

July 12, 2019

Dr. Craig Swenson
President
Ashford University
8620 Spectrum Center Boulevard
San Diego, CA 92123-1406

Dear President Swenson:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning Ashford University (AU) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting June 26-28, 2019. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit to Ashford University April 2-5, 2019. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by Ashford University prior to the Offsite Review (OSR), the supplemental materials requested by the team after the OSR, and the institution's June 10, 2019 response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues Dr. Gregory Geoffrey, Chair, Ms. Mary Jo Maydew, Vice Chair, and Dr. Laura Palmer Noone, Provost and ALO. Your comments were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's new status with WSCUC.

Actions

1. Receive the Accreditation Visit team report
2. Reaffirm accreditation for a period of six years
3. Issue a Formal Notice of Concern
4. Schedule the next reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review in fall 2024 and the Accreditation Visit in spring 2025
5. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review to begin May 1, 2022
6. Schedule an Interim Report due on November 1, 2020 and a Special Visit in fall 2021 to address issues described below.

The Formal Notice of Concern is being issued due to the Commission's longstanding concerns regarding Ashford University's student persistence and completion rates and performance on other student success metrics. The University is in danger of being found out of compliance with Standard 2 unless significant improvements are realized in the near future.

The Interim Report and Special Visit should address the following issues:

- a. Student success initiatives: The institution's strategy for creating, launching, evaluating, and sunseting initiatives to increase student persistence and

completion, to include specific metrics that describe current and target levels of persistence and completion.

- i. For the Interim Report, a report on the initiatives undertaken to date, including specific attention to the success or lack of success and the future plans for each initiative.
 - ii. For the Interim Report, and updated for the Special Visit, an analysis of the persistence and completion rates and trends for Ashford itself and relative to institutions with which Ashford University compares itself, including an explanation for the choice of institutions in the peer and benchmarking comparison group(s), to support comparison with WSCUC peer and trend analyses and contextual data.
 - iii. For the Interim Report, provide data on the impact of policies that have the effect of causing students to separate or be dismissed, the basis for such policy, and how these actions and outcomes are informing other policies or practices.
 - iv. For the Special Visit, updated data on 6.a.i., along with changes in strategy and tactics that have occurred over the two year period before the Visit, and a summary of plans going forward in the next two years.
- b. Faculty workload – For the Interim Report, and if needed for the Special Visit, the decisions and outcomes of the team recommendation with respect to faculty workload and compensation across full-time and associate faculty.
 - c. Faculty governance – For the Interim Report, and if needed for the Special Visit, a report on what actions have been taken to expand the engagement of associate faculty in faculty governance and in the institution’s educational effectiveness evaluations.
 - d. Student learning assessment – For the Interim Report, and if needed for the Special Visit, a report on the maturation of ILOs to meet student and institutional expectations.
 - e. Student success – See a. preceding. In addition, for the Interim Report include a report on what steps have been taken to document students’ employment outcomes and career paths, the role of co-curricular initiatives to promote student persistence and completion, and the use of qualitative assessment to accompany student persistence and completion initiatives.
 - f. Resource allocation – For the Interim Report, a report on changes made between the institution and its parent corporate owner to effect the highest possible investment in the educational activities of the institution.
 - g. Financial governance – For the Interim report, as appropriate, a description of how the entire Board of Trustees is engaged in evaluating the complete financial status of the institution including its relationship to its parent corporate owner.

The Commission commends Ashford University in particular for the following:

1. Mission – The authentic and enthusiastic commitment of its Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and staff to enacting its mission of serving students from underserved groups.

2. Data Informed Actions to Foster Student Success – Its efforts to collect actionable data to develop and implement policies and programs intended to guide institutional improvement and promote higher levels of student accomplishment.
3. Assessment – Its systematic efforts to assess student achievement aimed at providing a high quality student experience.
4. Faculty – The institution’s faculty development activities, both for full-time and associate faculty, that feature promising practices in learning and teaching.
5. Financial management – Its robust, holistic budgeting process and effective financial leadership.

The Commission requires the institution to respond to the following issues:

1. Initiatives – Ashford should develop and explain a coherent strategy for determining which improvement initiatives to evaluate, prioritize, and enact or sunset. The strategy should include explicit evidence of the role of senior administrators in leading efforts to improve student persistence and completion. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 4.6, 4.7)
2. Faculty Workload –Ashford should review its current workload and compensation practices for full-time and associate faculty to determine whether they are appropriate and equitable. (CFRs 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3)
3. Faculty Governance – The institution should examine whether associate faculty representation and participation in faculty governance and efforts to evaluate educational effectiveness are appropriate and adequate. (CFRs 2.4, 3.1. 3.10)
4. Student Learning Assessment – Ashford should examine its process for ILO development and assessment to determine that it is satisfactory and meeting student and institutional needs. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4. 2.6)
5. Student Success – Ashford should continue to analyze and interpret quantitative and qualitative institutional data from curricular and co-curricular programs in order to implement effective efforts to ameliorate obstacles to student persistence and completion and also to document its graduates’ career paths and employment outcomes. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
6. Resource Allocation – The institution should consider developing a policy to balance return to institution and return to shareholder/parent. (CFRs 3.4, 3.6, 3.7)
7. Financial Governance – Ashford should involve the entire Board of Trustees in examining annual financial reports to support a comprehensive understanding of the financial standing and practices of the University. (CFRs 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.9)

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Ashford University has addressed the three Core Commitments and has successfully completed the two-stage institutional review process conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. In keeping with WSCUC values, Ashford University should strive for ongoing improvement with adherence to all Standards of Accreditation and their associated CFRs to foster a learning environment that continuously strives for educational excellence and operational effectiveness.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of Ashford University's governing board. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the Ashford University website and widely distributed throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Ashford University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to public accountability, and we thank you for your continued support of this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jamienne S. Studley
President

JSS/cno

Cc: Reed Dasenbrock, Commission Chair
Laura Palmer Noone, ALO
Gregory Geoffrey, Board Chair
Members of the Accreditation Visit team
Christopher N. Oberg, Vice President