



WSCUC
WASC SENIOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COMMISSION
INSTITUTIONAL REPORT
2021

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COMPONENT I

Introduction: Institutional Context and Response to Previous Commission Actions

CFRs 1.1; 1.8

Institutional History

University of the West (UWest) is a pioneering effort of American and Chinese Buddhists to establish a Buddhist-affiliated university dedicated to providing a quality education rooted in the best American liberal arts traditions and standards and informed by Buddhist wisdom and values.

Founding Organization: Fo Guang Shan

UWest was founded in 1991 by [Venerable Master Hsing Yun](#), a prominent Chinese monk and advocate of Humanistic Buddhism. In 1967 Master Hsing Yun founded the [Fo Guang Shan](#) (FGS) monastic order in southern Taiwan. Active in over 60 countries today, Fo Guang Shan, or “Buddha’s Light Mountain,” is one of the largest Buddhist organizations in the world. Its humanistic projects include children’s and seniors’ homes, free medical clinics, disaster relief, prison ministry, and many cultural and educational endeavors such as nursery schools, secondary schools, libraries, museums, and institutions of higher education.

Establishment of UWest

UWest was the first university founded by FGS, opening our doors as Hsi Lai University in 1991 on the grounds of [Hsi Lai Temple](#) in Hacienda Heights, California. In the summer of 1996, the university moved to our current location in Rosemead. The name University of the West was adopted in 2004.

Since founding UWest, FGS has established six additional institutions of higher education internationally, which, together with UWest, constitute the seven members of the [Fo Guang Shan International University Consortium](#). As of 2021, UWest is the only FGS-affiliated

university in the Americas, and one of only five regionally accredited Buddhist-affiliated institutions of higher learning in the United States overall.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission: “Provide a whole-person education in a context informed by Buddhist wisdom and values and facilitate cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West.”

Vision: “UWest will model whole-person education through engaged and interdisciplinary learning in all programs; an exceptional, caring faculty and staff who fulfill 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. UWest will be a widely recognized name.”

Values: UWest integrates Western liberal arts traditions with Eastern wisdom teachings and a global perspective to provide an educational experience informed by Humanistic Buddhist values: becoming people of strong *character*; practicing *compassion*; and building sustainable *community* (see component 3).

The [UWest mission and core values](#) are actualized in the Institutional Learning Outcomes of *Know – Be – Do* and are published in the [university catalog](#).

Campus

UWest is located in the city of Rosemead on a spacious and tranquil 10-acre campus. [UWest facilities](#) include two main buildings housing offices and classrooms, a [library](#), auditorium, dining hall, two residence halls, and meditation room. The campus also features study rooms, computer lab, tutoring center, smart technology classrooms, and wellness center. Students find recreational opportunities at the swimming pool, spa, basketball court, fitness

center, recreation room, fountain courtyard, student café, and other open areas for recreation and relaxation.

Programs and Enrollment

UWest offers four undergraduate degree programs (BA in Business Administration, English, Liberal Arts, and Psychology), four master's programs (MA in Psychology-Marriage and Family Therapy, MA in Religious Studies, Master of Business Administration, Master of Divinity in Buddhist Chaplaincy), two doctoral programs (Doctor of Buddhist Ministry and PhD in Religious Studies), and various non-degree programs including the Intensive English Program ([2020/21 Academic Catalog](#)) and several certificate programs. 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.

In spring semester 2021, total enrollment at UWest was 230 students across all programs: 93 undergraduate students, 106 graduate students, and 31 students in non-degree and community education programs. The campus has the capacity to serve 800 students in in-person classes and to house up to 170 students in our residence halls.

In addition to the academic and non-degree programs, UWest is also home to three research institutes, the [Center for the Study of Minority and Small Business](#), the [Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon Project](#), and the [Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism](#).

Educational Experience and Contribution to the Public Good

UWest offers students a personalized whole-person educational experience that brings East and West together on our campus and in our curricula and programs. Because the university is dedicated to increasing educational access among those from underrepresented communities and diverse populations, UWest strives to keep attendance costs affordable. The

university also provides institutional scholarships and tuition waivers to our domestic and international students to increase educational opportunity and attract a student body that is both diverse and global. As a result, UWest has maintained a roughly equal proportion of domestic to international students overall, and our undergraduate cohorts of first-time college students are significantly composed of domestic students from underrepresented communities (see [UWest Student Demographic Diversity charts](#)).

The university's professional graduate degree programs prepare chaplains, Buddhist ministers, and mental health therapists to serve the spiritual and psycho-emotional needs of diverse communities according to recognized professional standards. UWest's business administration programs educate the next generation of ethical leaders, combining theory with practical skills in a wide array of business fields. UWest further contributes to the public good through the work and outreach of our research institutes and community service projects such as the [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program](#), chaplaincy outreach, the UWest Prison Project, university food and clothing drives, and our feral cat trap-neuter-release initiative.

Governance and Employees

Governance of the university lies with the [board of trustees](#) (BOT). Trustees select and evaluate the president, oversee faculty and senior administrative appointments, monitor the budget, supervise the endowment, and protect university property. The UWest president serves as the institution's chief executive officer and is supported by the Executive Team, consisting of chief academic officer (CAO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief student services officer (CSSO), and institutional effectiveness manager (IEM). In spring 2021, UWest employed 15 full-time faculty (including the chairs of the six academic departments: Buddhist Chaplaincy, Business Administration, English, General Education & Liberal Arts, Psychology, and Religious

Studies), 44 adjunct faculty, 35 full-time, and three part-time staff members (see updated [Organizational Chart](#))

UWest's embrace of diversity and inclusion is reflected in the [demographics](#) of our administration, faculty, staff, and student body and exemplified by our currently all-female, multiethnic, multireligious executive leadership team. UWest's mission and learning outcomes promote cross-cultural understanding and exchange while university policies (e.g., [nondiscrimination, equity, diversity](#)), structures (e.g., [committees](#)), and institutional culture of [shared governance](#) value and ensure inclusion and participation.

Finances

As a small non-profit university, UWest is funded through donations (43% of revenue; primarily through the International Buddhist Progress Society [IBPS-Hsi Lai Temple]), tuition and fees (40% of revenue), and grants and endowment investment and earnings (17%). The university has recently completed the development of the next [five-year strategic plan](#), which integrates a [five-year strategic budget](#).

Accreditation History

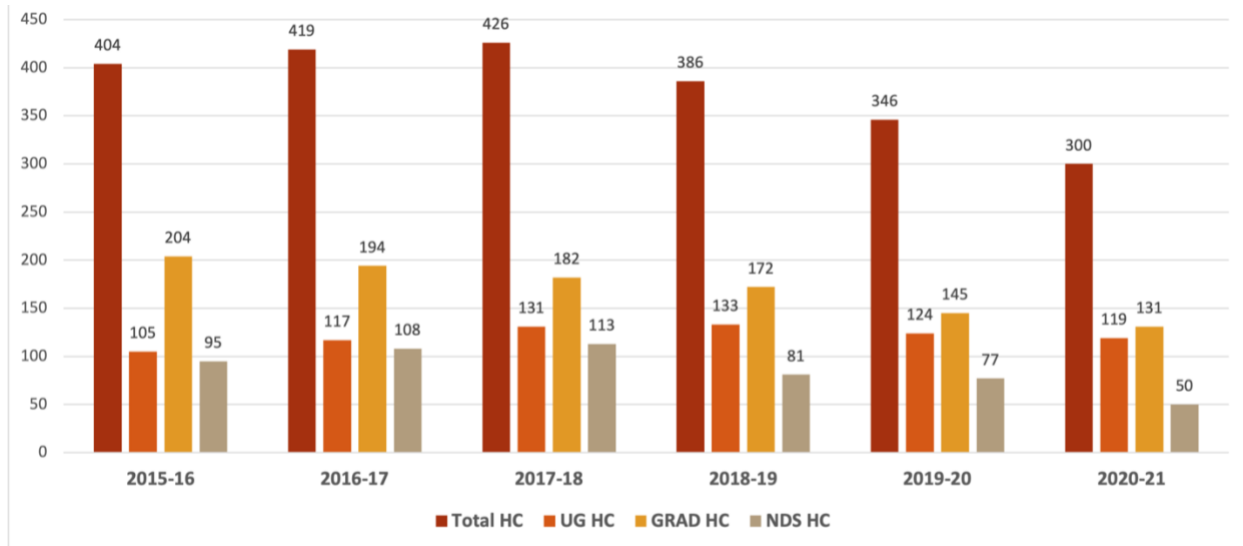
UWest was granted initial WSCUC accreditation on February 16, 2006. The Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) was conducted in 2010, resulting in a Special Visit in 2012, which cleared the university for the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) in 2014. The March 6, 2015 Commission Action Letter reaffirmed 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 current reaffirmation of accreditation review, originally scheduled for spring and fall 2021, was postponed by six months upon [UWest's request](#) due to several changes

in leadership between 2018 and 2020. All accreditation reports and action letters since 2010 are [published on the university website](#).

Significant Changes Since the Last Accreditation Review

Since the 2015 and 2017 accreditation reviews, the university has experienced exciting changes as well as serious challenges. Following Dr. Steve Morgan’s tenure as UWest president (2013-2018), there have been three changes in chief executive leadership: Dr. Otto Chang (president, 2018-2019), Dr. Chiung-Sally Chou (interim president, 2019-2020), and our current, permanent president, Dr. Minh-Hoa Ta, who assumed leadership in July 2020. This turnover at the top coincided with declining enrollment (illustrated in figure 1), impacting university revenue and leading to budget cuts and some staff reduction, mostly in the form of hiring freezes.

Figure 1. 12-month Unduplicated Headcount, 2015-16 to 2020-21



Notable changes in staffing occurred in institutional research and effectiveness, which went from a two-person office prior to 2018 (consisting of an institutional research and assessment officer and an institutional planning and campus culture officer) to a one-person office (IEM) in spring 2018. A new part-time institutional research analyst was added in spring 2021 (see below). In 2019, the career services coordinator position was dissolved as a cost-

cutting measure, with some of the related duties reassigned to the Student Success Center coordinator. In another cost-saving measure, the human resources director position was eliminated in 2021, and UWest now contracts with an HR consulting company.

In the face of external and internal challenges, UWest has also experienced significant positive changes. After the resignation of President Chang in June 2019, the board of trustees (BOT) appointed Dr. Chou, who served as interim president while the BOT conducted a nationwide search for a permanent president. Dr. Chou took decisive steps to address budget shortfall and successfully steered the institution through the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. The university's current president, [Dr. Minh-Hoa Ta](#), officially took office in July 2020. In the one year since then, she has improved institutional morale, overseen the completion of the new five-year strategic plan, bolstered institutional research, strengthened the enrollment and marketing functions, and stabilized the budget. Another positive development in governance has been the recent addition to the UWest BOT of two members with accomplished careers in American higher education leadership, [Dr. Allen Huang](#) in 2020 and [Dr. Howard Wang](#) in 2021 and an additional new trustee since June 2021, attorney [Joshua Figuli](#), with expertise in higher education law, finance, and accreditation.

In late 2019, CAO and Accreditation Liaison Officer Dr. Peter M. Rojcewicz left UWest for a new position. Chief Student Services Officer Vanessa Karam assumed the role of ALO, one she had filled in the past (2012-2014). In August 2020, [Dr. Jane Naomi Iwamura](#), former chair of UWest's Religious Studies Department and inaugural director of the Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism, was appointed CAO. Finally, in 2018, [Dr. Bobby Ojose](#) joined the General Education Department as full-time professor of mathematics/math program coordinator; his work has led to significant improvements in math course pass rates.

Financially, the university has benefited from a \$1,000,000 private foundation grant and interest from the university's endowment fund, which has helped cover scholarship cost and offset the general fund. To address enrollment challenges, in spring 2021, UWest restructured the enrollment and admissions office and hired an experienced new enrollment coordinator, [Dr. Nadia Simone](#).

Covid-19 Pandemic Response

The global Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated several of the university's challenges, causing significant enrollment decline and loss of revenue. Fortunately, UWest was able to mount a swift and successful response to the pandemic as the university had already hired a full-time online learning coordinator, put a learning management system in place, and begun offering online courses in 2019. (See [essay on UWest Covid-19 Response](#)).

Response to Recent Commission Recommendations

The WSCUC review process has consistently provided invaluable guidance to UWest's efforts to increase educational effectiveness and institutional integrity. Commission recommendations from the 2015 EER and 2017 Special Visit have helped us focus on five areas: collection and analysis of student data, graduate culture, strategic planning, enrollment management, and multi-year budgeting.

Collection and Analysis of Student Data (CFRs 1.2, 2.10)

Turnover in executive leadership accompanied by the departure of key institutional research personnel, the global pandemic, and associated budgetary pressures delayed UWest's efforts to implement a structured process for the systematic use of data to increase student success across diverse cohorts. In fall 2020, the former institutional research officer was brought in as a consultant to comprehensively update [student success data](#). In response to WSCUC

recommendations, the institutional effectiveness manager also undertook various qualitative studies such as focus groups of student sub-populations in 2018-19 and semi-structured student interviews in 2019-20 (see components 4 and 6). Plans for focus groups in 2020-21 were postponed due to the disruptions of the pandemic.

With the hiring in spring 2021 of [Dr. Shusaku Horibe](#), a highly qualified institutional research analyst, UWest has increased capacity to effectively collect and disaggregate student success data. During 2021, Dr. Horibe is assessing the university's data ecosystem with a goal of developing and implementing efficient and effective data collection and warehousing processes. These systems, complemented by a common research methodology, will enable the consistent disaggregation and analysis of student persistence and graduation data to improve student learning outcomes and student support and to inform decision making about best practices.

Over the past years, the [graduation rates of our first-time full-time \(FTFT\) undergraduate cohorts have been below the regional mean](#). Analysis of these data for diverse groups of students at UWest informs our ongoing efforts to track and assess our retention and support efforts ([Retention Plan](#)). Implemented changes include assigning a faculty mentor to support incoming freshman cohorts, strengthening the general education math curriculum, introducing supplemental writing instruction in key undergraduate courses, and raising the minimum GPA for undergraduate admission (see component 5).

Graduate Culture (CFRs 2.2b, 2.8-2.10, 3.1-3.3, 3.10)

The 2015 and 2017 Commission action letters highlighted graduate culture as an area for improvement: specifically, clarity of expectations for tenure and promotion, student-faculty ratios for graduate mentoring, and professional development. In the interim, the university has focused on developing and supporting the academic vitality on campus through student

participation in teaching practica, research projects and publications, academic conferences and colloquia, activities of graduate student clubs, etc. (described in greater detail in component 3).

Additionally, UWest has made progress in the specified areas:

Tenure and Promotion. University administration worked with the faculty senate to revise the [UWest faculty handbook](#). The development, drafting, and review of these policies involved all faculty, including those on tenure, promotion, and sabbatical leave. A priority for 2021-22 is the development and approval of faculty workload guidelines and a post-tenure review policy.

Student-Faculty Ratios for Graduate Mentoring. Given the specialized nature of doctoral dissertation advising, the university has established a 6:1 student-faculty advising ratio as an optimal target for its doctoral programs. The target allows for sustainability in terms of program size and quality of mentorship. Since the 2017 Special Visit, enrollment in the Buddhist chaplaincy DBMin program has increased, bringing the student-faculty ratio to the target level. Student-faculty ratios in the religious studies PhD program have been reduced to a more optimal level by means of intentional decreases in admissions.

Table 1. Doctoral Student-Faculty Ratios (Headcount)

	Buddhist Chaplaincy Department			Religious Studies Department		
	DBMin students	DBMin faculty	DBMin student-faculty ratio	PhD students	PhD faculty	PhD student-faculty ratio
Spring 2017	6	2	3:1	34	4	9:1
Spring 2019	10	2	5:1	34	4	9:1
Spring 2021	12	2	6:1	27	4	7:1

Research Opportunities and Professional Development. UWest offers [Faculty Research Awards \(FRA\)](#) for research projects, workshop registration, and academic/professional conference support. Placed on hold for 2020-21 due to the pandemic and budgetary constraints,

reinstatement of the FRA is included in the [2020-25 Strategic Plan](#). Student research opportunities can be attached to these faculty-led projects across the university.

The Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism (ISHB) offers the [ISHB Graduate Student Research Training Program](#), in which selected graduate students participate on various projects and receive mentorship and research training. UWest Master of Divinity students have provided research support for the [Mapping Buddhist Chaplains Research Survey](#), a joint initiative with Harvard Divinity School, Brandeis University, and UWest's Institute of Buddhist Studies. Chaplaincy students also engage in professional development through active leadership and participation in university and community interfaith events, with academic support and social engagement provided by the [Religious Studies Graduate Council](#).

The Religious Studies department has instituted the [PhD Teaching Program](#) (PTP), open to all doctoral-level students who have advanced to candidacy. PTP students participate in a semester-long Teaching Practicum ([REL 690](#)), in which they are introduced to relevant practices and issues related to college-level teaching and develop their own course syllabus. They may also apply to teach an undergraduate course in UWest's general education-liberal arts department.

Students in the MBA program collaborate with faculty on original research and submit [articles](#) to peer-reviewed journals. Psychology department leadership has involved undergraduate and master's marriage and family therapy (MFT) students in [community action research](#).

Strategic Planning (CFRs 3.4, 4.5-4.7)

UWest has inclusive, broadly participatory structures and evidence-based processes in place for strategic planning and budgeting. Since 2017, the university has experienced the volatility of the higher education environment, especially as it pertains to enrollment numbers,

staffing, and financial stability. Turnover in leadership over several years set in motion operational changes that put the university in a precarious situation when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020. The [2020-25 strategic plan](#) was [developed within this context](#) and with this set of challenges in mind. The plan creates a strong infrastructure that addresses current needs and builds on the university's strengths and distinctive identity while facilitating UWest's sustainability. The new strategic plan integrates a five-year strategic budget and develops realistic tactical and operational steps at the programmatic, divisional/departamental, and institutional levels in support of strategic goals. Detailed action plans with measurable outcomes, including key performance indicators, monitors the realization of this strategic plan (CFR 4.6).

Enrollment Management (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 3.7, 4.6, 4.7)

Several years of heightened investment in the university's enrollment and recruitment functions were accompanied by enrollment growth and stability through 2017. While international undergraduate enrollment remained robust thanks to UWest's 2+2 transfer and exchange programs with our sister universities in Taiwan, domestic undergraduate enrollment has declined significantly since 2018, and some of the previously stable graduate programs (e.g., MBA, MFT) have also seen falling enrollment. UWest has taken meaningful steps to achieve realistic growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollments by restructuring the enrollment office, hiring a dynamic, highly qualified enrollment coordinator as well as a full-time marketing specialist and a part-time website developer to carry forward crucial recruitment, outreach, and branding efforts (see component 7).

The [strategic enrollment plan](#) targets enrollment of 400 students by 2025 (a 53% increase from fall 2020), based on anticipated internal and external factors and the current context in higher education. Complementing recruitment efforts to grow enrollment, UWest's [Retention](#)

[Plan](#) identifies strategies to track and evaluate student success data and make recommendations to improve persistence, graduation, and other student success measures through curricular and co-curricular initiatives and student support services.

Multi-Year Budgeting (CFRs 3.4, 4.5-4.7)

UWest's financial position is laid out in detail in component 7. As recommended in the 2017 Commission Action Letter, UWest's strategic planning process has included the development of a five-year strategic budget that invests in the academic infrastructure to serve enrollment growth and promote educational effectiveness.

Conclusion

Preparation for Reaffirmation of Accreditation Review

UWest utilized a broadly participatory process to evaluate and transparently demonstrate the university's performance under the WSCUC Standards and the Criteria for Review. This work tied in directly with the university's priorities and projects focused on strategic planning and budgeting, enrollment growth, and assessment and program review. The core WSCUC Team (CSSO/ALO, CAO, and IEM), in close collaboration with the president, was responsible for organizing the review process, overseeing the evidence collection, managing the timeline, keeping stakeholders informed, and writing the institutional report with input from key constituents. The University-wide Assessment Council, serving as the Accreditation Taskforce, includes the academic department heads, librarian, registrar, core WSCUC Team, and student representatives. This group met regularly to discuss and elaborate our approach to the review and responses to the various components of the report. The university also conducted [town hall meetings](#) to explain the purpose and importance of accreditation and solicit input from the broader community. The president regularly shared [relevant information and updates](#) with

faculty and staff. Early drafts of the report were disseminated to the Accreditation Taskforce and the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the board of trustees for valuable feedback. The final draft was made available to students, faculty, and staff, and received [board approval](#) at the trustees' June 18, 2021 meeting.

Strengths, Challenges, and Planning

Based on internal planning and evaluation, UWest perceives our strengths in the clarity of our mission and values and their integration throughout our programs and services; our diversity and inclusiveness; the quality of our faculty and academic programs; the enduring financial support from our founding organization; the university's endowment, executive leadership and managing board; our new strategic plan; and our commitment to serving our students and improving their outcomes. We continue to benefit from the dedication of our faculty and staff to UWest and to the success of our students and alumni, who are our primary purpose and the pride of UWest. As discussed above and in multiple sections of this report, factors internal and external to the university have led to temporary setbacks, most noticeably in our enrollment numbers. We welcome the accreditation review process, which has helped us to focus on analyzing and addressing the challenges we currently face, particularly in marketing and recruitment, domestic undergraduate persistence and graduation, and the systematic analysis of student success data. Our formulated plans, laid out in this report and supported by the evidence provided, prioritize these same areas of improvement.

COMPONENT 2

Compliance with WSCUC Standards and Federal Requirements

At the beginning of UWest’s self-study process, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee Working Group reviewed the CFRs and made preliminary identifications of evidence supporting our compliance with the WSCUC Standards. The CFRs provided a framework for iterative review throughout our preparation and informed the responses for this component and the corresponding [Compliance Worksheet](#). The responses were discussed in detail by the University-wide Assessment Council/Accreditation Task Force (UWAC-ATF) and the Retention Committee, with final review from the Executive Team as well as other stakeholders across the university.

Strengths Corresponding to CFRs

UWest has a revitalized strategic plan for fulfilling our articulated mission and vision in line with our institutional values. This plan is supported by a curriculum reflective of our mission and approach to whole-person education, a co-curriculum that supports students’ personal and professional development, a philosophy of educating students for future success characterized by ethically and socially responsible citizenship, a financially stable foundation for long-term planning and viability, effective leadership and decision-making processes, and a transparent, collaborative, data-driven process for tracking outcomes. Our [2020-25 strategic plan](#) is reflective of our commitment to quality education and continuous improvement (CFRs: 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, 2.2a, 2.11-2.13, 3.4, 3.6-3.10, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6).

UWest has revitalized and honed academic program review processes that support the regular and systematic assessment of student learning outcomes and student success outcomes, as well as data-driven resource allocation (CFRs: 1.2, 1.6, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.4-2.7, 2.9, 2.10, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7).

Expectations, requirements, resources, policies, and procedures for prospective and current students are clearly articulated in university policies, the university catalog, the student handbook, programmatic materials, course syllabi, and on the university website (CFRs: 1.1-1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 2.2-2.2b, 2.4, 2.5, 2.12-2.14, 3.5).

Expectations, requirements, resources, policies, and procedures for faculty are clearly articulated in university policies, the university catalog, the faculty handbook, faculty governance materials, academic department materials, and on the university website (CFRs: 1.1-1.7, 2.2-2.2b, 2.4, 2.5, 2.12-2.14, 3.5, 3.7, 3.10, 4.3).

Expectations, requirements, resources, policies, and procedures for staff are clearly articulated in university policies, the university catalog, the employee handbook, and on the university website (CFRs: 1.1, 1.3-1.8, 2.4, 2.12-2.14, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.10).

UWest has a highly qualified and committed team of faculty, staff, and administrators, led by the strategic vision and experience of our president, Dr. Minh-Hoa Ta (CFRs: 1.1, 1.3-1.5, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.4-2.7, 2.9, 2.11-2.14, 3.1, 3.3, 3.6-3.10, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7).

UWest has a strong commitment from our primary financial donor, the International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS-Hsi Lai Temple), that ensures long-term institutional viability (CFRs: 1.7, 3.4, 3.5, 4.7).

Areas for Growth Corresponding to CFRs

UWest's educational philosophy is informed by our Humanistic Buddhist identity, which is also reflected in our mission and values. Offering more curricular and co-curricular programming that highlights and furthers our mission, values, and Buddhist identity would help to further articulate UWest's distinctive character. Recognizing this opportunity, faculty are in

the process of developing a certificate program in Buddhist chaplaincy and a master's in Buddhist psychology (CFRs: 1.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.11, 3.10, 4.7).

Current expectations for research, scholarship, and creative activity for faculty are not clearly defined within faculty workload agreements and faculty handbook. This has been highlighted by President Ta and the CAO as a priority for improvement (CFRs: 2.8, 3.2).

Faculty and staff evaluation processes would benefit from a realignment with current best practices in performance appraisal (e.g., feedback from multiple sources, appropriate peer review, meaningful professional development arising from useful evaluation, etc.) (CFR: 3.2).

The recent redesign of [mission-centric student affairs learning outcomes](#) (aligned with the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education standards) has readied student services offices for the development and implementation of co-curricular assessment practices to improve program effectiveness (CFRs: 1.2, 2.3, 2.10, 2.11, 3.3, 4.3).

While IBPS, UWest's primary financial donor, has made a firm commitment to ensuring the viability of the university, the identification of revenue streams alternative to IBPS and tuition has become an even greater institutional priority in the wake of declining enrollment trends and the Covid-19 pandemic. UWest's 2020-2025 strategic plan addresses this priority with the strategic goal (R-3) of university and board of trustee collaboration on fundraising campaigns and the addition of a development officer position (CFR: 3.4).

Infrastructure Revitalization Priorities Corresponding to CFRs

Throughout our WSCUC accreditation history, UWest has made steady improvements to key university functions (e.g., strategic planning, implementation of assessment practices to support a culture of evidence, use of data collection and analysis) to support student success and

satisfaction. Since our last WSCUC visit, we have also strengthened our graduate culture, enrollment management efforts, and our multi-year budgeting practices.

In recent years, UWest has faced challenges shared by small, private, non-profit universities across the country. Declining domestic undergraduate enrollment trends at such institutions have been noted for years. The recent political climate in the United States resulted in additional sizeable drops in international enrollment at the undergraduate and graduate levels; international students make up nearly 50% of UWest's student population. Declining domestic undergraduate and international enrollment and the associated decreases in tuition, room, board, and fee revenue were significantly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Further compounding these challenges was a period of instability arising from multiple transitions in university leadership, lasting approximately two years (summer 2018 to summer 2020; see [Strategic Planning Process Document](#)). These challenges led to a temporary pause to UWest's steady progress towards improved educational and operational infrastructure. Now, with stable and highly qualified leadership in the president's office, UWest has resumed its forward trajectory towards consistent implementation of evidence-based quality assurance practices and processes in both academic and non-academic areas.

The newly revitalized academic program review process has laid a solid foundation for the further development of the systematic assessment of core competencies beyond the GE curriculum; the consistent communication of course, program, and institutional learning outcomes; increased faculty ownership of the assessment process; regular review of external evidence of student success indicators (such as job placement and employer feedback); strengthening the links between assessment and institutional planning, and the involvement of

external stakeholders in the assessment of educational programs (CFRs: 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5).

Institutional research capacity was impacted by the departure of our former chief budget analyst and institutional research director. This position was not subsequently restaffed. Under President Ta, this need was prioritized, and a qualified higher education data analyst was retained by the university as of April 2021. This addition to the institution has increased our capacity for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; the tracking of learning results over time; the timely dissemination of student achievement data; and its incorporation in institutional review, planning, and decision making (CFRs: 1.2, 2.7, 2.10, 4.1-4.3).

Faculty and staff development activities designed to improve teaching, learning, and assessment of learning outcomes were impacted by the loss of revenue resulting from enrollment declines and the Covid-19 pandemic. Renewed institutional commitment to providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, including the revitalization of the Faculty Research Award program, has been articulated in the 2020-25 strategic plan (CFRs: 2.8, 3.3, 4.3).

COMPONENT 3

Degree Programs: Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees

CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.3

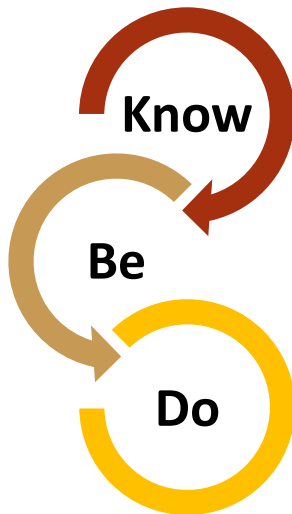
Meaning of UWest Degrees

The meaning of a UWest degree is closely linked with the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and institutional values. These university-wide learning outcomes and values are drawn from the university's mission and vision (see component 1); they drive the institution's curricular and co-curricular programming and encapsulate UWest's whole-person approach to education.

Institutional Learning Outcomes

The ILOs are centered around the expectation that a student who graduates from UWest will acquire relevant knowledge of their discipline, cultivate an ethical outlook and integrated identity, and be able to apply the knowledge, skills, and outlook in the real world: *Know, Be, Do*.

Figure 2. Institutional Learning Outcomes



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

These outcomes are undergirded by our institutional values.

Institutional Values

University of the West is committed to graduating students with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their educational, professional, personal, and spiritual goals and to perpetuate these values as the cornerstones in creating a better world: *Character, Compassion, Community*. Figure 2 illustrates what it means to belong to a university community founded on Humanistic Buddhist principles.

Figure 3. Institutional Values



The university mission, values, and ILOs serve as the foundation for and inform the meaning of UWest degrees. The [ILOs define three characteristics expected of a UWest graduate](#): (1) competency in core areas, including written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and information literacy, with higher expectations and specialized knowledge at the advanced degree program levels; (2) an ethical outlook and self-awareness cultivated through contemplative practice; and (3) respect and appreciation for diversity in a variety of contexts.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) have been organically developed by each department, based on the parameters of the field of study, differentiated in level and intensity between undergraduate and graduate levels and aligned with the ILOs.

Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes

While the [PLOs at the baccalaureate level](#) are tailored to each undergraduate major, they are designed to integrate the [GE PLOs](#) into the curriculum, representing the skills and competencies, knowledge, and abilities that UWest commits to developing in our students through GE, the major, and co-curricular programs.

As reflected in the GE program mission, the attainment of a general education means that students possess “a broad range of knowledge and vital skills of learning which will enhance and transcend student’s chosen major and their life goals.” At the heart of an undergraduate education at UWest, GE seeks to “prepare our students to foster the transferable skills of critical thinking by integrating ideas from multiple disciplines and provide insights on how to apply the knowledge into their real-world context.”

Fifty-one GE units (42 lower-division units and 9 upper-division units) constitutes roughly 40% of the 120 units required for an undergraduate degree. Forty-seven GE units are taken within seven broad categories, illustrated in figure 4. Additionally, students complete one unit of Service Learning and a 3-unit GE capstone course. These requirements ensure that students have met the learning goals of UWest’s GE program and can integrate and apply the knowledge and skills they have gained from their undergraduate education.

Figure 4. General Education requirements

Area	Required Units
Total	51
1. Core Competencies	15
2. Historical Foundations	6
3. Mathematics & Natural Sciences	6
4. Religion & Philosophy	6
5. Social & Behavioral Sciences	6
6. Humanities	6
7. Wellness	2
8. Service Learning	1
9. Capstone in General Education	3

The UWest baccalaureate learning outcomes incorporate the five WSCUC core competencies through alignment with the GE goals and outcomes, while also incorporating a sixth related to service; Table 2 displays this alignment.

Table 2. Crosswalk: Institutional Learning Outcomes, GE Outcomes, Baccalaureate Program Learning Outcomes, and Core Competencies Alignment

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)	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.
GE Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral Communication (LO1) ○ Written Communication (LO2) ○ Information Literacy (LO3) ○ Critical Thinking Processes (LO4) ○ Quantitative Reasoning (LO5 & LO6) ○ Individual and Cultural Diversity & Identity (LO7) ○ Value of Service (LO8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral Communication (LO1) ○ Information Literacy (LO3) ○ Individual and Cultural Diversity & Identity (LO7) ○ Value of Service (LO8) ○ Acts of Service (LO7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral Communication (LO1) ○ Written Communication (LO2) ○ Information Literacy (LO3) ○ Critical Thinking Processes (LO4) ○ Quantitative Reasoning (LO5 & LO6) ○ Individual and Cultural Diversity & Identity (LO7) ○ Acts of Service (LO7)
Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Mapping completed by programs	Mapping completed by programs	Mapping completed by programs
WSCUC Core Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral Communication ○ Written Communication ○ Information Literacy ○ Critical Thinking ○ Quantitative Reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral Communication ○ Information Literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral Communication ○ Written Communication ○ Information Literacy ○ Critical Thinking ○ Quantitative Reasoning

The PLOs and the overarching set of ILOs and institutional values are further reinforced by attention to each student and a variety of [co-curricular activities](#) that enhance the student’s educational experience and promote a whole-person approach.

Graduate Learning Outcomes

[Graduate degree program learning outcomes](#) are developed by program faculty based on the professional standards (MBA, MFT, MDiv, DBMin, Post-MBA) and advanced requirements

and expectations of a given field (MA and PhD in religious studies), in line with the ILOs. The ILOs are further enhanced and reinforced by co-curricular programming through the various departments, institutes, and projects (e.g., lectures and projects offered through the [Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism](#), [graduate student club activities](#), etc.).

Student Well-Being and Service to the Community

As a distinctive characteristic of a UWest degree, the university pays special attention to opportunities and practices that enhance a student's *well-being* and self-awareness. This sense of well-being is intimately linked to cultivating an ethical outlook and sense of connection and responsibility to the larger community in the form of *service*. The commitment to self-awareness and service is currently realized through co-curricular activities, undergraduate service-learning requirements (e.g., SRVLG 100 Service Learning, PSYCH 495 Capstone: Eastern & Western Perspectives on Contemporary Issues in Psychology & Counseling), and numerous curriculum-embedded field experiences ([MBA 590 Internship](#), [MDIV 590 Service Learning Practicum](#), [PSYCH 700/710 Practicum in Buddhist/Multicultural Counseling](#)). Service is articulated as a GE learning goal with two related learning outcomes. It is further evidenced within the university's [strategic goals](#) (C-4, A-1, A-6, and E 1-3). Additionally, faculty and students engage in a variety of research, scholarly, and creative activities that address issues directly relevant to a whole-person approach and robust and thriving community. Some of the many examples of how UWest has rendered and realized student well-being and service to the community:

- [Contemplative Education courses](#) provide students with self-reflection and mindfulness strategies grounded in an understanding of contemplative traditions.
- The [REL Graduate Student Council](#) sponsors lectures by scholars in the field of religious studies and offers the weekly Chanting for World Peace.

- [Weekly yoga and meditation](#) sessions represent guided practice for students, faculty, and staff seeking a safe and comfortable space.
- [Common Ground Week](#) and [International/Interfaith Education Week](#) are annual events that build community and promote interfaith and cultural understanding through a series of events.
- [Scholarship service hours](#) are an integral part of the International Buddhist Education Foundation Scholarship awarded to DBMin, MDiv, and REL PhD and master's students; scholarship recipients are expected to complete 50 hours of service to the university or other non-profit organization.
- The free [VITA tax preparation program](#) is provided each spring by faculty and [trained students](#) in the Department of Business Administration as a service to the wider community ([2019 VITA Report](#)).

These programs create and sustain a robust environment that supports student well-being and fosters service to the community.

Quality of UWest Degrees

University of the West students graduate from the university with the expected competencies defined in the institution's learning outcomes through the following quality assurance processes: (1) by delivering high-quality academic programs informed by direct assessment of student learning; (2) through UWest's commitment to inclusive excellence—holding high expectations of all students while providing the supports necessary for all graduates to achieve those expectations; and (3) by providing a rich co-curriculum that enhances the curricular experience and enables the further development of competencies in meaningful and practical contexts.

As highlighted in the [UWest Program Review Processes & Procedures](#) document, the chief purpose of assessment is to improve student learning. To facilitate systematic use of ongoing program assessment, the university has fine-tuned its annual assessment reporting process, which mirrors the reporting categories collected via the WSCUC Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI): (1) the evidence (direct and indirect) used to ensure that students have achieved PLOs; (2) the interpretation and analysis of evidence; and (3) the process for using findings for program improvement. Program chairs and directors submit an annual program report (APR) on assessment findings and program maintenance outcomes at the end of each fall semester based on the assessment data from the previous academic year. The CAO and CSSO, in coordination with the University-wide Assessment Committee (UWAC), review and further hone the annual reports and track the key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined in the strategic plans on both the program and university levels. Academic programs also engage in an external peer review (EPR) process that occurs every five years.

The annual reporting process and broader five-year self-study cycle (which includes the cyclical EPR) are facilitated by the institutional effectiveness (IE) office. Annual report findings demonstrate a range of assessment methods employed for both curricular and co-curricular programs. See examples below.

- The GE department utilizes the capstone course ([CAP401 Religion, Science and Society](#)) to assess student learning and achievement of performance standards. UWest students take CAP401 after having completed 42 GE units, including completion of all GE core courses. Additionally, with the change of the targeted PLOs in 2019-2020, the GE faculty introduced a [quantitative reasoning assessment component](#) into CAP401 (described in [GE 5-Year Self-Study](#), p. 5).

- The Undergraduate Transformation Team is currently in the process of fine-tuning baccalaureate program assessment and tools in accordance with the [sixteen VALUE rubrics for the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes](#) offered by the Association of American Colleges & University. Alignment of the university's rubrics used to assess undergraduate core competencies will especially benefit from this process.

Through established review processes, programs are encouraged to use multiple methods of assessment, with an emphasis on direct measures. The University-wide Assessment Committee (UWAC) offers a key venue where faculty and administrators share key data, work across departments on interdisciplinary dimensions of assessment, and further hone their assessment efforts. In short, UWAC ensures the quality of our assessment efforts, which in turn allow us to better evaluate and enhance the quality of our degrees.

Integrity of UWest Degrees

University of the West is committed to ensuring the integrity of its degrees and does so in the following important ways:

- Advocacy from faculty, demonstrated through their commitment to delivering high quality instruction and to ensuring student performance meets stated course expectations.
- Accurate naming and reporting of degrees, concentrations, and minors.
- A comprehensive evaluation and degree clearance process.
- A whole-person approach to student success.

Faculty Commitment to High Quality Instruction

The faculty are integral to ensuring the integrity of UWest degrees. Faculty have developed and are responsible for maintaining and updating policies and procedures for

academic program and course proposals; principles of assessment of student learning; and principles, criteria, and procedures for retention, promotion, and tenure review/departmental tenure criteria for tenure-track faculty. This faculty-developed system helps ensure high standards of teaching, with appropriate connections to research, scholarship, and creative activity defined by faculty and their academic programs ([UWest faculty handbook](#)). UWest faculty are primarily responsible for the development of degree program curriculum, policy, and assessment. Faculty are supported in their roles as teachers, learners, and scholars through research award opportunities and workshops offered by the CAO's office (e.g., [Moodle Up!](#)).

Accurate Naming and Reporting of Degrees

Accurately naming and reporting degrees, concentrations, and minors is critical to their integrity. The title of a degree, concentration, and/or minor is intended to reflect a specific body of knowledge and skills defined by the respective field of study. The name implies and communicates that body of knowledge and skills to students, employers, other universities comparing degrees for student transfer or matriculation into graduate school, as well as other constituents.

Comprehensive Evaluation and Degree

With the development of [degree roadmaps](#) by the registrar's office, academic advisers, and each academic program (including GE), accurate up-to-date advising information is always available. A comprehensive review process is in place leading to the awarding of a degree. Graduate psychology students complete comprehensive exams intended to prepare them for the state licensure exam. Religious studies and Buddhist chaplaincy students must successfully complete certain milestones (qualifying examinations/candidacy portfolio and dissertation proposal defense). The formal evaluation process begins with student submission of the Petition

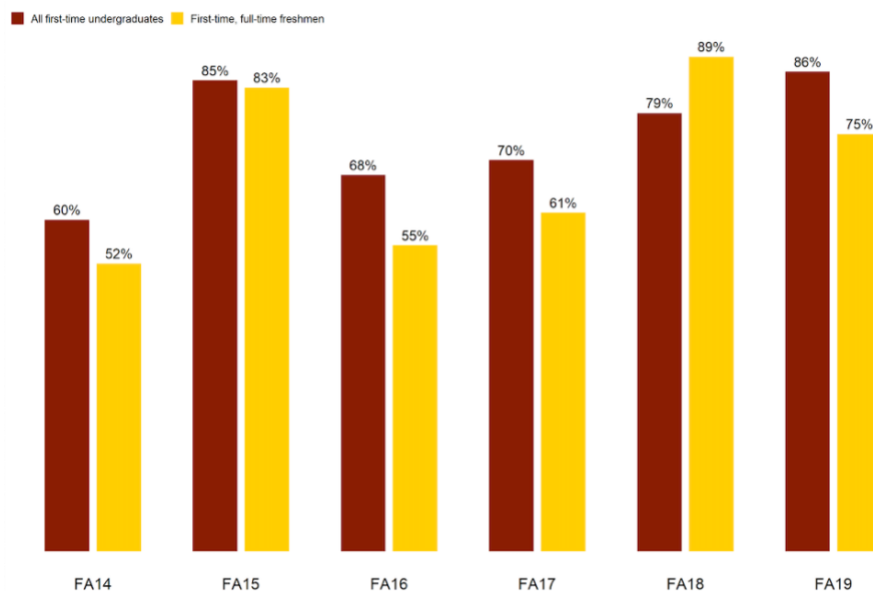
to Graduate form. The major adviser or department chair then reviews a student’s transcripts ensuring degree requirements have been met. The sequence of review ends with a final review by the registrar’s office confirming completion of degree requirements after final grades have posted. Final submission approval by the UWest library is also required of doctoral candidates, who must file their dissertation with the university.

A Whole-Person Approach to Educational Success

UWest pursues a whole-person approach to student success. This means that we not only focus on a student’s academic performance, but also their physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being and ethical outlook. These considerations and integrated approach inform the way we teach, advise, and guide students through their university education.

The university has faced challenges in terms of retention and degree completion during the past five years, especially in the early years of the review period (2016 and 2017). However, undergraduate retention rates from the first to second fall of enrollment have improved, as illustrated in figure 5. A further examination of persistence rates is warranted.

Figure 5. Undergraduate First-to-Second-Fall Retention Rates, 2014-2019



We have addressed and continue to address these challenges in several ways, with special attention to our most vulnerable students. In addition to the university's [Student Early Alert System \(SEAS\)](#) in which an instructor may bring to the SEAS team attention students who are struggling in a class at any time, the university has instituted a [4th and 8th week reporting system](#) that prompts instructors to identify students who may be struggling in their classes. The SEAS team's approach is holistic and can call upon a range of services to assist the students (e.g., Student Success Center, Wellness Center). Often, the CSSO and/or undergraduate advisor or department chair reaches out to the student to fully understand the context for the student's performance and offer additional assistance. (See component 5 for more details of SEAS and other student support services.)

Furthermore, UWest is taking more proactive measures to boost retention and ensure student success. As part of our [2020-25 strategic plan](#) (Goal A-1), the university is developing a structured mentoring program that will closely track first-time undergraduate students through their first two years of the study. The [Bridge-to-University or B2U program](#) provides new first-time college students with a tailored introductory experience to the university. Finally, in AY 2021-22, UWest has raised its minimum GPA for entering undergraduates from 2.0 to 2.5, a step which aims to decrease the need for remedial courses and allow us to focus on providing a more standard level of educational training and support.

UWest does not encourage modification or allow dismissal of requirements; rather, we intentionally choose to support students through the above measures and to increase efficiency in time-to-degree through identifying and removing barriers to progress. Some examples include [tailored student success plans](#); improved student communication; timely delivery of critical

information to students via the most effective platform; and [redesign of non-credit-bearing remedial courses to credit-bearing supported courses.](#)

Meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees has been a long-standing focus at University of the West. The meaning of UWest degrees is well-defined through the university's revitalized mission, vision, and values, as well as through the institutional learning outcomes and degree program learning outcomes. Quality is ensured through annual program assessment and five-year external peer review and self-study processes. Integrity is maintained through faculty-developed policies and procedures for academic program approval and faculty evaluation, as well as through university processes ensuring degree requirements for graduation are upheld. Most importantly, the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees continue to be realized through the university's hard-working faculty and their extraordinary commitment to students, both inside and outside of the classroom.

As UWest moves forward, we will continue to review and reflect upon the meaning, quality, and integrity of our academic programs. Opportunities for such reflection and needed revision are built into our assessment efforts and program review process at the departmental and university levels, which we also continue to hone. The close relationship that faculty, administrators, and staff maintain with our students—a hallmark of the UWest experience—provides a continual feedback loop and informs the ongoing pursuit to fulfill the university's mission and values.

COMPONENT 4

Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, Standards of Performance

CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4

University of the West's approach to educational quality is centered in the core functions of teaching and learning. We document the acquisition of knowledge and skills to validate the effectiveness of our academic programs and support services, provide accountability, and set the conditions for improvement of learning. We support the learning and success of our students inside the classroom and beyond through curricular breadth and depth, relevant pedagogy, and responsive and personalized student services.

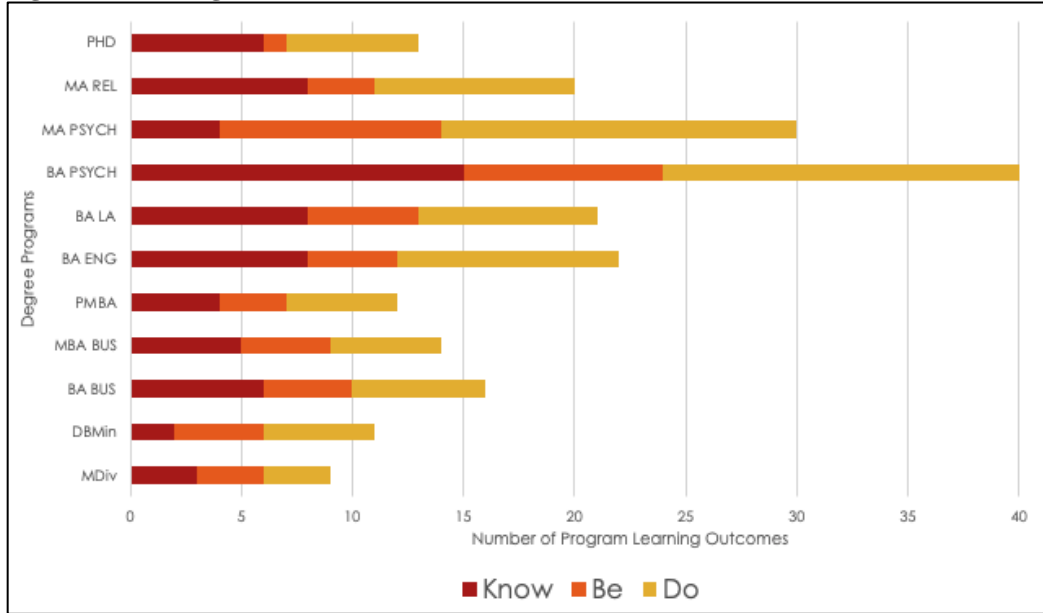
Undergraduate Core Competencies

UWest's student learning outcomes at the undergraduate level are focused on the development of essential core competencies in verbal and written communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy (CFR 2.2, 2.2a, 2.5), as well as the dimension of service learning, reflective of UWest's mission and values. Where possible, curriculum and learning outcomes for majors are derived from professional standards; for example, the [undergraduate psychology program learning outcomes \(PLOs\)](#) are modeled after the [American Psychological Association Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major](#). Written communication and quantitative reasoning are initially evaluated during the UWest undergraduate admissions process and subsequently, along with the other core competencies, throughout students' educational experience. Transfer coursework and credits are reviewed by the relevant department chairs and the registrar to determine compatibility with the curriculum.

UWest's three institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) of Know, Be, and Do address the acquisition, integration, and application of core competencies as defined by WSCUC, by relevant professional organizations, and by the UWest faculty. All UWest degree PLOs are mapped to

ILOs, with most PLOs aligning with more than one ILO, reflective of the central Buddhist concept of interdependence that informs UWest’s educational approach (see figure 6).

Figure 6. PLO Alignment with ILOs



Similarly, undergraduate PLOs are aligned to core academic competencies in oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and quantitative reasoning, with some PLOs mapping to more than one competency.

Table 3. Number of Undergraduate PLOs Aligned to Core Academic Competency

UG Degree Program	Oral Comm.	Written Comm.	Quan. Reason.	Info. Lit.	Crit. Thinking
BA BUS	2	6	3	3	7
BA Eng	5	6	0	6	7
BA LA	1	1	2	1	1
BA PSYCH	6	6	2	9	11

In terms of both core competencies and specialization within the majors, UWest’s degree programs represent more than an accumulation of courses and credits. Writing, critical thinking, oral presentation, and information literacy skills are emphasized in multiple core general education courses and integrated within coursework in each major. All undergraduates develop foundational quantitative reasoning skills in a series of GE courses appropriate to a liberal arts

focus, while the majors in psychology and business administration deepen quantitative skills (e.g., statistics, accounting, research design, etc.). In this way, the scaffolding of undergraduate curriculum is supported by the integration of core competency mastery into academic requirements. For example, undergraduate students majoring in psychology must meet the quantitative core competency of [MATH 212: Introductory to Statistics](#), a four-credit course that focuses on application, to advance to upper-division psychology courses. This prepares students to understand the fundamental concepts in [PSYCH 300: Research Design and Data Analysis in Psychology](#), the first upper division psychology course undergraduate psychology majors take (the [BA Psychology 5-Year Self-Study report and curriculum map](#) further illustrate how students are expected to meet WSCUC competences at *introductory*, *developing*, and *mastery* levels).

UWest's GE curriculum aligns with American liberal education standards and integrates our heritage, mission, and values by providing opportunities for service learning, contemplative engagement, religious and philosophical exploration, and cultural education. [Co-curricular programs support, enhance, and complement this learning](#).

Graduate Competencies

At the graduate level, student learning outcomes are developed in alignment with national professional standards and competencies. For example, the [Master of Divinity \(MDiv\) learning outcomes](#) were developed in consultation with the standards of the [Association of Theological Schools](#) and the [Association of Professional Chaplains](#). Similarly, expected outcomes of the Master of Psychology-Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program were [developed in close alignment with expectations](#) set by the Board of Behavioral Sciences (the California state entity responsible for issuing MFT licenses) and the discipline's regional and national professional associations. Across all UWest graduate programs, standards of performance are communicated

through the catalog and syllabi, are measured through formative and summative assessment developed by faculty, and will be demonstrated through the success of graduates on licensure, board exams, and job placements (CFRs 2.2-2.6, 4.3) as we build out our alumni network through the new development position prioritized and funded in the 2020-25 strategic plan.

Assessment of Learning

UWest has adopted a systematic approach to educational effectiveness. Program goals and program learning outcomes (PLOs) are developed by program faculty to reflect the intellectual and practical competencies expected in the discipline and appropriate to the level of degree. Goals and outcomes are aligned with UWest's mission and strategic plan, and the ILOs are linked to curricula through alignment with PLOs. Standards of performance during and at the completion of a degree program are set by program faculty and reflect the professional standards of the discipline. Evidence that key learning outcomes are being met at graduation includes results of assessment of capstone courses/terminal projects; results of assessment of clinical/internship experiences; and measurement of PLOs (aligned to ILOs) by each program.

Assessment of undergraduate acquisition of GE core competencies is conducted through specific PLOs and assignments in the curriculum to ensure achievement in each area. Learning outcomes are mapped to each course and are listed in each syllabus. For example, in 2017-18, GE faculty assessed information literacy using the capstone course and final paper assignment as an artifact (pp. 4-5 of [GE Five-Year Self-Study](#)). Findings revealed that student skills in evaluating strength of evidence were lacking; recommendations included adjusting curriculum to increase the number of class discussions that strengthen these skills, providing a model sample paper to students, and requiring students to revisit the library's Online Modules for Information Skills (OMIS) activities (OMIS access requires institutional log-in, which will be provided to the

site visit team). The GE chair shared the above findings and recommendations during the GE and liberal arts faculty meetings and discussed them with individual instructors who teach both core courses and non-core courses to encourage increased curricular focus on research skills and information literacy. During the 2018 fall semester, a working group of faculty members across diverse courses and a librarian developed a simplified version of OMIS which both students and instructors can easily access and find their subjects of interest. Results of these efforts were also presented to the Retention Committee; the assessment loop will be closed in the 2022-23 academic year, when information literacy is reassessed by GE faculty.

Ongoing assessment and improvement of students' mastery of written communication has been a consistent focus for the GE department over the past five years. Recently, recommendations have included benchmarking of validated rubrics. Since fall 2020, the chairs of academic departments with undergraduate degree programs have collaborated with the Undergraduate Transformation Taskforce to review [standardized writing rubrics](#) for use across all undergraduate programs. Consistent with WSCUC's standards for educational quality and the development of key core competencies, we are looking at how to adapt and implement the rubrics that define performance standards for written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and quantitative reasoning. We anticipate that within the next five years, all GE courses and syllabi will include assignment rubrics that clearly communicate performance standards to students as well as instructors. In the future, we will examine how standardized rubrics may be modified to provide objective measurement of student performance in other core competencies.

UWest's student learning outcomes assessment process provides evidence for the continuous improvement of educational programs and services. The institutional effectiveness

manager supports the faculty and student services staff in their critical roles of educational quality assurance. The committees that support and oversee educational effectiveness include the [University-Wide Assessment Council \(UWAC\)](#), [Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee \(APCC\)](#), [Retention Committee](#), [Undergraduate Transformation Taskforce \(UTT\)](#), the newly-formed Program Review Committee (PRC) and the [Executive Team](#).

Curricular review, development, and assessment are conducted on an ongoing basis; the evidence is key to the program review process. Assessment results inform stakeholders about the academic quality of programs and facilitate discussion about ongoing improvement of curriculum, graduate school/advanced degree preparation, professional development opportunities, student services, and overall educational experience. Degree programs establish and maintain educational quality and effectiveness through multiple review processes. All programs use [end-of-course evaluations](#), which are standardized across the university and administered by the institutional effectiveness office. Programs triangulate their data by referring to satisfaction surveys that are routinely administered to UWest's student body. Survey results provide additional perspective on the perceived quality of a UWest degree.

Annual Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

UWest's student learning outcomes assessment is based on a five-year assessment cycle, during which time academic department faculty assess their [program learning outcomes \(PLOs\)](#). Assessment plans, learning outcomes, and assessment data are summarized in [annual reports](#) submitted by each academic department and are reviewed collaboratively by UWAC, the Program Review Committee, and the Executive Team. This review provides the opportunity for each program to receive feedback on the quality of its data and plans. The institutional effectiveness manager (IEM) conducts an annual inventory of assessment activities. With an eye

to making student learning outcomes and their assessment more visible, over summer 2021, the IEM will be using the [National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment \(NILOA\) Transparency Framework](#) as a method of increasing communication of meaningful information about student learning in an open and easily accessible manner. We look forward to sharing this progress with the site visit team.

Program Review

Department chairs and faculty are ultimately responsible for assessing their respective academic programs and using their assessment findings to improve student learning and curriculum. Student learning outcomes assessment has been organized into an annual cycle. In mid-August, academic department chairs and co-curricular leaders submit their [assessment plans](#) for the upcoming academic year. These plans are reviewed by the University-wide Assessment Council (UWAC) to provide feedback prior to commencement of assessment activities. Over the course of the academic year, department faculty execute their assessment plan. Faculty are responsible for gathering assessment artifacts and documenting their assessment plan, evidence, process, findings, reflections, and recommendations for improvements in the program's annual assessment report, which also contains a summary of the previous year's "closing the loop" activities. Beginning in 2021, [assessment reports](#), previously shared in UWAC throughout the academic year, will be submitted in August following the end of the previous academic year.

Internal program review processes identify achievement gaps (CFR 2.7). Program faculty determine where the gaps are and why they have developed, and implement corrective changes in the curriculum, instruction, and support services. The assessment process facilitates the effectiveness of the changes upon student performance. For example, during the 2016-17 annual program review process, the Buddhist chaplaincy faculty used Master of Divinity (MDiv)

student portfolios to assess the PLO related to “demonstration of intellectual and affective capacities to provide pastoral leadership” and found that students needed to strengthen their ability to differentiate between critical thinking, discernment, and criticism. This was communicated to instructors of relevant courses (i.e., [MDIV 540 Sacred Abrahamic Texts in Spiritual Care and Counseling](#), [MDIV 640 Seminar in Buddhist Ministry: Buddhist Sacred Texts](#)), who adjusted curriculum and class activities, and discussed the following year in the Academic Policies and Curriculum Committee (APCC). In 2019, this PLO was re-assessed, and student acquisition was found to have improved (see MDiv [Five-Year Self-Study](#) and [APRs for 2016/17 – 2019/20](#)). An undergraduate example of actions to remediate identified achievement gaps is the rehaul of the GE math curriculum during the 2017/18 year (see [General Education Math Requirements Report](#)).

Program review provides the basis for institutional planning. Data analysis in annual program reviews is used to update the institutional strategic plan annually and informs budget adjustments each year as assessment findings are validated via committee review and priorities for improvement are identified and justified.

UWest: A Learning-Centered Institution

At UWest, student learning is at the core of our purpose. We are committed to the meaningful and sustainable assessment of student learning outcomes and the ongoing improvement of educational quality and experience. The university has embedded core academic competencies into the GE curriculum and ensured that graduate-level competencies meet the standards of the programs’ respective professions. We seek to further expand our assessment capacities with systematic closing-the-loop assessment activities and continued meta-assessment of the processes by which we evaluate achievement of competencies at or near graduation.

COMPONENT 5

Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation

CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4

Student Success Defined at UWest

As a significant outcome of the five-year self-study process spanning 2015-21, the institution clarified, refined, and confirmed its definition of student success. This definition captures the institution’s view of student success beyond persistence and graduation rates (see figure 7).

Figure 7. UWest Student Success Definition

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST believes that student success occurs 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.

Student success at UWest is achieved when our students:

- engage in academics, recognize, and utilize the university's resources, and participate in university life.
- gain knowledge, skills, practical experience, and capacity for self-reflection and cultural appreciation, empowered to improve lives and benefit others.
- self-reflect to discover who they are, take ownership of their learning, and pursue their passions.
- enter professional life prepared to make unique contributions to their field of study and their communities.

UWest supports student success through a whole-person education that creates:

- space for spiritual and personal development, active self-reflection, and exploration of diverse cultures and faiths alongside creative and engaging academic study.
- an inclusive, affirming, and supportive learning environment, fostering personal growth, career readiness, and community.
- rich opportunities and experiences that increase self-awareness and resilience, build healthy relationships, explore personal beliefs, and develop ethical values and social responsibility.

To round out our whole-person approach (academic excellence and core competencies, ethical self-awareness, service to the community), we have added the key component of “job readiness” and have written into our [2020-25 strategic plan](#) measures that support and encourage this aspect (Goal E-1).

Student Success Infrastructure

Student success is a primary goal at University of the West. We hold high expectations for all our students, while providing the support—from application through graduation, and beyond—to achieve those expectations.

Undergraduate Students

In spring 2021, UWest enrolled 97 undergraduate students enrolled across four degree programs (business administration, English, liberal arts, psychology). To help coordinate student support programs and services at the undergraduate level, the Undergraduate Transformation Taskforce (UTT) was established in January 2017. The UTT includes the department chairs of the undergraduate programs, the math director, undergraduate advisor, and CAO. The UTT was charged with reimagining liberal arts education at UWest with a focus on interdisciplinarity, effective teaching and learning methodologies, service learning, and international/intercultural experiences. The UTT also sought to identify enhanced strategies that would support the success of underprepared students.

The UTT pursued an ambitious revision of the undergraduate GE program that included a reconfiguration of the core competencies, a more expansive approach to historical foundations and philosophy/religion (“Big History”: [HIST 200](#), [HIST 205](#); “Life & Culture”: [L&C 120](#), [L&C 121](#)), enhancements to the curriculum, including service learning and contemplative education courses, and the reorganization of the mathematics/quantitative reasoning pathway, all of which aimed to round out the university’s whole person approach to education.

Learning Community: Self & Community, a prior undergraduate initiative undertaken in 2015, included a sequence of four courses in which students embarked on an extended engagement in self-exploration. However, evaluation led the taskforce and the CAO to discontinue this initiative, due to drops in student retention and the recognition of a lack of transferability of learning community courses. The reported efficacy of the other UTT revisions remained positive, and they remain an integral part of the current GE curriculum at UWest.

Most recently, the UTT has turned its attention to the core competencies of writing and critical thinking and [reinvigorated the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative](#). Led by the GE-liberal arts chair, English chair, English Language Institute director, and CAO, the UTT recognized that good writing should be pursued and developed beyond the GE core. As a result, it instituted a pilot program placing supplemental writing instructors (SWIs) in two upper division liberal arts courses during spring 2021. [Pilot assessment results](#) were promising; we plan to expand the effort and provide SWIs to key writing-focused, upper-division courses in business administration and psychology and further evaluate the initiative during AY 2021-22.

Undergraduate faculty prioritize the development and improvement of our undergraduates' foundational academic skills with an eye to increasing engagement and retention. In fall 2018, the GE department formed a diverse faculty and staff work group to investigate methods and practices for improving undergraduate research skills ([GE Five-Year Self-Study](#), p. 5). One outcome of the work group's efforts was the revision of the Online Modules for Information Skills (OMIS), an online research training required of all undergraduate students entering the university, to improve students' ability to research based on areas of interest. A full-time mathematics professor (Dr. Bobby Ojose) was hired in summer 2018 and charged with revamping the math curriculum to improve student outcomes. Dr. Ojose also implemented individualized math plans for each student placed in [MATH 030](#), the developmental math course. The program is evidencing success, with a 100% pass rate in the fall 2018 MATH 030 course, compared with a 65% pass rate in the same class in fall 2017. Measures such as these are intended to help retain at-risk students at their most vulnerable time (the first two years).

Postbaccalaureate and Graduate Students

In spring 2021, UWest has 113 students enrolled across seven postbaccalaureate credential programs (66 master's, 42 doctoral students, and five postbaccalaureate certificate students). The university supports our graduate students through one-on-one advising and close faculty mentoring, as well as through co-curricular programming. For our Master of Divinity (MDiv) and Master of Psychology-Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) programs, both of which lead to professional certification, the Buddhist chaplaincy and psychology departments, respectively, provide structured pathways in which students are guided and monitored to ensure that requirements and competencies are achieved to meet professional standards and students are ready for the next step ahead. For all post-baccalaureate programs, the university provides co-curricular programming that supports academic skills and knowledge (e.g., [Zotero citation management software training](#), also embedded in [REL 607 Research Method\(s\)](#)), as well as professional readiness (e.g., [placement fairs for Chaplaincy students](#), [entrepreneurship and other business development clubs](#), etc.).

UWest supports its postbaccalaureate students from application through graduation through the following: supporting students in their exploration of and application to graduate school; orienting incoming graduate students through department orientations; providing advising, academic support, mentoring, and professional development opportunities within the graduate programs; providing research opportunities, academic support, and scholarly enrichment programs through its institutes and projects (e.g. the Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism); assuring quality graduate programs and advocating for graduate education through graduate councils and groups; and providing coordinated infrastructure to support and advance graduate education. The university also provides in-house training of its

PhD and DBMin doctoral candidates through the [PhD Teaching Program](#), in which students participate in a teaching practicum and then have the opportunity to teach an undergraduate class in the general education program under mentored supervision. This experiential learning prepares doctoral students for teaching positions in higher education.

Community Education

During the spring 2020 semester, University of the West had 30 visiting and/or non-degree-seeking students enrolled in Intensive English Program (IEP) courses and extended studies courses. The IEP course sequence was streamlined in 2019; the grammar, writing, and speaking components were reorganized and integrated into a more holistic approach. In fall 2020, UWest introduced its first set of non-credit [Community Education](#) (CE) courses. These courses attracted 25 students over AY 2020-21 and represented a promising reinvention of the extended studies division, which will offer similar non-credit courses, workshops, and lectures to a non-degree seeking audience. The extended studies initiative is written into the [2020-25 strategic plan](#) (Goal R-1). The university is in the process of building out appropriate assessment rubrics to measure the effectiveness and success of both the revised IEP and CE courses. Students in both programs enjoy IT and Moodle course support and limited library privileges, as well as access to UWest co-curricular programming and events.

Indicators of Student Success and Student Success Practices

As a university of access and opportunity, UWest consistently strives to support the success outcomes of our students. One important way in which UWest supports student success is by acknowledging and rewarding it through [honors lists and ceremonies](#), [student leadership award](#), [alumni of the year award](#), and other activities that help the UWest community recognize and celebrate student success. However, while overall retention and persistence rates over the

past five years have shown mostly positive trends, as illustrated in table 4, the 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation rates of our first-time full-time (FTFT) freshman have remained lower than we would like.

Table 4. Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rate Trends, 2012-2020

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											

In fall 2019, as a follow-up to our midcycle progress report, WSCUC requested an [explanation of UWest’s low graduation rates for the 2012 cohort](#), along with consideration of disaggregated student populations and a report of support practices that have been established or are under consideration. In reviewing our 4-year and 6-year graduation rates, we [disaggregated](#) the 2012 first-time full-time (FTFT) first-year cohort population by gender, age at initial enrollment, ethnicity, citizenship status, academic program of study, and aid received (Cal Grant, Pell Grant, institutional Lotus Scholarship). The available data revealed that the mean GPA of 2012 FTFT first-year cohort members who graduated within 150% of normal time was 2.96, as compared to 2.87 for those who did not complete within 150% of normal time. The average time to degree for 2012 FTFT first-year students was 4.41 years, which is not surprising, as most of this cohort were advised to take fewer than 15 credit hours per semester to better support their ability to successfully balance academic work with other obligations (employment, family commitments, etc.). This remained the case for all FTFT first-year cohorts following until 2018-19. Since then, in compliance with Cal Grant requirements, students receive undergraduate advisement on how to complete their degrees within four years so that many opt for fuller

schedules (15 units or more per semester). UWest's new institutional research analyst plans to conduct a comparison of success rates of cohorts advised to take less than 15 units with those of students following a 15-unit per semester roadmap.

Further analysis of these data revealed that the overall 4-year graduation rate for the full 2012 first-year cohort was only five percentage points higher than for 2012 first-time full-time (FTFT) first-year students, and the overall 6-year rate was five percentage points lower than for 2012 FTFT first-year students. No individual variable examined significantly impacted persistence to graduation within 150% of normal time. We further [disaggregated the attrition population](#) for 2012 FTFT first-year students and the full 2012 first-year cohort by gender, age at time of exit, ethnicity, citizenship status, academic program of study, GPA at the last date attended, and time to drop. For 2012 FTFT first-year students who left the institution, the most prevalent reason was transfer to another institution (approximately 42%), followed by failure to return from leave of absence (approximately 25%). No individual variable significantly impacted reason for leaving the institution, although approximately 25% of students who left the institution did so within the first 11 months of enrollment. Students who transfer often do so because they are seeking a major not offered at UWest after completing transferable general education coursework here.

Due to UWest's small population size, quantitative studies of our freshman student population are limited; however, we attempt to mitigate this limitation by supplementing statistics with survey research and [qualitative inquiry](#), including focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews, in keeping with previous WSCUC recommendations. For example, over the spring and summer 2019 semesters, the institutional effectiveness office conducted over 20 one-on-one interviews with undergraduate and graduate students, focusing on

academic experience and satisfaction at UWest, and is currently analyzing [the data](#). We are also working to improve the quality and quantity of information related to non-transfer withdrawals and failures to return from leave of absence, in support of increasing our understanding of factors that positively and negatively impact persistence to completion.

Supporting Students from Application to Graduation and Beyond

Academic Preparation

All incoming first-time undergraduates complete writing and math placement tests to ensure they are placed at the optimal level for success in their first year. UWest’s domestic undergraduate students largely come from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds and/or are first generation students, and a significant percentage of these students place in remedial math and/or writing courses. Ensuring the success of these entering students requires that developmental education be efficient and effective. Table 5 illustrates the core competency remediation needs of incoming domestic FTFT students from fall 2015 through fall 2020. (Note: this table does not include international students who have earned a high school diploma in a medium of instruction other than English and subsequently placed in developmental math and/or English courses. Course outcomes and retention and persistence rates for these students suggest that their placement in remedial coursework is related to their level of English proficiency at entry rather than deficiencies in composition or math skills *per se*.)

Table 5. Core Competency Remediation Needs of Incoming Domestic FTFT Freshman

	Incoming Domestic FTFT Freshmen	Remediation needed									
		None		Math only		Writing only		Both		Any	
FA 2015	5	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	5	100%
FA 2016	18	3	17%	5	28%	1	6%	9	50%	15	83%
FA 2017	44	5	11%	10	23%	9	20%	20	45%	39	89%
FA 2018	14	2	14%	2	14%	0	0%	10	71%	12	86%
FA 2019	6	2	33%	1	17%	0	0%	3	50%	4	67%
FA 2020	4	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%	1	25%	4	100%

As the data illustrate, over the past five years, the university has experienced decreasing trends in the number of domestic FTFT students requiring remedial/developmental coursework: 86% in 2018, and 67% in 2019. While all domestic FTFT students in the most recent entering class (2020) were placed in remedial courses, this cohort was relatively small ($n=4$) and had completed their high school degrees during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may have had a unique effect on the quality of senior preparatory coursework and more generally the academic profile of students in this cohort.

Examination of placement test score data revealed that a significantly greater number of domestic FTFT students in each incoming cohort have required math remediation or remediation in both math and writing, as compared to remediation in writing alone. This finding, along with examination of course grades and attendance outcomes, prompted the university to undertake [comprehensive assessment of the general education math requirements](#) in fall 2017.

Recommendations following the assessment were discussed over AY 2017-18, and significant changes to the math curriculum were implemented in fall 2018. Analysis of the correlation between entering high school GPA, remedial coursework placement, and student performance/retention additionally prompted the university to raise the minimum GPA for admission from 2.0 to 2.5, beginning in fall 2021. We will continue to track the effect of this decision on the placement and retention of future cohorts.

Financial Aid Programs

UWest is committed to providing affordable quality education by keeping tuition prices low and helping our students access public, private, and university funding for their education. The financial aid office (FA) plays the principal role in the latter. In 2020-21, the university administered roughly \$211,000 in Pell Grants, \$294,000 in Cal Grants, and \$733,000 in loans,

and funded \$711,000 in the form of [institutional scholarships](#) (including tuition discounts and waivers). Separately, [privately funded scholarships](#) are available to UWest students. These include the [International Buddhist Education Foundation](#) (IBEF), which provides and administers significant scholarship support for the university's religious studies and chaplaincy students. In 2021, approximately 80% of UWest students received some sort of financial aid listed above.

Academic Support

To help ensure students are acquiring essential academic knowledge and skills and ultimately being successful in their coursework, UWest provides a variety of academic supports. Key services include the [university library](#), supplemental instruction, tutoring and disability services provided by the Student Success Center, and the Student Early Alert (SEAS) team.

Student Success Center. UWest's [Student Success Center](#) (SSC) offers students a supportive, comfortable, confidential, and collaborative learning environment that promotes academic achievement and professional development. The center's underlying philosophy is that every student has the ability to achieve their academic goals. Together with the full-time student success coordinator, the SSC's qualified and trained peer tutors provide support in academic tutoring, language skills, multiliteracy skills, and career exploration. The center offers a convenient online appointment service, and students can choose to attend one-on-one tutoring appointments in person at the SSC or remotely via a live online platform. Students can also utilize the center's versatile space to work collaboratively, for example, in study groups. The SSC regularly hosts [workshops](#) such as study skills, time management, overcoming writer's block, and succeeding in online courses and hosts study jams before midterms and finals (pre-pandemic).

UWest continues to develop strategies to encourage students to use the resources of the SSC, especially those students who are identified as academically at risk and/or are placed on academic probation or warning. At the same time, overall SSC usage rates are fairly robust (table 6). Almost all tutoring sessions reflected in the table below were held synchronously online. With the reopening in fall 2021, students will be able to choose between in-person and online once again. While the SSC has begun [preliminary analysis of effectiveness](#) (e.g., usage of SSC correlated with SEAS reports, 4th and 8th week reports, etc.), comprehensive analysis of SSC effectiveness and data-driven improvement of support is one of the new institutional research analyst’s top priorities for the 2021-22 year.

Table 6. Student Success Center Usage

Students utilizing SSC		
	<i>n</i>	% of total enrollment
SP 2020	70	25%
FA 2021	58	22%
SP 2021	51	24%

The SSC coordinator also serves as the university’s [disabilities services officer](#). [Data](#) show that since 2016-17, 27 non-duplicated students have received disability accommodations, of whom to date, 13 have graduated or completed a non-degree-seeking program, six are currently enrolled, one was academically dismissed, and seven have withdrawn. This represents a success rate of roughly 70% for students with disabilities, demonstrating the effectiveness of the accommodations and other services students with disabilities receive at UWest. The SSC will continue to track this data and work with institutional research to attempt to capture attrition factors and improve outcomes for these students.

Student Early Alert System. The [Student Early Alert System](#) (SEAS) is operated by a multidisciplinary team dedicated to identifying and supporting students whose success may be in

jeopardy and coordinating appropriate intervention measures. Faculty or staff who observe a student who is not making satisfactory progress, is in academic difficulty, is exhibiting behaviors that may lead to academic difficulties, or seems to be in distress of any nature are able to report their concern to the SEAS team using the online [SEAS referral form](#). The team, consisting of the SSC coordinator, academic advisor, mental health therapist, chief student services officer, and a faculty member, meets weekly during the semester to review reports, reach out to identified students, and recommend appropriate action to improve their chance of success at UWest. In addition to reviewing SEAS reports, the team looks at attendance patterns and reviews faculty [4th and 8th week reports](#). Faculty are strongly encouraged to submit these reports, identifying students who are performing below minimum GPA or showing other signs for concern in their courses. This allows timely advising/intervention so that students can improve in or withdraw from a course before the 10th-week deadline for course withdrawals. The SEAS team pays special attention to students on academic probation or warning to make sure they are following through with their [success plans](#) and have the support needed to regain good academic standing.

Psychological and Emotional Support

At UWest, mental health counseling is provided through the [Wellness Center](#), managed by a Licensed Marriage Family Therapist (LMFT) who has served the university's students for over ten years. For the past three academic years, fall 2018 to spring 2021, 421 therapy sessions were provided to 92 students (duplicated). Each semester during that period, anywhere from 10 to 24 unduplicated students sought clinical therapy, which the Wellness Center provided in anywhere from 50 to 104 separate sessions. The fluctuating numbers are largely in line with decreasing enrollment numbers; however, a significant drop (approx. 50%) in therapy appointments took place during the pandemic (23 students attending 102 sessions in fall 2019

versus 10 students attending 51 sessions in fall 2020). While the center quickly transitioned to a HIPAA-compliant online therapy modality, pandemic restrictions meant face-to-face and drop-in services were not available. Over the same period, the number of therapists available went from two to one, reducing the number of therapy hours accordingly. Altogether, usage data going back to 2012 demonstrates a pattern where the availability of additional therapists has resulted in increased usage of therapy services by students, revealing that the demand for therapy is there.

Recognizing that one part-time mental health therapist will not be sufficient to cover student need once enrollment reaches pre-pandemic levels, the center plans to hire an MFT intern who will work under the supervision of the LMFT. We are also exploring additional collaboration with local health care services/facilities and community providers. (See additional usage data and analysis in [spring 2021 Wellness Report](#).) Over the next two years, the build-out of a more systematic data collection system will allow the Wellness Center to collect additional mental health services data to better gauge the level and types of student need and the effectiveness of therapy and other types of services.

The [UWest Student Support Essay](#) provides an overview of other UWest student support services, including advising, mentoring and professional development, library, student life, psychological and spiritual support, and physical health.

Moving Forward

UWest holds high expectations for all of our students while providing the supports to achieve those expectations. Analysis of student performance data has already yielded insights which have informed decisions about program implementation and resources. As the university increases data collection and institutional research capabilities, we are well positioned to promote and support student success and improve outcomes.

Improving First-Time, Full-Time Success

One of the principal areas we have prioritized in the [Retention Plan](#) is the improvement of success rates for our first-time, full-time (FTFT) cohorts. UWest welcomed our first domestic undergraduate student cohort in fall 2012. As discussed above, the retention and graduation rates of our FTFT students, comprising primarily first-generation and underrepresented minorities, have shown some improvement but are still under the regional mean and below the rate the university is targeting for success. One area impacted is state financial aid eligibility (Cal Grant), which is contingent upon a minimum 30% graduation level of FTFT cohorts after 6 years (150% time to degree). UWest lost but then regained Cal Grant eligibility for AY 2021-22 following a successful [appeal to the California Student Aid Commission](#). We will most likely forfeit Cal Grant eligibility for AY 2022-23, based on the low graduation rate of the 2014 FTFT cohort. Anticipating this outcome has helped us identify critical priorities for supporting the success of our students, including:

- Raising the minimum GPA level for incoming freshmen from 2.0 to 2.5;
- Providing structured faculty mentoring for 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.

While our efforts are focused on improving the outcomes for FTFT students, the university has also established a contingency plan so that we can continue to cover students' Cal Grant funding using institutional funds should we lose eligibility in a future year.

Preparing for Graduation and Life After College

UWest students receive graduation application support from the academic and program advisors and registrar, who conduct regular graduation checks. Students receive professional development within their academic programs and can prepare for their transition to working life through services provided by the Student Success Center. Most graduate programs (MBA, MFT, MDiv, DBMin, PhD) include an internship or practicum requirement for graduation allowing students to apply learning and make professional connections before graduating. The chaplaincy program holds a [yearly CPE career fair](#) (also see [video on YouTube](#)) as well as career workshops with alumni working in the field. Yet the university recognizes that more needs to be done to prepare our students for the transition to working life.

Based on feedback from students and faculty, the university has prioritized career development in the new strategic plan, adding a full-time position by spring 2023 for a career development/internship coordinator to develop undergraduate internship opportunities and programs that support professional readiness, and a clinical fieldwork coordinator for Buddhist chaplaincy and the MA psychology program by spring 2024 (Strategic Plan Goals E-1, A-6).

To strengthen student engagement after graduation, the university will move from the current informal department-level structures of alumni support to an institutionally supported and engaged alumni network through robust, consistent outreach and specialized programming for alumni. Preparation for this task has already begun with the development and piloting of an [alumni survey in fall 2019](#); the survey intends to capture alumni satisfaction with their UWest education as well as the sufficiency of preparation for entry into professional work fields. To better support this initiative, the strategic plan includes the hiring of a development coordinator

(Goal C-3) by spring 2023. This position will also focus on the development of endowment funding and additional revenue streams.

Other areas targeted to improve student success and supported by strategic planning and budgeting include building out spiritual care services (Goal C-4), supporting increased presentation of student research at academic conferences (Goal A-5), and systematically integrating the facilitation of cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West into academic and co-curricular programs (Goal E-3)

Finally, UWest will continue to enhance our capacity to develop and sustain data-driven planning and decision-making as demonstrated by our investment in a part-time institutional research analyst in spring 2021 (Goal R-6) to collaborate with the institutional effectiveness manager. Component 6 contains further details and plans for strengthening sustainable data collection and analysis methods to increase educational effectiveness and student success outcomes.

COMPONENT 6

Quality Assurance & Improvement: Program Review, Assessment, Use of Data & Evidence

CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7

Overview of Quality Assurance at UWest

University of the West is committed to continuous improvement of educational quality by means of systematic assessment and use of data to inform decision-making and planning. At the programmatic level, annual program review and five-year self-study review provide participatory and evidence-based assessment of student learning outcomes. These elements are integrated in the 2020-25 strategic plan to inform and support resource allocation, as well as divisional assessment, and receive review from key stakeholders and committees (e.g., Executive Team, UWAC). The strategic plan lays the groundwork for an expansion of institutional-level assessment of learning outcomes, core competencies, productivity, and other key indicators. For example, the most recent Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting of the board of trustees included a discussion of implementing the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to better benchmark student satisfaction and inform institution-wide conversations leading to recommendations for improvements.

Program Review

The purpose of the [program review process at UWest](#) is to assist academic programs in improving educational quality and enhancing productivity and efficiency within the context of our mission and core values. The process is a means to inform faculty, students, administrators, and university trustees as to the relative merits of and areas of needed improvement in specific program areas. As such, program review is a tool for critical reflection, accountability, and continuous quality improvement at UWest. [Program review processes were themselves reviewed for efficiency and effectiveness](#) by a collaborative working group of faculty, key staff, and

administrators; subsequent revisions to the process included the creation of report templates ([Annual Program Review Report](#), [5-Year Self-Study Report](#)) to provide academic chairs and division leaders with specific evaluative criteria (including two forms of external review) and the development of a [five-year program review and institutional planning master calendar](#) in order to better facilitate appropriate time for planning and review and provide a consistent method of deadline communication across the institution.

The revised program review processes state the expectation that, through careful documentation and analysis, faculty, administration, and students will engage in the review process to assess the quality, centrality, demand, and costs associated with specific programs and subsequently develop plans for program direction. The program review process is intended to result in a set of recommendations, crafted by faculty and students and endorsed by administrators, that include concrete strategies and benchmarks for achieving improved quality and efficiency. The revised process will 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. The results of the revised program review process will also provide university 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.

All degree programs at UWest engage in two types of program review: the annual program review (APR), resulting in the APR report; and the five-year self-study (5YSS). The APR process reviews the previous academic year and is directed by the department chair, involving other full-time and/or adjunct faculty, as appropriate. Each academic department

submits an APR report on the performance of each academic program offered by the department. The APR report includes qualitative and quantitative data to substantiate program quality, productivity, and efficiency. APR reports are reviewed by the Program Review Committee (CAO Dr. Jane Iwamura, CSSO Vanessa Karam, IEM Jessa Forsythe-Crane; beginning in 2021-22, committee membership will expand to include at least one full-time faculty member), which provides department chairs with evaluative comment and feedback. Components of the APR report can be found in the UWest Program Review Processes & Procedures document.

The five-year self-study (5YSS) process reviews the previous five academic years and is directed by the department chair, involving other full-time and/or adjunct faculty, as appropriate. All degree programs are required to complete a 5YSS every five years (table 7).

Table 7. Program Review Cycle 2020-21 to 2025-26

Program(s)	External review period	5YSSself-study report submission
MA REL, PhD REL	AY 2020-21	SP 2022
BA BUS, MBA	AY 2021-22	SP 2023
MDiv, DBMin	AY 2022-23	SP 2024
BA English, BA Psych, MA Psych	AY 2023-24	SP 2025
GE, BA Liberal Arts	AY 2024-25	SP 2026

The 5YSS includes qualitative and quantitative data to substantiate program quality, productivity, and efficiency. Referencing their APR reports, academic departments are expected to reflect upon the previous five years of program activity, including assessment, faculty and student scholarship, student success indicators (i.e., retention, graduation), program relevance, and priorities for improvement. Two types of external review are required: (a) professional review with a minimum of two reviewers in the discipline/industry unaffiliated with UWest; and (b) external comment from alumni, employers of graduates, the community, the public, and/or

other knowledgeable individuals. Components of the 5YSS self-study can be found in the UWest Program Review Processes & Procedures document.

In recent years, program review processes have primarily focused on assessment of student learning outcomes. However, such assessment has led to the concrete identification of priorities for improvements beyond the curricular; for example, the evaluation of sufficiency of clinical field training placement sites with respect to state board licensing requirements and expectations revealed the need for a dedicated clinical field training coordinator to best support MFT students in achieving their educational and professional goals. Similar assessment and findings were identified by the Buddhist chaplaincy department. Further analysis of student populations and discipline standards within psychology and chaplaincy has indicated that one coordinator may be able to effectively serve both MFT and MDiv students; this position was subsequently included in the 2020-25 Strategic Plan.

Assessment of Student Learning

In recent years, UWest faculty have become more familiar with the purposes and best practices of assessment and have taken steps to improve the sustainability, effectiveness, and efficiency of educational quality assurance and improvement. Support comes from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, which additionally designs and administers surveys and qualitative studies.

Data and Evidence

Student Surveys. UWest conducts a [student satisfaction survey](#) every two years. The survey's sections include demographics, experience with staff and faculty, campus support services, safety and security, campus experience, facilities, classroom climate, class activities, and overall satisfaction with the university. Results of the spring 2019 administration of the

student satisfaction survey were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Average scores of Likert-scale questions were compared to scores from the previous two survey administrations (spring 2017, spring 2015). Open-ended question responses helped to provide further context to identify trends. Results were discussed in Retention Committee and UWAC meetings; departmental/divisional results were additionally provided to department heads for further analysis and discussion with staff. One example of action arising from student satisfaction survey-related recommendations is the inclusion of writing standards in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan and the addition of supplemental writing instruction in targeted classrooms. The most recent Student Satisfaction Survey was conducted in the spring 2021 semester; its results are currently under review and will be provided to the visiting team by the time of the on-site visit.

Additional satisfaction surveys are conducted as need arises. For example, in fall 2018, in response to student concerns, the institutional effectiveness office collaborated with the UWest Student Government to administer a [survey related to cafeteria and on-campus dining satisfaction](#). Survey result analysis resulted in a [town hall meeting with the president](#), [conversations with the cafeteria vendor](#), and expansion of food selection and portion size. Additional surveys (i.e., a standardized exit survey, alumni survey, etc.) are in development to gain a broader understanding of the needs and experiences of different student populations.

Qualitative Data. Due to the small size of the student body, UWest makes efforts to collect qualitative data from students to augment quantitative findings. Such data are collected in focus groups organized by population of interest as well as in one-on-one semi-structured interviews and open-ended survey questions.

In 2018-19, two focus groups were conducted to better understand the needs of [international undergraduate 2+2 students](#) and of [first-year undergraduate students](#). The data

collected from these groups informed changes to the new student orientation and residential programming, improvements to cross-campus communication strategy, and approaches to strengthening academic and social interactions between domestic and international students. Focus groups were planned for AY 2020-21; however, due to the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, these were placed on hold until the following year. As of May 2021, the institutional effectiveness office is beginning to analyze the results of the 2021 student satisfaction survey. Results will be shared at appropriate committee levels (e.g., Retention, UWAC, Executive Team). In the interest of transparency, an executive summary will be shared with the entire UWest community. It is expected that focus groups will help provide rich qualitative insight into survey results and inform recommendations.

In 2019-20, 24 one-on-one interviews were conducted with students representing multiple demographics (e.g., domestic/international, undergraduate/graduate, gender, ethnicity, age, academic program, etc.). The interview questions focused on academic expectation versus academic experience at UWest; however, due to the semi-structured design of interview protocols, many other areas related to overall satisfaction were discussed. [Results were thematically coded](#) and provide rich context to the assessment of student preparation, needs, and experiences. Recommendations for improvements stemming from these data will be developed following in-depth discussion in various forums (e.g., Executive Team, Retention Committee, UWAC, etc.)

Institutional Research Function

UWest's institutional research function was impacted by institutional leadership changes coupled with the departure of key personnel, especially in 2018, with efforts to rebuild capacity additionally impacted by the global pandemic in 2020. Fortunately, as of spring 2021, new

leadership has taken decisive steps to restore key institutional research functions and continue to build out sustainable systematic data collection and analysis processes.

Prior to spring 2018, UWest was served by a two-person institutional research and assessment office responsible for coordinating assessment of student learning outcomes as well as collecting and analyzing student data. One member of that office, the institutional planning, effectiveness and campus culture officer, left the university in February 2018, leading to the hiring of an institutional effectiveness manager, [Jessa Forsythe-Crane](#), who has held that position since May 2018. In October of the same year, the chief budget analyst and institutional research officer departed the university, at which time, the institutional effectiveness manager assumed responsibility for completing and submitting all mandated reporting requirements.

Between fall 2018 and summer 2020, annual review of student success outcomes (i.e., retention, graduation, time-to-degree) was facilitated by the completion of IPEDS reporting. It was determined that a more comprehensive approach to data analysis was necessary to better support the assessment of student success and understand the needs of UWest's small yet diverse student body. In the first months of her presidency, Dr. Ta took the necessary steps to begin to rebuild institutional research capacity at UWest. In summer 2020, UWest engaged our former institutional research officer, Michael Oertel, as a consultant to assist with quantitative analysis. Mr. Oertel provided year-by-year and multi-year analysis of retention, persistence, graduation, and time-to-degree data disaggregated by ethnicity, underrepresented minority status, scholarship award status, transfer student status, and academic department. These [data](#) have been published on the UWest website and discussed at community-wide committee meetings (e.g., Retention Committee). In spring 2021, Dr. Ta further bolstered UWest's ability to collect and analyze quantitative measures of student success by hiring Dr. Shusaku Horibe as a part-time

institutional research analyst. Dr. Horibe is currently working with the institutional effectiveness manager to assess UWest's data ecosystem. His priorities include the development of a systematic, sustainable data collection and analysis methodology, including warehousing processes, that facilitates and maximizes the use of data in informing institutional decision-making and planning. He has also scheduled a fall 2021 training for faculty and staff to further support the growth of UWest's culture of evidence.

Alignment between Strategic Planning, Assessment, and Resource Allocation

UWest updated and adopted its [current strategic plan](#) in June 2021. Based on extensive consultation with stakeholders across the university over a two-year period, the strategic plan, with four overarching strategic areas (CARE), was deliberately written as open and dynamic. The initial plan was drafted in 2019; however, due to changes in leadership, the strategic foci were reinterpreted, and subsidiary goals significantly revised. Upon the recommendation of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the board of trustees, baseline measures, key performance indicators, action plans, timelines, and costs were added to make the plan robust in terms of planning/budgeting, implementation, and tracking.

The strategic goals listed in the plan are provided as a starting point and should not be considered a comprehensive list. This approach to the development of the plan was the result of multi-stakeholder, cross-divisional collaboration that involved a significant amount of university community consultation. The final version of the plan was reviewed by various shared governance committees (APCC and UWAC; UWest Committees) in spring 2021 and by President Ta in March 2021. It was reviewed and approved by the board of trustees on June 18, 2021 and was [published on the university website](#) on June 30, 2021.

The university has developed a [dynamic timeline/master calendar](#) from assessment and review at the program level to strategic plan tracking and budgeting at the university level that will be followed each year going forward. This timeline was developed collaboratively at shared governance committees (UWAC, Retention, etc.), refined by the Executive Team, and distributed to the community. Most recently, UWest formally added university-wide strategic plan tracking and budgeting to the processes of program assessment and review that were already in place.

Table 8. Program Review and Institutional Planning Calendar, 2020-21

AY 2021-22 PROGRAM REVIEW & INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING CALENDAR	
Aug. 2021	Academic departments submit AY20/21 Assessment Reports and AY21/22 Assessment Plans; student services offices submit AY21/22 Assessment Plans
Sep. 2021	WSCUC Off-Site Review Program Review Committee (PRC) reviews assessment reports and plans
Dec. 2021	Academic departments submit AY20/21 Annual Program Reports (APRs); REL submits 5-year Self Study (5YSS); E-team reviews APRs and 5YSS
Jan. 2022	Additional documents submitted to WSCUC; E-team reviews APRs and 5YSS, approves program review budget priorities
Feb. 2022	PRC sends departments feedback and revisions for assessment reports & plan, APR reports, 5YSS
Mar. 2022	WSCUC Site Visit Programs submit revised APRs, 5YSS
Apr. 2022	Town Hall presentation of strategic plan updates
Jun. 2022	Institutional strategic plan updated for 2022/23 year
Jul. 2022	Institutional strategic plan updated for 2022/23 year published to UWest website
<i>NOTE</i>	<i>FA21-SP22: BUS conducts external reviews in preparation for 5YSS in AY22/23</i>

Training of faculty and staff in data-driven practices provided by the institutional research analyst, along with the implementation of sustainable data collection and analysis methods, will help ensure that the quantitative data used in various annual reviews are standardized, and any necessary revisions to the strategic plan are evidence based. By expanding and shoring up the review process in these ways, UWest will further close the loop and proceed on a rational path towards institutional sustainability and growth.

COMPONENT 7

Sustainability, Financial Viability, and Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment

CFRs 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7

UWest is dedicated to ensuring that fiscal resources are available to support, sustain, and improve student learning programs and services while maintaining on-going fiscal stability. Budgeting and financial planning are thus aligned with our educational purposes and objectives. With the limited resources, the university strives to achieve the maximum outcome to ensure its financial strength and operational sustainability. The university develops and applies resources and organizational structures that ensure sustainability, and clearly defines and follows policies, guidelines, and processes for financial planning and budget development that include appropriate opportunities for participation by its constituencies. Timely and accurate financial information is provided by an appropriate accounting system that follows generally accepted accounting principles and through reliance on an effective system of internal controls. As a result, over the past five years, the university has consistently received an [unqualified opinion from our independent auditor](#), with minimal findings that we have been able to readily resolve.

Current Financial Position and Adequacy of Financial Resources (CFRs 3.4, 3.5)

The university's current annual operating budget is \$7.5-\$8 million. Covid-19 made the 2019-20 and 2020-21 fiscal years particularly challenging in the face of an accelerated enrollment decline leading to a shortfall of approximately 20% of projected tuition/fee revenue and 93% of projected room and board revenue for FY 2020-21. From July to October 2020, the university thoroughly explored possibilities for budget reduction plans that would have the least impact on our ability to deliver quality education and student services, support retention, and maintain essential operations. Most operational budget cuts came from salary (reduced by 8%), auxiliary services (reduced by 68.3%), and Program for American Cultural Exchange expenses

(reduced by 88.6%). In FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21, the university was able to secure two Small Business Administration Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loans; the first PPP loan in the amount of \$931,098 was forgiven in FY 2020-2021. By virtue of the CARES Act, the university was also awarded Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding (HEERF) in the amount of \$341,890. In addition, the university received a total of \$1 million through a grant from the [Chao Foundation](#) to support the university's various projects related to transitioning to online instruction, new program initiatives, faculty and staff development, student recruitment, and academic support. As of March 31, 2021, the university's total cash and cash equivalents were approximately \$10 million, a roughly 31% increase over the prior year.

An important aspect of the university's financial stability is the board of trustees's ability to secure continuous financial support from Fo Guang Shan through the International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS, Hsi Lai Temple's charter name). As of March 21, 2021, IBPS had contributed a total of \$1.9 million for the current fiscal year, which is about 22% of total revenue. With an endowment yield rate of 99.51% and a strong return on the university's endowment investment, the total endowment market value including quasi endowment increased by 10% over nine months (July 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021) over the prior fiscal year. Overall, the university's financial activities as of March 31, 2021 have generated a surplus of approximately \$3.28 million through a combination of 105% higher-than-budgeted revenues and 13% lower-than-budgeted expenditures.

To continue the effort of maintaining financial stability while facing an enrollment crunch and the persistent impact of Covid-19, UWest pursues a conservative budgeting policy to control costs and reduce the risk of overspending while we explore additional possible sources of revenue. As of March 31, 2021, this cautious approach has resulted in the above-mentioned

\$3.28 million surplus. Figures 8 and 9 present preliminary, unaudited fiscal data and may change slightly as the accounting office continues their tabulations.

Figure 8. University of the West Revenue Sources by Fiscal Year

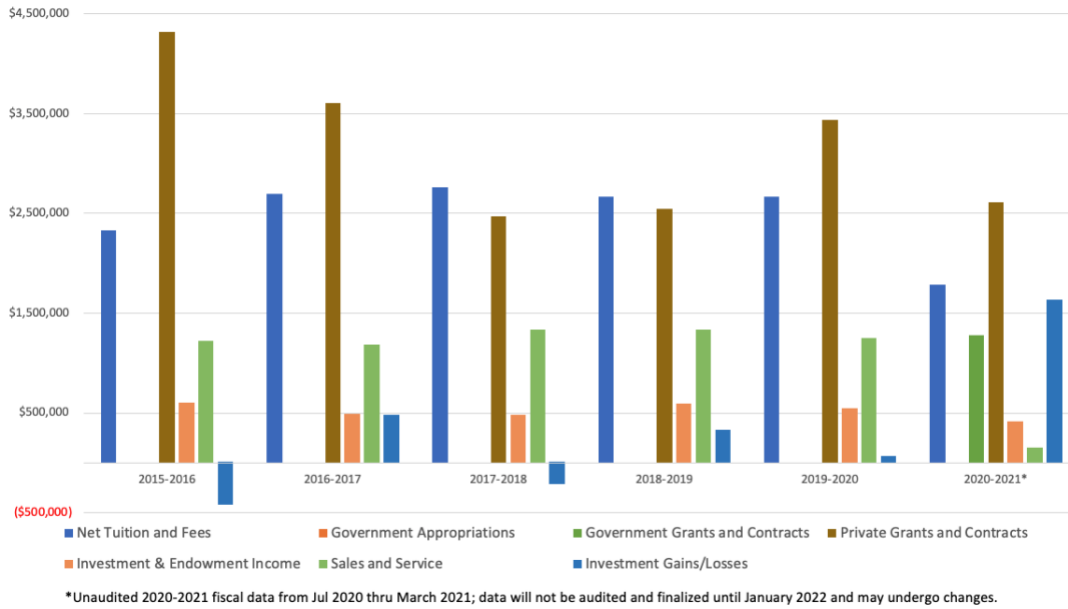
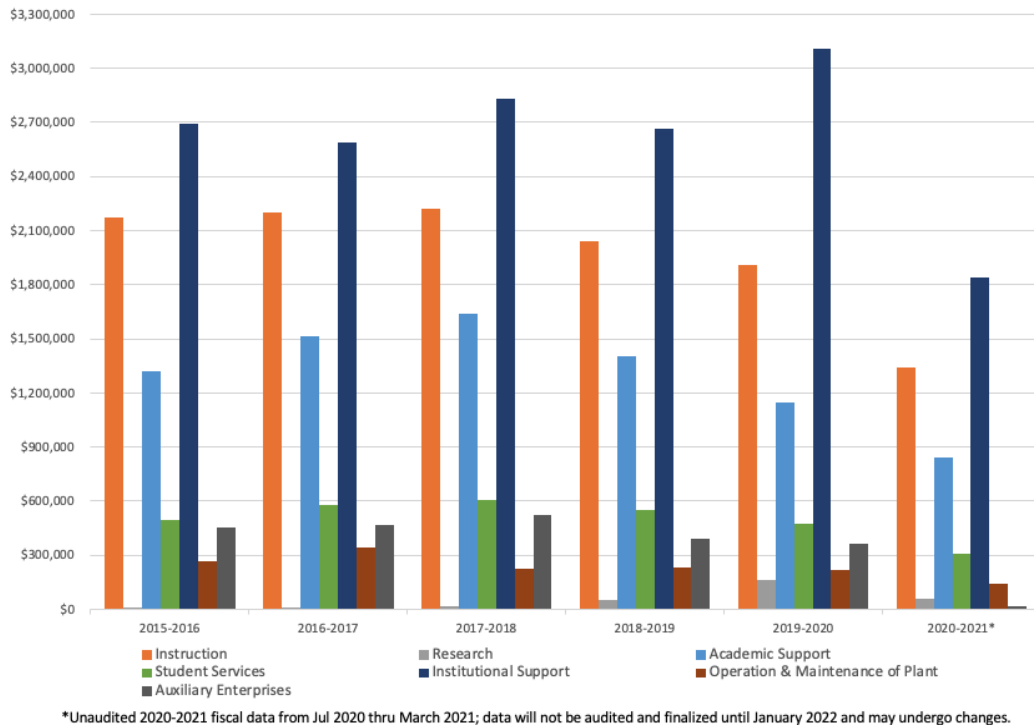


Figure 9. University of the West Operating Expenditures by Fiscal Year



Financial Accountability and Budgeting Process

The CFO is ultimately accountable for developing effective and cost-efficient financial structures to ensure financial stability and sound operations in support of educational effectiveness. The CFO's office provides monthly and quarterly [financial reports](#) to the board of trustees' (BOT) Financial/Budget Standing Committee and quarterly budget variance reports to division heads, department chairs, and other budget submitters.

The [annual budgeting process](#) involves all departmental managers adhering to the established budget policies and procedures. Beginning in the fall of each year, the CFO and president review the budget guidelines and distribute them to the budget managers for development of the following fiscal year's budget. The proposed budget is reviewed by the BOT Financial/Budget Standing Committee, who approves it with appropriate modifications at the annual March BOT meeting. The CFO presents updated budget information at various monthly meetings, including Cabinet, Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee, and University-wide Assessment Council, and weekly Executive Team meetings.

Most of UWest's revenue is not derived from tuition and fees. Grants, donations, and other non-tuition-derived revenue sources are budgeted separately from tuition revenue and have historically made up a significant portion of the revenue. As past accreditation reviews have pointed out, UWest has had an enviable financial position since its inception. UWest continues to benefit from one large annual funding source by means of quarterly IBPS contributions approved by the BOT (approx. 43% in FY 2020-21). The second largest revenue source consists of funds from tuition, fees, and room and board (40% in FY 2020-21), while the third revenue source flows from private foundation grants and UWest endowment investments and earnings (17% in FY 2020-21).

Meeting Financial Challenges

From 2017 through 2020, UWest has had to respond to enrollment decline, reflecting nationwide trends for similar private institutions and resulting largely from an improved economy and job market, US foreign policy, inhospitable government policies and practices towards international students, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Programs that had enjoyed stable enrollment (e.g., MBA) also experienced a decline in line with national trends. These external pressures coincided with internal disruptions caused by turnover in leadership and in several key positions following the retirement of President Morgan in 2018. Finally, the pandemic led to a 30% drop in our enrollment in fall 2020 and spring 2021 over the previous year.

Decreased enrollment naturally affected the university's bottom line, leading to budget shortfalls in the last three years. Despite three changes in leadership in as many years, the presidents and BOT worked together to mitigate these challenges in several ways. In 2018-19, President Chang implemented budget cuts, a hiring freeze, and the elimination of one full-time staff position. On December 1, 2018, the BOT empowered the president to declare financial exigency and take all necessary steps to ensure the immediate and long-term sustainability of UWest; however, exigency was not formally declared. Although plans were drafted for possible furloughing and reduction in force, the university balanced both the 2018-19 and the 2019-20 budget by utilizing UWest reserves. Dr. Chang left UWest in late July 2019 and was replaced by Dr. Chou, a former trustee, whom the BOT immediately appointed to lead the institution while a nationwide search was conducted to recruit a permanent president. During Dr. Chou's one-year interim presidency, the university secured a [\\$1,000,000 private grant from the Chao Foundation](#) (\$500,000 received in December 2019, and \$500,000 in December 2020) to cover the costs of moving UWest's courses online and to provide concomitant resources for staff development and

other faculty and student support. In addition, the trustees reviewed the guidelines for the IBPS-BOT contribution and approved the transfer of limited revenue (7% of the dividend generated) from the endowment account to the operational budget.

Dr. Ta's tenure as UWest president began on July 2, 2020. She quickly ascertained that UWest's enrollment decline had been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, creating additional challenges for UWest's 2020-21 operational budget. As a result, the university was facing a \$1.7 million budget deficit (on a total \$7.74 million proposed annual budget, which includes roughly \$720,000 in institutional scholarships). Dr. Ta immediately began to work on cost reduction and sustainability plans and initiated budget deficit reduction strategies. In the interest of transparent communication, Dr. Ta also communicated [UWest's financial challenges and the university's plans to address them](#) to WSCUC.

Since August 2020, President Ta and the Executive Team reviewed, discussed, and carried out layoffs of several nonessential positions with the least direct impact on our students. Beginning spring 2021, the university has outsourced the human resources function to save money in the long term and support the university with more updated employment regulations and trainings. The president has restructured the enrollment and admissions office, reducing the part-time budget costs and replacing the enrollment/marketing director position with an enrollment coordinator position, now filled by an experienced recruitment professional. On the academic side, careful review of enrollment patterns over the past five years led to a successful early retirement negotiation with a senior faculty member and conversations with faculty to temporarily adjust their workloads. Furthermore, UWest has decided to migrate from Moodle to Open LMS effective July 12, 2021, which will reduce costs and allow for more consistent performance of the university's learning management system. On the IT side, new website

management tasks can now be handled in-house instead of via costly outsourcing to a small company.

The CARES Act provided crucial support for UWest, helping us to cover our budget gap in several ways. With the approval of the PPP loan, reduction in workforce, outsourcing tasks, and the Chao Foundation grant, UWest has been able to restructure funding to hire full-time marketing staff, support retention efforts in first-year English classes, and contract with an experienced institutional researcher as well as an online learning and website technician.

Five-Year Budget Planning

UWest has enjoyed a long history of maintaining a robust funding balance and sufficient cash reserves through careful planning and sound fiscal management. However, in recognition of the unpredictable financial landscape of higher education and our institutional reliance upon one primary funding source, the president has recommended that the five-year strategic budget include plans to use the cash reserve 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. This ensures that financial support is maintained, and funding is available to encourage innovative activities and programs to support retention, enrollment growth, student success, and faculty development in times of constrained resources. We also continue to explore alternative revenue streams; for example, the president submitted a [contribution proposal](#) to a local corporation with ties to Buddhism and has begun to recruit qualified community members to join an advisory committee to help UWest grow and thrive.

UWest continues institutional research efforts to analyze both enrollment and full-time equivalent (FTE) student data to work toward improving FTE, productivity, and instruction and services costs. We are committed to enhancing UWest's academic excellence and increasing our

enrollment in the next five years as we gradually become a more financially independent and sustainable educational institution. Educational effectiveness and improvement of student learning continue to be prioritized in the university's formal plans, as illustrated in the [five-year strategic budget summary](#) (based on [enrollment projections](#) provided by the former institutional research director).

Commitment to Increasing Enrollment

As a non-profit university and with the funding commitment from our founding organization, Fo Guang Shan, UWest exercises fiscal flexibility to shift from quantity to quality, evaluating course offerings and services to ensure that we maximize the needs of our students and community by prioritizing classes needed for degree and certificate completion and for generating higher enrollment. In FY 2021-22 and 2022-23 the university is dedicating more attention and funding to recruitment by restructuring the enrollment office, redefining marketing and recruitment strategies, and bringing in a new full-time marketing specialist. In 2020-21 we commissioned a marketing firm to develop new branding taglines, and we are currently in the process of comprehensively overhauling the university website to make it both more user friendly and more effective as an outreach tool. We are actively promoting UWest with local business organizations and media outlets while leveraging digital and print marketing and social media to [increase nationwide awareness](#) of UWest's unique mission, programs, and learning environment. We are exploring the development of new market-responsive educational offerings: for example, the Business Administration Department developed a data analytics concentration in response to a growing demand for training in this area. This concentration, along with the concentrations in finance and computer information systems, have received [STEM designation](#). This makes these concentrations more attractive to prospective students, as

completion of a STEM-designed degree program allows F-1 students to extend their period of Optional Practical Training by an additional 24 months. We are also exploring the possibility of developing fully online certificate and degree programs to fit working students' schedules, such as Buddhist psychology, for which our current faculty hold the requisite expertise. The university is also building out an extended studies division with community education courses to broaden our educational audience and provide an additional revenue stream.

In collaboration with leadership, the enrollment team has developed a realistic but robust [enrollment plan](#). Articulated strategies include leveraging our strong [scholarship funding](#) to attract well-prepared and motivated students, modifying agreements with sister universities, increasing collaboration with international agency partners, and targeting local transfer students from community colleges. The Retention Committee and the Student Early Alert System (SEAS) team are working to improve access to services and to provide support for current students to increase retention, persistence, and degree completion.

Board Plans and Commitment

The [UWest board of trustees \(BOT\)](#) is the governing board of the university. Its authority is established in the [UWest Bylaws](#), which states, “The Board of Trustees perform any and all duties imposed on them collectively or individually by law, by the Articles of Incorporation of this corporation, or by these Bylaws.” The board has authority over and responsibility for assuring the academic quality, integrity, and effectiveness of student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution. Trustees have a strong commitment to the mission of UWest and its future viability and are highly supportive of the UWest president.

UWest is a unique educational institution, as reflected by the diverse composition of our governing board. Forty-five percent of our BOT members are senior monastics serving Fo Guang

Shan (FGS) in Taiwan and Hsi Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights, California. These trustees continue to advocate for UWest within the FGS organization and play a key role in supporting UWest's funding needs for our annual operational expenses. Their engagement is complemented by the BOT's independent members, with [expertise in law, U.S. higher education, accounting, finance and investment, and organizational management](#). The BOT is committed to ensuring UWest's financial sustainability as it supports the university's long-term plans to become less dependent on IBPS contributions by growing enrollment and diversifying fundraising.

Historically, the BOT has performed minimal giving or fundraising activities. Recognizing the importance of this function, the BOT is planning to undergo fundraising training in July 2021. Over the past year, the BOT has recruited three new board members with decades of experience in U.S. higher education and education law, and their expertise is expected to enhance UWest's future fundraising efforts. The BOT is supportive of hiring a development coordinator to explore projects for university advancement and development; UWest's 2020-25 strategic plan includes budgeting for a full-time development position beginning spring 2023 (Strategic Plan Goal R-3).

Alignment of Resource Allocation with Institutional Priorities (CFRs 3.4, 4.3)

UWest reinvests funds in the university to promote innovation, cover ongoing new needs as determined (see [Program Review and Institutional Planning Calendar](#)), and address student retention, persistence, and success. In FY 2020-21 and moving forward, the university has budgeted funding to provide ongoing support for first-time undergraduate students through a faculty mentorship program. The [2020-25 strategic plan](#) calls for ongoing annual funding for this program, and the five-year budget plan has projected budgeting to hire a full-time employment

developer/internship coordinator by 2024 to assist UWest students in obtaining employment experiences.

Ultimately responsible for the fulfillment of the UWest mission, the president oversees the plans and procedures for measuring progress as well as the university's integrated planning processes. The president also makes resource allocation decisions based on recommendations from program review, prioritized within the Executive Team, which includes the CAO, CFO, and CSSO. Recommendations are further assessed by the university's chief officers and Strategic Planning Committee. The annual budget for program review, innovation activities, and faculty and student research make up 1.1% of the total operational budget. In cooperation with the Executive Team, the president leads the Cabinet members (academic department chairs, student support services managers, and accounting managers) in the creation and implementation of new academic programs and enhancements to existing degree programs and student services in alignment with the mission and vision of the university.

Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment

Since assuming her position in July 2020, President Ta has established a strong vision for the university and has motivated her staff to actively pursue that vision. Under her leadership, a new, perceptible movement has been noticed on campus, and trust on the behalf of faculty and staff members has increased. Part of this change is a shift in management style from a top-down model to one in which individuals entrusted with specific roles are empowered to pursue those tasks utilizing their knowledge and skills. The president believes in transparent and engaging communication and eliciting, supporting, and maximizing the strengths of those who make up the campus community to better advance the institution's student success goals.

UWest has been using private grant money to explore and implement new technology and software that are appropriate and adequate to support the institution's management and operational functions, academic programs, teaching and learning, and support services to ensure UWest is meeting modern-day technology needs. The plan is to reserve 15% of our total operational budget annually for ongoing and new technology expenses.

The number of courses delivered online has increased from a handful to 100% since spring 2020. Recognizing that online education will continue to be in demand in the decade to come, UWest will maintain 25% of total course offerings online in fall 2021 and beyond. We have extended our contract with Open LMS to support the learning and training needs of faculty and students. The university will continue to monitor success indicators of courses delivered via distance education as compared to in-person courses.

Finally, UWest has begun offering online community education and is exploring continuing education offerings within various academic programs through the development of an extended studies division. As mentioned above, our flagship Buddhist chaplaincy program is in the process of developing an online certificate program to meet the needs of a wider professional chaplaincy audience. We are also planning to launch a Buddhist psychology certificate program in fall 2023. This program will serve to enhance current mental health practitioners' tools and perspectives in supporting a diverse clientele in response to the mental health needs magnified by the global pandemic, racial and economic inequities, climate degradation, and related spiritual crises.

COMPONENT 8

Conclusion: Awakening Purpose and Realizing Potential

From a Humanistic Buddhist perspective, all humans benefit from education that progresses individual growth, discernment, creativity, and development. Committed to fulfilling its unique mission centered around a whole-person education rooted in Buddhist wisdom and values, University of the West has cultivated a collegiate experience and institutional culture that are purposeful, rigorous, and distinctive. While the university has encountered both internal and external challenges (e.g., leadership changes, enrollment decrease, Covid-19 pandemic), UWest has prioritized significant areas of improvement, including key enhancements to UWest's graduate culture, steps toward the collection and analysis of student data, increased recruitment and retention, and a revitalized strategic plan linked to a multi-year strategic budget.

The reformulation and approval of the 2020-25 strategic plan and corresponding strategic budget constitutes an important milestone for UWest. With a focus on monitoring, reporting, and communicating strategic plan progress (according to clear key performance indicators) as well as closing the loop for decision making, the university has made significant strides towards data-driven institutional planning. Meaningful program review continues to be a focus, now with clear connections between program and institutional assessment findings, implementation plans, and corresponding resource decisions supported at the executive and governing board levels. With our increased institutional research capacity in place, UWest has prioritized data-driven decision making and will continue efforts to further formalize these connections and processes.

The strategic plan development process led to engaging conversations regarding whole person holding, the mission, vision, and values statements, and the university's commitment to evaluating and improving student success. Moving forward with UWest's newly articulated

definition of student success, the conversations surrounding our students and the positive environment created for them will not cease.

While University of the West recognizes that student success is defined by aspects and experiences beyond graduation rates, the university has nevertheless implemented tools and strategies to help students achieve their degrees in a timely fashion, such as clear, well-defined roadmaps, close personal academic advising, supplemental writing instruction, and enhanced course-level monitoring of student performance. The foundation of the university's educational structure rests upon clearly articulated GE learning goals and program learning outcomes, which are aligned with UWest's institutional learning outcomes, creating coherence and meaning of the degrees. In addition to the institutional-level goals, UWest has made a commitment to the careful assessment of the core competencies, especially at the undergraduate level, with the Undergraduate Transformation Taskforce developing and sharing resources with faculty for the integration and assessment of these competencies. Qualified faculty establish high expectations for students, and the university provides the supports necessary for students to meet those expectations; it also provides the structures and processes to ensure that quality and integrity of degrees are upheld. Faculty, too, are empowered with infrastructure to support, promote, and recognize faculty in teaching, research, scholarship, creative activity, and service. The student services division provides attention, resources, and co-curricular activities that further enhance the educational environment.

The university has firm structures, processes, strategic plans, and committed funding resources in place to sustain UWest's financial viability over the next ten years. University leadership remains attuned and responsive to the evolving higher education landscape. In that process, the concept of impermanence, central to the teachings of Buddhism, makes us aware of

the need to be ready for and at peace with whatever comes next. This mindset has helped us come together to weather, meet, and move beyond substantial challenges in recent years. As we focus on our role in twenty-first century higher education, the university continues to adapt in response to a changing demographics, demands for new skills and knowledge, economic pressures and unforeseen crises, and requirements for new technology.

University of the West is confident that we will continue to help students fulfill their promise and realize their purpose as servants and change agents within their local communities and an ever-changing global environment. WSCUC's standards and criteria and its regular review and reporting processes continue to provide a guiding light on our path to continuous improvement.

LIST OF LINKED EVIDENCE

Board of Trustees

[BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[2019 03.08-09 BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[2019 07.26 BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[2019 12.13-14 BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[2020 04.03 BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[2020 07.24-25 BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[2020 11.20-21 BOT Meeting Minutes](#)
[BOT Committee Roster 2021-2022 June, 2021](#)
[BOT Self Assessment Report & Skills Matrix- 09.2020](#)
[University of the West Bylaws Amended & Restated as of March 19 2021](#)

Budget & Finances

[Financial Reports for BOT](#)
[2021 03.31 UWest Statement of Financial Activities Actual vs Budget](#)
[2021 03.31 UWest Statement of Financial Activities July 2020-March 2021](#)
[2021 03.31 UWest Statement of Financial Position](#)
[2020 08.04 Contribution Proposal](#)
[Chao Foundation Grant Award Letter](#)
[FY2019-20 Audit Report](#)
[FY2020-21 Annual Budget Process](#)
[FY2021-26 Five-Year Budget Planning Summary](#)
[FY2022-26 Enrollment Projections](#)

Campus Communication

[Sample President Updates re Strategic Planning](#)
[2021 02.10 President Update to Campus](#)
[2021 02.26 President Invite to Town Hall on Strategic Planning](#)
[2021 06.25 President Notification to Campus of BOT Approvals of Strategic Plan & Institutional Report](#)
[2019 01.30 Town Hall Meeting on Cafeteria Satisfaction notes](#)
[2021 03.11 Town Hall Presentation on Accreditation](#)

Catalog, Handbook, Policies

[2020-21 UWest Academic Catalog](#)
[Equal Employment Opportunity Employer Statement](#)
[Faculty Right to Participate in University Governance Statement](#)
[Non-Discrimination Statement](#)
[Organizational Chart \(updated June 2021\)](#)
[Religious Accommodations & Equal Pay Statements](#)
[UWest Campus Map](#)
[UWest Committees](#)
[UWest Employee Handbook \(updated April 2020\)](#)
[UWest Faculty Handbook \(updated March 2020\)](#)

Committee Minutes & Notes

[Academic Policy & Curriculum Committee \(APCC\) Sample Minutes & Notes](#)
[2018 02.21 APCC Minutes](#)
[2020 04.15 APCC Minutes](#)
[2021 02.17 APCC Minutes](#)
[2021 05.19 APCC Minutes](#)
[Executive Team Minutes & Notes](#)
[2019 03.18 E-Team Minutes](#)
[2020 07.21 E-Team Notes](#)
[2021 06.21 E-Team Notes](#)
[Retention Committee Sample Agendas & Notes](#)
[2020 03.04 Retention Agenda](#)
[2021 02.10 Retention Presentation & Discussion](#)
[2021 06.09 Retention Committee Notes](#)
[Retention Committee Mission & Charge](#)

[Undergraduate Transformation Taskforce \(UTT\) Sample Minutes & Notes](#)

[2021 02.24 UTT Notes](#)

[2021 04.01 UTT Notes](#)

[2021 04.21 UTT Notes](#)

[2021 05.27 UTT Notes](#)

[2021 06.08 UTT Notes](#)

[2021 06.23 UTT Notes](#)

[University-wide Assessment Council \(UWAC\) Sample Minutes & Notes](#)

[CVs & Job Descriptions](#)

[Bio Huang, Allen University Trustee](#)

[CV Figuli, Joshua University Trustee](#)

[CV Forsythe-Crane, Jessa Institutional Effectiveness Manager](#)

[CV Horibe, Shusaku Institutional Research Analyst](#)

[CV Iwamura, Jane Chief Academic Officer](#)

[CV Ojose, Bobby GE Math Professor & Coordinator](#)

[CV Simone, Nadia Enrollment Coordinator](#)

[CV Ta, Minh-Hoa President](#)

[CV Wang, Howard S. University Trustee](#)

[Job Description CEO President](#)

[Job Description CFO](#)

[Demographic Charts](#)

[UWest Employee Demographics](#)

[UWest Student Demographic Diversity 2015-2020](#)

[Enrollment, Marketing, & Retention](#)

[Marketing Brochures & Flyers](#)

[MA PSYCH & MBA Brochure](#)

[REL & Chaplaincy Brochure](#)

[Undergrad Application Checklist](#)

[Undergrad Programs Brochure](#)

[UWest Fact Sheet Flyer](#)

[2021-24 Enrollment Plan](#)

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