tactical (or operational plan) to achieve its goals, and the results of its first period of implementation.” The Commission further recommended that UWest develop measurable goals, initiatives, indicators of success, and budgetary implications as planned. (CFRs 4.5, 4.7)

For this issue, the visit team sought clarification on each of the major features of strategic planning, such as how the strategic planning process works, how the latest process of strategic planning may have differed from previous processes, what specific steps University of the West has instituted for achieving its strategic goals, particularly those pertaining to enrollment growth, and what kinds of contingency plans the institution has put in place.

In the Special Visit Report and accompanying documents, the University provided thorough and comprehensive evidence of the steps it has taken to achieve these objectives. The new Strategic Plan, completed in 2015, includes a new statement of values and vision, a set of subsidiary action plans for each major organizational unit within the University, a five-year budget plan, a report on the plan’s first year of implementation, and recommendations for further revisions moving forward. The team carefully reviewed these documents in preparation for the visit.

The visit team found that the new strategic planning process at University of the West meets and exceeds WSCUC standards for strategic planning (CFR 4.6). The processes are clearly stated, and there is evidence that the University has carried out the new steps. The strategies are sufficiently comprehensive and consistent with the institution’s mission and vision.

The team focused on three areas of strategic planning at UWest, including the process through which the plan was developed and approved, implementation and assessment of the plan, and financial and enrollment targets.

(1) The process through which the plan was developed and approved

An important strength of University of the West, which was reflected in the institution’s report and in multiple conversations with stakeholder groups on campus, is the University’s strong commitment to a compelling mission 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.” Members of multiple

constituencies spoke convincingly of their commitment to this vision. The new strategic plan provides a framework for actualizing this vision within the changing context of UWest and of higher education in general.

Recognizing the need to enhance its capacity for effective strategic planning, the University, under the leadership of its president, created a new Office of Institutional Planning, led by a full-time staff person reporting directly to the president. The Institutional Planning Effectiveness and Campus Culture Officer sits on the Executive Team and on numerous other campus committees, which allowed for broad collaboration in developing the new plan. Likewise, the Strategic Plan Working Group included executive leadership, accreditation and institutional research specialists, faculty, student affairs professionals, staff, and students. (CFR 1.1, 1.4, 1.6, 2.4).

The development of the strategic plan began with a year-long process of reflection and dialogue. This process led to a new articulation of UWest's values and vision statements, which in turn gave rise to the goals and strategies of the plan. A new set of Institutional Learning Outcomes consistent with those values was developed and articulated at a two-day weekend retreat, which included members from all stakeholder groups. The institution speaks of its approach as the "Hub and Spokes" model. Once major goals were identified, interdepartmental teams proposed strategies to achieve these. The original plan had only four spokes, but based on the subsequent recommendation of the Student Affairs Division, a fifth spoke on "student development" was added. The change reflects a collaborative and iterative process as well as the institution's commitment to whole person education, which is central to its mission. (CFR 3.1)



(2) Implementation and assessment of the plan

Subsidiary plans were developed by each unit to support the implementation of the strategies identified in the plan. The process was inclusive, involving not only administrators but also line staff and faculty. The comprehensive plan update, conducted in the spring of 2017, reports on progress made regarding each strategy and recommendations for the future.



The visit team noted that connections between the overall strategic plan and various subsidiary plans are more implicit than explicit and that the relationships between them are not as clear as they could be. While in one sense this outcome reflects distributed leadership and a grassroots or bottom-up planning process, the lack of alignment could potentially inhibit the successful achievement of overall institutional goals. The team was therefore glad to see in the 2017 Strategic Plan Update a recommendation to "chart the relationship between the institutional plan's goals and strategies and the specific goals and strategies of the division, department and committee plans."



The Institutional Plan established clear metrics for each of the five major goals in the plan. The visit team encourages the University to continue to monitor the stated objective that "individual strategies will also have their own metrics and targets, set and



monitored by the groups responsible for them.” These targets and metrics represent an important means for aligning the institutional plan with the subsidiary plans.

(3) Financial and enrollment targets

The Strategic Plan sets forth an ambitious set of enrollment targets, including a 50% increase in total enrollment and a shift to a greater percentage of undergraduate and domestic students. Because actual enrollments have not matched these targets, the institution has reassessed its goals. The five-year budget plan now includes more modest projections. The team commends the institution for its evidence-based leadership and for closing the loop between the data and the strategic plan, which has now been adjusted to reflect the new projections. (CFRs 3.6-3.9, 4.6)

One institutional goal for University of the West is to increase self-sufficiency, relying less on major donor support while maintaining financial stability. The visit team observed that additional work is needed to develop effective strategies to meet this goal. The team therefore recommends that the institution specify more clearly how growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollments will occur, including its plans for branding and outreach. These plans for enrollment management should include realistic goals for increasing enrollment and improving retention. UWest has begun to develop and implement a plan to reach out to the local community to recruit undergraduates, but it is too soon to tell if this strategy will be effective. In that regard, the team also recommends that the institution continue its efforts to develop a campus climate that is inclusive of the local Latinx population as well as its international students from China and other countries. Staff and faculty will need to be further supported in developing cultural sensitivity and skills needed to address the needs of culturally diverse populations and first-generation college students in particular. (CFR 3.4)



Overall, the team commends University of the West for the process and content of its strategic plan and the measures that have been put in place to monitor and revise the plan as needed. Such revisions are particularly important in the dynamic environment of higher education today. In that context, UWest’s small size is both a strength and a liability. It is a strength in that the institution can be nimble; changes can be made quickly by an experienced leadership team. It is a liability in that the range of programs and revenue streams is limited, and small decreases in enrollment can lead to financial challenges. Nevertheless, the team is confident that the University can reach its goals as it continues to adapt to the current internal and external environment.

Issue B: Student Success Data

The second request made by the Commission in its March 6, 2015 Action Letter was for “a discussion of analysis done on disaggregated student success data, to include the conclusions reached from that analysis and the actions taken based on those conclusions.”

For this particular issue, the team sought clarification by asking about student success definitions, examples of institutional successes, challenges with collecting and using disaggregated quantitative data with small numbers of enrollments, the potential use of qualitative data, alignment of student success outcomes with the institution's mission and student learning outcomes, and campus-wide involvement in student success. The University of the West Assessment Committee (UWAC), the Retention Committee, the Student Affairs Leadership Team, the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (OIR & A) and the Strategic Planning Group provided most of the responses to these questions.

OIR & A maintains a comprehensive website that includes data on enrollment, retention, and graduation rates disaggregated by cohorts, in addition to a "cookbook" for how terms are defined for the purposes of quantitative analyses. OIR & A also provides a list of program-level learning outcomes (PLOs) by degree program that can inform UWAC and help this committee with its assessment charge. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.10, 4.1, 4.2)

The visit team found that the groups mentioned above work together closely to examine and discuss evidence of student success and decide what should be done with results. The Special Visit Report contains a list of findings from disaggregated retention data that have been used by the committees to enhance student success, such as conducting student focus groups, starting an early warning system with faculty referrals and reports, and hiring a full-time advisor, to name a few (pp. 23-24).

UWest leaders understand the challenges with disaggregating quantitative data given small numbers of enrollments and the need to supplement evidence with qualitative data. The institution is clearly committed to using data to inform practices and planning, and it is committed to improving data collection and analyses. (CFRs 4.1-4.4)

Those interviewed described several of their most compelling results concerning student success that need attention and follow-up, including second year retention, Latino student success, creating a sense of belongingness and an inclusive environment for students from diverse backgrounds, college preparedness, first generation college student needs, and faculty knowledge and readiness to assist varied student populations. In response, second semester learning communities lead by peer mentors have been established, and discussions are taking place about how to create a greater sense of belonging for all students, especially commuters. UWest assessment leaders and committees are devoted to the mission of their institution and are intent on ensuring an inclusive learning environment for all students. (CFRs 4.1-4.4)



Student Affairs leaders provided ample evidence of their contributions to student success, including chairing the university retention committee, participating in UWAC, developing program level outcomes in alignment with those of academic programs, and assisting with the enhancement of student learning and avoidance of probation. Student Affairs developed a subsidiary strategic plan in alignment with the main strategic plan of the university. Student Affairs professionals are currently determining

use of results to “close the loop,” and they appear to be well versed in these important assessment endeavors for the attainment of student achievement and success. (CFRs 2.11, 2.13, 4.1-4.4)

Another student success project on the horizon for UWest is the plan for an “Undergraduate Transformation,” which is currently being developed by a widespread, inclusive taskforce that includes the president, a variety of campus leaders, and the student government president. This taskforce is researching “best and innovative practices in undergraduate education using case studies,” with a goal to “develop a comprehensive plan for a creative, integrated undergraduate experience that weaves curricular and co-curricular programming together” to address UWest values detailed in its strategic plan. (Undergraduate Transformation Task Force Update for the Board of Trustees, April 29-30, 2017). (CFR 4.3-4.4, 4.6)

University members spoke with pride about UWest’s uniqueness as an institution that brings international and domestic students from the East and West together to pursue secular and non-secular degree programs. They emphasized the importance of recruiting students who can thrive in their kind of institution. University leadership is committed to continual improvement of programs while remaining aware of how difficult it can be to ensure and demonstrate the success of disparate student populations. (CFR 4.3)

The visit team concurs with UWest about the challenges of making decisions based on quantitative analyses broken down by cohorts given small numbers of enrollments. Therefore, the team recommends that UWest team members consider expanding the practice of collecting narrative data by cohorts (domestic versus international students, first generation college students, residential students, students in varied degree programs, and other identified student cohorts), analyze data systematically according to a plan, and use qualitative findings along with institutional research data to support student success. (CFRs 1.2, 2.10, 2.11, 4.1-4.3).

Issue C: Graduate Culture

The final task requested by the Commission in its March 6, 2015 Action Letter was for “a discussion of enhancements taken to further the development of a graduate culture, in light of the institution’s programmatic direction towards expanded graduate offerings (e.g., the ThD proposal).”

For this issue, the visit team reviewed the UWest Special Visit Report 2017 and the Strategic Plan along with other materials submitted by the institution. During the visit, the team sought information concerning how UWest perceives a “graduate culture,” how an MA program is different from a Ph.D. program, and how the academic affairs leadership team is working together to develop a graduate culture. The team also asked about the main challenges faced by the institution in this area, its enrollment targets, and its evidence of graduate student success.

UWest offers six graduate degrees through four academic departments. The Buddhist Chaplaincy Department has two full-time faculty members and offers a Master of Divinity (MDiv) in Buddhist Chaplaincy and a Doctor of Buddhist Ministry (DBMin). The Religious Studies Department has four full-time faculty and offers a Master of Arts in Religious Studies and a Doctorate in Religious Studies. The Business Administration Department has three full-time faculty and offers a Masters of Business Administration and graduate certificates in Business Administration. The Psychology Department has two full-time faculty and offers a Masters of Arts in Psychology.

In its Action Letter of March 6, 2015, the Commission requested that action be taken to “enhance the graduate culture and consider increasing the number of full-time faculty....” To that end, the Commission further recommended that UWest address research issues to “calibrate its plan for growth with a corresponding increase in the number of full-time faculty.” (CFRs 2.2b, 2.10, and 3.1)

This request was the result of several observations that were cited in the EER report from October of 2014. That visit team agreed that there was

a need for continued enhancements to the graduate programs and professional preparation of the graduate students, including enhanced resources for research and increased numbers of full-time graduate faculty. As enrollments continue to climb, the team recommends that the university consider providing additional opportunities, such as student teaching for the doctoral students, developing plans for an outpatient clinic that would utilize psychology students, and experiential learning for the business students. (CFRs 2.2b, 2.10)

The EER report also drew attention to the ongoing issue of faculty workload:

There is no direct response in the EER self-study on the issue of faculty research; however, the committee reviewed a draft document that describes a limited new sabbatical policy for faculty. The financial plan does not have a predication of grant income, nor is there a line item for faculty research. While there is support for “conference and seminar,” it is not clear whether these are for scholarly work. While faculty are engaged in scholarship, more financial support in this area should be a strategic goal for the future. The intellectual climate of the university and retention of accomplished faculty are at risk without a commitment to scholarship.

Action item C therefore focuses on issues related to the development of a graduate culture at UWest, both from the perspective of graduate student engagement and faculty workload.

With respect to graduate student engagement, the Special Visit Report and accompanying documents provide evidence of UWest’s continued efforts to better engage its large and diverse graduate student population. Each of the four departments with graduate programs has created clubs (Chaplaincy, Entrepreneurship, Psychology,

Pali Society, Success and Achievement, Sustainable Investing, Peer Mentoring) to better engage students and to stimulate dialogue. Graduate students have the opportunity to participate in research projects such as the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon (DSBC) Project in the Religious Studies Department, which is a collaborative partnership with Nagarjuna Institute of Exact Methods, Nepal. This program helps involve graduate students in the significant technology-based cultural project of gathering, digitizing, and disseminating original Sanskrit scriptures of Buddhism to a broad audience. (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.5)

UWest has also begun to take concrete steps to address the need for providing the graduate student population with hands-on experience both in the classroom and on the job. The engagement with service learning is evidenced in all four departments that have graduate programs. This engagement includes Chaplaincy students working in clinical pastoral education at Children's Hospital LA and Business Administration students participating in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. The MBA program has an internship requirement. Psychology students complete practicum courses that enable them to see patients in a therapeutic setting and participate in the Los Angeles county Marriage and Family Counselling Consortium. Religious Studies students participate in the department's PhD Teaching Program (PTP), which involves both practicum study and teaching assistantships.

UWest also provides ample opportunity for cross-campus communication in the forms of town-hall meetings, open spaces for meetings, and student meetings with the president to better strengthen students' sense of belonging and campus camaraderie. Graduate students attend regular club meetings and events and serve in the UWest Student Government as officers, academic department representatives, and special representatives (i.e. doctoral student senator). (CFRs 2.11, 3.1)

In UWest's Special Visit Report, several departments indicated that there remains additional potential for continued growth around graduate culture. The Psychology Department, for example, notes that

the department desires more comprehensive assistance from the university on issues of student disabilities, such as financial support for learning/developmental disability testing to which our underserved population may never have had access [CFR 2.13]. Faculty, in the spirit of university values of compassion and loving kindness, sometimes under-accommodate or over-accommodate when addressing disability issues. Faculty recognizes that the number of students who face psychological and emotional challenges will likely increase in the future, and seek greater professional training and guidance that results in consistent abiding in California and federal law.

Similarly, Religious Studies faculty comment that with over 50% of their PhD students belonging to various Buddhist monastic orders, these students are often ill-prepared to fully address the critical study of Religion from the perspective of non-practitioners.

This may contribute to a wide gap in the level of preparation and research capabilities of local versus international doctoral candidates.

With respect to faculty workload as it pertains to the enhancement of graduate culture, the evidence presented in the Special Visit Report and accompanying documents, as well as the team's experience during the visit at the institution, confirmed that there remain several significant areas of concern that need to be addressed by the institution. These include the student-faculty ratio for graduate mentoring, clarity of expectations for tenure and promotion, and issues related to professional development (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.1-3.3)

In the Special Visit Report, UWest notes its efforts towards reducing and streamlining assessment practices and processes to reduce faculty workload. Notwithstanding, there remains a significant disparity between the large number of graduate students and the small number of full-time faculty who are required to teach, mentor, and advise them. The following numbers are from fall 2016:

| Department | Full-Time Fac# | MA/MDiv students# | PhD students# |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Chaplaincy | 2 | 25 | 5 |
| Business Admin | 3 | 54 | NA |
| Religious Studies | 4 | 5 | 38 |
| Psychology | 2 | 26 | NA |

The Special Visit Report details UWest's extensive mentoring expectations of faculty who must serve as recruiters, mentors and sponsors (p. 33). Indeed, faculty interviewed by the visit team during the Special Visit noted that it was not uncommon for them to advise upwards of 20 graduate students over and above their teaching load of three classes per semester. The challenge of these demanding expectations is exacerbated by the requirement for faculty to serve on numerous university-wide committees and task forces and by the extensive administrative tasks that fall upon them, especially as faculty are not provided with any departmental office support.

It should also be noted with respect to faculty growth that while the UWest budget planned for growth to 18 full-time faculty in 2016/17, departures and failed searches have led to an overall drop in this number to a total of 11 faculty members at the present time. The near-future does not harbor changes. As of the date of the site visit on April 26 and 27, 2017, none of the currently advertised searches has been successfully concluded and the CAO indicated that no new searches are planned for AY 2017/18. (CFR 2.1)



In addition, while UWest recognizes that faculty research influences teaching, advising, and mentoring, the visit team did not find meaningful evidence of the administration taking concrete steps to actively support faculty research or to formulate clear and

transparent expectations regarding faculty members' professional growth. (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.3)

In short, while UWest has made some solid strides toward improving the graduate student culture for its students, much work remains to be done to foster an equally vibrant and supportive environment for full-time faculty. The quality and reputation of graduate programs, both nationally and internationally, is typically built in large part upon the professional contributions and productivity of faculty. At present, UWest's full-time faculty, while expressing a high level of job satisfaction, are demonstrably over-burdened with extensive teaching and mentoring obligations, to a degree that could significantly impede their scholarly output, which will in turn negatively impact their programs.

SECTION III - Findings, Commendations, And Recommendations

Based on its review of written documents provided by the institution and the two-day site visit, the Special Visit Team was able to exam each of the three Action Items in the Commission Action Letter of March 6, 2015. The visit resulted in five commendations and four recommendations.

Commendations

- (1) The institution's mission and values are coherent, well-articulated, and embodied in the everyday life of faculty, staff, and students.
- (2) Under its current leadership, the University of the West has made significant progress in responding to its challenges as well as those facing higher education in general.
- (3) The institution has done extensive and high-quality work over the last two years in preparing its guiding documents, including the institutional report, the strategic plan, and the 2016 update to the strategic plan.
- (4) The process leading to the strategic and subsidiary plans has been collaborative and inclusive with broad campus involvement, including executive leadership, accreditation and institutional research specialists, academic departments, student affairs professionals, and staff. Specific goals have been formulated and are being assessed.
- (5) University of the West is beginning the process of rethinking its undergraduate curriculum. The proposed focus on inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches aims to align general education requirements more closely with the university's mission. The visit team commends the institution for efforts to create an integrated undergraduate experience that blends curricular and co-curricular elements and considers student success among diverse populations.

Recommendations

(1) While the institution is striving to further develop 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 (CFR 4.6). In particular, the institution should concentrate on developing tactical and operational, concrete steps that are realistic given current financial and enrollment levels. Such steps are necessary if the university is to develop actionable plans based on core values (CAL, action item a).

(3) It is recommended that the institution specify how growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollments will occur, including plans for branding and outreach. Such plans for enrollment management (CFR 3.4) should include realistic goals for increasing enrollment and improving retention.

(4) It is recommended that the institution build a structured process for collecting and using qualitative data to increase student learning and success. The university should evaluate evidence of learning to support maximum learning for diverse student cohorts (Standard 2). By identifying the distinct needs of its domestic and international students, the institution can better assess academic needs such as preparation and college readiness, and strive to improve student achievement (CFR 2.10).