

**REPORT OF THE WASC SENIOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COMMISSION TEAM**

**SPECIAL VISIT**

**MARYMOUNT CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY**

November 14-15, 2019

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

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## **SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, and Visit**

#### ***Mission and Description***

Marymount California University (MCU) is an independent, Catholic university whose mission is inspired by the charism and tradition of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM). In 1968, MCU began as a two-year institution serving outbound transfer students. It transferred its accreditation from ACCJC to the WASC-ACSCU Senior Commission in 2010 when it obtained approval to offer baccalaureate degree programs. Marymount launched BA degree programs in 2010 and changed its name from Marymount College to Marymount California University in 2013.

Currently, MCU offers BA programs in biology, business, criminal justice, multidisciplinary studies, and psychology; BS programs in accounting, biology, digital communication media, and management; associates degrees; and a master of business administration. Baccalaureate students represent 93% of student enrollments. The largest undergraduate major is business/management/accounting with 31% of the enrollments, followed by multidisciplinary studies which includes students without declared majors (16%), psychology (14%), and criminal justice (13%). The MBA has 45 students, 7% of the total student population.

MCU serves primarily traditional and transfer students in face-to-face or hybrid programs, with a total enrollment of 647 FTE students in fall 2019. The instructional program is delivered by 31 full-time and 23 part-time faculty. Full-time faculty teach 82% percent of classes. Class size averages 18.9 which aligns with MCU's stated intent to provide a small, supportive, interactive learning environment, one designed to know its students and to push them to pursue experiences for success in their professional and personal lives. MCU's values also challenge students to pursue lives of leadership and service.

#### ***Recent Accreditation History***

In March 2016, the WSCUC Commission acted to reaffirm MCU's accreditation for six years with a Special Visit in spring 2018 to provide evidence of progress on nine recommendations centered primarily on financial sustainability.

After the resignation of President Brophy in June 2015, President Lamadrid took office in April 2016 and launched a significant financial restructuring of the institution. This restructuring included closing the Lakeside campus, selling the residential apartment building, outsourcing technological services, consolidating several departments, and implementing staff layoffs. In February 2018, MCU's Board of Trustees replaced President Lamadrid

after commissioning a third-party investigation triggered by a formal complaint against the president. Long-term board member Brian Marcotte was appointed president in February 2018.

The February 2018 WSCUC team arrived at a time of internal turmoil associated with this transition. That Special Visit team confirmed notable progress in MCU's goal to restore the institution to fiscal health, as evidenced by balanced budgets and improved financial ratios. At the same time, concerns were identified about campus climate, governance, and organizational structure.

In June 2018, the WSCUC Commission acted to maintain the Accreditation Visit for fall 2021 with a Special Visit for fall 2019. In its Institutional Report for the fall 2019 Special Visit, MCU addressed seven recommendations as identified in the 2018 Special Visit Team report and Commission action letter:

- *Participatory Governance*: Define, refine, and implement a clear model of participatory governance that includes the board, faculty, administration, and staff.
- *Campus Climate*: Take steps to identify and address issues of faculty and staff morale, including a baseline climate survey to be administered soon, and a second survey administered prior to the next accreditation visit.
- *Strategic Planning*: Create a new institutional strategic plan that is developed through participatory governance, responds to external trends, and creates a clear identity for MCU.
- *Admission and Marketing Plans*: Within the strategic plan, develop a comprehensive three-year undergraduate and graduate admissions and marketing plan aligned with the institution's strategic plan.
- *Alignment with Best Practices and Regulations*: Engage higher education professional organizations and leaders for consultation and begin to better align MCU with state and federal guidelines and employ higher education best practices.
- *Faculty Development and Student Needs*: Closely evaluate reductions in infrastructure, particularly IT, to ensure basic faculty development and student needs are met.
- *Communications*: Develop an effective communications model that includes internal communication and crisis management.

## **B. Description of Team's Review Process**

The team reviewed MCU's progress for each of the above seven items. While each recommendation is important in isolation, the team focused primarily on three interrelated issues—financial stability, enrollment growth, and campus climate. This review included a critical examination of the information provided in the institutional report, a discussion of these issues during the team's conference call prior to the campus visit, a one-day site visit (interviews with faculty, staff, administrators, and board members), an evaluation of essential documents and evidence of the institution's progress in addressing key issues, a review of the information submitted via the confidential email account, the WSCUC letter of findings from MCU's mid-cycle review, and the Commission action letter resulting in the Special Visit. Each team member participated in reviewing all MCU's materials and evaluated the institution's strength in gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and using data for institutional improvement.

## **C. Institution's Special Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence**

The institution provided a succinct and well-organized report regarding each recommendation for institutional improvement. The institution's Special Visit report responded effectively to issues outlined in the Commission action letter. The report reinforces the institution's core commitment to student learning and success. Based on the site visit, the institutional report was judged to accurately portray

the current status of the institution with regard to these recommendations. MCU's appendices provided appropriate and clear documentation to substantiate its progress from the prior Special Visit.

MCU offered some evidence to illustrate actions taken in response to key issues, although these mostly are in the form of policy documents and a few, but important, data-collection instruments (such as campus climate survey) with limited data to illustrate that initiatives have resulted in greater institutional effectiveness.

MCU identified substantial changes since the February 2018. The team confirmed the following changes have been undertaken; the extent to which these actions have been effective in addressing the critical issues facing the institution is not yet known in terms of long-term impact on enrollment growth and fiscal stability.

- consolidated instruction at the Oceanview campus (deactivated Waterfront campus)
- restructured academic programs moving to four-unit classes
- launched bachelor's programs in accounting and management
- hired new faculty following faculty retirements
- increased proportion of classes taught by full-time faculty, including freshman classes
- appointed budget manager as acting chief financial officer
- reorganized functional reporting for greater accountability and supervisory oversight
- commissioned external firm to support branding and marketing initiatives
- commissioned development and launching of new and more student-focused website
- implemented new student information system
- improved facilities for residential campus and modernized science laboratories
- updated and clarified governance structures and financial approval authorities
- completed teach out of partnership online MBA
- completed teach out of the Lakeside students (1 student left)
- phased out Kings recruiting partnerships for international students (fall 2019 is last intake)
- faced lawsuits by one former administrator and one current administrator

The team did not identify other issues requiring institutional or WSCUC attention at this time. Given MCU's Accreditation Visit is scheduled for fall 2021, the team expects additional information to be available regarding continued progress for institutional advancement, accompanied by more evidence and assessment data.

The team confirmed sufficient institutional involvement in addressing WSCUC recommendations and in the review and report preparation. These included joint faculty and staff forums, administrative bodies (e.g., Cabinet, Provost's Council), and board committees. Faculty involvement was confirmed via membership of the faculty senate president and vice president who serve on the Cabinet.

## SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

(Approximately 60% of the report, 6-12 pages)

Marymount California University addressed seven WSCUC recommendations in its institutional report for this Special Visit. A summary of the team's evaluation follows.

***Participatory Governance:*** Define, refine, and implement a clear model of participatory governance that includes the board, faculty, administration, and staff. (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 3.10)

Overall, MCU has taken several important steps to enhance participation of campus constituencies in and to strengthen governance. The *Governance Participatory Agreement*, approved by the board in June 2019, provides a delineation of authority for governance and administration bodies, including charge, role, and composition of each. It describes also the process and criteria for new program development, program review, and approval of faculty policies. The preface identifies standards of good practice tied to Catholic social thought and WSCUC CFRs related to governance.

At the operational level, this agreement is to be reviewed every five years, shared at each fall semester's opening and posted on MCU's website for all employees. Moreover, meeting minutes are to be distributed for key governance bodies (e.g., Cabinet, Provost's Council, Curriculum Development and Review Committee, and Faculty Senate). Other key actions have been taken to increase governance effectiveness, notably adding faculty-elected faculty to the Cabinet and administering annually an employee campus climate survey.

With regard to faculty leadership and curricular committees, the administration is urged to ensure genuine faculty participation in the deliberative process before final decisions are rendered. These concerns have import specifically with regard to decisions about academic programs. The administration indicated its understanding that academically related decisions are to be made with faculty engagement from the outset of discussions, especially related to new and discontinued programs, student course loads, and faculty teaching loads.

***Campus Climate:*** Take steps to identify and address issues of faculty and staff morale, including a baseline climate survey to be administered soon, and a second survey administered prior to the next accreditation visit. (CFRs 1.7, 2.10, 4.5)

During a timeframe in which the campus faced extremely trying times resulting both from the sudden departure of the prior president and from significant reduction in student enrollments, the president and provost evidenced serious engagement with improving morale and campus climate. Examples include adding a strategic goal for 2022 to foster a positive and collegial culture among faculty and staff. A baseline for measuring the achievement of this goal was the administration of a campus climate in 2018 and 2019 with intent to administer the survey annually. Overall improvement was evidenced in this survey between 2018 and 2019, but many items (27 or 45% of the survey items) remained at 55% or less positive responses, and 29% of the items were in the 30% and 40% range for positive response. Specific items requiring continued attention include changes discussed prior to implementation, respectful debate, being on same team/working together, adequate number of faculty/staff, orientation program, involvement in planning, senior leadership with clear direction for future, open communication, and a well-run institution.

Consistently in campus interviews, staff and faculty praised President Marcotte for setting an example of ethical and transparent leadership and for working diligently to restore trust on campus. A few comments on the confidential WSCUC email account and during an open forum with staff and faculty cited improvement for an inclusive process while at the same time noting the need for continued improvement for faculty and staff (via governance bodies) to participate in deliberations on critical issues facing the institution before decisions are made. This is an important issue to be assessed during the next WSCUC review.

The team recommends continued progress to ensure a campus climate that reflects trust, collaboration, and open communication. Further, senior leadership is encouraged to address concerns raised specifically about their roles in providing clear direction for the future, ensuring the institution is well run, and issues are discussed and debated respectfully to achieve better results.

***Strategic Planning:*** *Create a new institutional strategic plan that is developed through participatory governance, responds to external trends, and creates a clear identity for MCU. (CFRs 3.7, 3.10, 4.6, 4.7)*

The MCU 2022 Strategic Plan, approved by the board in June 2019, is comprehensive with five strategic priorities supported by goals, actions, and key performance indicators (KPIs) to be accomplished for each of the four years of implementation: (1) rooted in RSHM heritage, foster a “small means more” culture and student experience that maximizes student achievement and satisfaction; (2) raise academic reputation and visibility; (3) strengthen marketing and enrollment practices to grow enrollment, retention, and net revenue; (4) take advantage of location in Southern California and South Bay; and (5) attend to facilities and technology needs to support instruction, real world learning, and effective operations.

While the plan has KPIs for each of the five strategic priorities, metrics/data for longitudinally tracking and evaluating the achievement of each KPI was not evidenced. The team recommends the strategic plan be improved by providing these metrics and illustrate progress toward achievement of the strategic priorities. MCU explains that the strategic plan is to be complemented by an enrollment plan, pricing analysis, retention analysis, annual and multi-year budget scenarios, and department plans. The team strongly recommends these plans be implemented and evidence of their effectiveness illustrated prior to the next accreditation review. MCU has a strong institutional research function that has provided both data generation and analysis for institutional decision making and tracking of students from admission to graduation. The team encourages continued reliance on this expertise for demonstrating achievement of its strategic priorities.

MCU provided limited information regarding the resources required to implement the strategic plan. Given the likely high cost for full implementation of the strategic plan and its complementary enrollment and marketing plans over the next four years, the team expresses concern as to MCU’s capacity to realize each of the strategic priorities in the timeline required for its achievement.

With regard to external trends, the team encourages the institution to continue its engagement with questions focused on the competitive environment (e.g., What is MCU’s clear identity that would lead a student to choose MCU over other competing institutions? Of the peer institutions identified for benchmarking, what are their competitive advantages compared to MCU, particularly related to signature academic programs? What are the main reasons students give for not returning to MCU? What strategies will MCU employ to address anticipated demographic changes in California?)

**Admission and Marketing Plans:** *Within the strategic plan, develop a comprehensive three-year undergraduate and graduate admissions and marketing plan aligned with the institution's strategic plan. (CFRs 1.7, 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.7)*

The university's strategic admissions/enrollment and marketing plans are well thought out and provide a solid roadmap for marketing and recruitment strategies. As with any plan, the key is the execution of the plan and the ability to secure the requisite resources to deliver and sustain the plan. It remains to be seen how the plan will be executed in light of major financial constraints and budget deficit. At the time of the next review, the team expects the institution to demonstrate the implementation of these plans and evidence of their effectiveness in increasing enrollments.

MCU is commended for contracting with reputable external agencies with expertise to assist the institution in addressing its recruitment and enrollment challenges (e.g., Noel Levitz for admissions and financial aid, Zehno for brand audit, and Cunningham for facilities usage). The newly designed website was launched summer 2019, with a distinctive design that appeals to prospective students. The website is visually appealing, easy to navigate, and reflects the diversity of MCU's students. Further, the team reviewed MCU's other digital and print communications, which are professional and polished. The campus placed priority on the website redesign, new print materials, and social media as marketing tools in time to affect the outcome of the fall 2020 recruiting season.

To MCU, its concept of right-size and "small means more" is defined by growing the student population to 900+ to achieve greater fiscal sustainability. To achieve this goal, the institution has projected a goal of 375 new students for fall 2020, 425 new students for fall 2021, and 415 new students for fall 2022. The goal is for the student population to be comprised of 793 primarily day students and 150 evening/weekend students. New athletic programs in surfing and eSports are a key part of the enrollment strategy. In fall 2019, 38% of new students were athletes. A strategic priority is raising academic reputation and visibility. The team expects that MCU will illustrate the ways in which this priority is incorporated into its enrollment strategy and the extent to which this important goal has been achieved.

The team expresses concern that the stated enrollment goals are highly ambitious, and may not be realized over the established timeframe of three years. In order to achieve these enrollment numbers, MCU must continue its singular, urgent, and aggressive actions for enrollment growth that is at the core of its immediate and long-term financial stability.

**Alignment with Best Practices and Regulations:** *Engage higher education professional organizations and leaders for consultation and begin to better align MCU with state and federal guidelines and employ higher education best practices. (CFR 1.7, 1.8, 4.7)*

The team commends MCU for its important work to improve its internal structures and systems, eliminate inherent conflicts of interest, and align reporting to reflect both student interests and best practices in higher education. Specifically, by moving key leadership positions such as the registrar away from the CFO and back to a more appropriate reporting structure under the provost, the university has ensured that the priority of this office is academic integrity and student success. Similarly, separating the financial aid office from the budget office, and instead having financial aid report to the new vice president for enrollment management, ensures that student needs will not be in direct conflict with other institutional considerations. Finally, the president has assumed supervisory responsibility for

some key positions at this important moment in the university's development, including the director of human resources and the director of marketing. These new reporting structures are a considerable improvement from those observed by the team in 2018. At present, there are a large number (13) of individuals reporting directly to the president, which may not be sustainable for the long term, but is understandable given the issues the institution is currently facing.

In addition to these structural changes, the university has actively and thoughtfully begun to develop stronger external affiliations to support the professional development of the leadership team, and bring opportunities and ideas back to the campus. The president and provost have both been active in WSCUC events; the president has also developed productive relationships with the NAIA, AICCU, and AGB. These relationships provide opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration, and expose MCU to a range of options as the leadership team plans for the future. This type of engagement will continue to be important as MCU exists in a small college ecosystem that is itself undergoing rapid change and many challenges. It is important for the university to continue to be nimble and proactive in understanding the larger context for higher education, to learn ways in which some campuses are responding, and to seek affiliations and professional development opportunities that will create options for the future.

***Faculty Development and Student Needs:*** *Closely evaluate reductions in infrastructure, particularly IT, to ensure basic faculty development and student needs are met.* (CFRs 3.4, 3.5)

To reduce cost and ensure data security standards, MCU contracted through May 2020 with an external firm for its technology needs (except for educational and online education which was supported in-house). After the contract expiration, the institution plans to increase its internal capacity for IT support. The institutional report cites appropriate actions taken to ensure adequacy of the IT structure and support services. A fall 2018 freshmen survey indicated that internet service and technology support ranked high on student dissatisfaction. An *ad hoc* technology action group has been convened to assess technology services, leading to a detailed multi-year technology plan to be completed in January 2020 and reviewed by appropriate governance bodies. The team encourages MCU to monitor technology resources and provide sufficient assets to students, faculty, and staff.

***Communications:*** *Develop an effective communications model that includes internal communication and crisis management.* (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 4.1, 4.5)

The administration implemented a communication model for enhancing both external and internal communication. While in its early stages, the team was convinced the communication strategies have increased open communication between the administration and faculty/staff. During campus interviews, the campus constituencies verified improved campus morale and a genuine increase in transparency of operations. During the forum, staff and faculty affirmed improved communications with administration while also indicating that work needs to continue to ensure progress toward transparency and openness. In several campus interviews, faculty and staff expressed support for scheduling a class-free hour four days weekly to share and discuss timely matters. The importance of continued vigilance for ensuring open communication with regard to academic matters such as faculty hiring, appointment of department chairs, and curricular changes was also emphasized.

The spring 2019 hiring of a full-time, in-house director of marketing and communications, reporting directly to the president, promises to give a high level of professionalism to external communications and targeted recruiting materials. Most importantly, it was apparent during interviews that this position

works closely with the vice president for enrollment management, thereby enhancing communications critical to achieving MCU's projected enrollment growth.

### **SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS**

While major changes have occurred since the last site visit, each is related to those issues identified by the Commission in June 2018.

#### ***Enrollment Challenges*** (CFRs 1.2, 2.10, 3.4, 4.2, 4.6)

MCU is facing an accelerated declining enrollment trend, one that does not portend well for the future. The team found ample evidence prior to and during the visit to demonstrate leadership is working diligently and aggressively to reverse the downward trend in enrollment and resulting budget deficits.

In the MCU's Mid-Cycle Review (August 2019) data points for enrollment changes and financial indicators suggest a serious concern for the future viability of the institution. Overall, the institution experienced a 26.23% enrollment decline (above the WSCUC threshold of a 20% decrease). In addition, MCU has a significantly lower four-year graduation rate (14% vs. regional mean of 42%) and a lower six-year graduation rate (23% vs. regional mean of 60%). It should be noted that these data in part reflect that MCU did not start offering BA degrees until 2010, with many degree programs launched more recently and are not yet captured in the 6-year graduation metric.

Fall 2018 enrollment was 761 FTES, 212 fewer students than the prior year (a 27% decline). The drop was due primarily to an unusually small entering class of 242 new students compared to its recent historical average of 366 new students. Of the 242 new students, 91 were athletes recruited by coaches, 89 were non-athlete freshmen, 35 were non-athlete transfers, 21 were international students, and 5 were graduate students. Except for athletes, each of these categories of students is below MCU's historical enrollment patterns.

Fall 2019 enrollment was 647 FTES, with 207 new students. The small entering freshmen class of 133 is another major decline. To offset this smaller than anticipated freshmen class, MCU recognizes the need to recruit a larger-than-average entering classes for the next three years to reach its goal of 900+ students. In addition, the Kings contract for international students expires with fall 2019 as the last intake, which means fewer students for 2020 and beyond from this source.

The institutional report states that retention remains an area for institutional attention with early indicators of the revised curriculum, faculty assignments, and freshman experience positively impacting increased retention rates. (Retention from fall to spring, moved from 83% in 2017-2018 to 89% in 2018-2019.) The team encourages the institution to continue its efforts to improve this retention rate for upper-class students as well.

The administration, supported by staff and faculty, is taking initiatives to reverse the downward trend in enrollments, and ample evidence during the visit was provided to demonstrate these strategies are underway. The development of a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, a comprehensive three-year blueprint, addresses key issues of marketing, recruitment, and enrollments.

The administration expressed confidence that the institution will be able to achieve its projected enrollment goals and associated revenue. The team recognizes the enormous and genuine institutional efforts underway, yet is also cognizant of MCU's large graduating class (131 baccalaureate students), the external competitive environment in Southern California, the city's cap on MCU's student enrollments, the continued struggle to gain visibility as a four-year degree granting university (not a two-year junior college), and demographic challenges in the broader higher education environment. As such, the team is cautious about the institution's ability to overcome these enormous challenges for enrollments and financial sustainability as projected over the next three years.

***Finances*** (CFRs 3.4, 4.6, 4.7)

MCU's primary source of revenue is tuition and fees, with supplementary income from endowments, and gifts. Each of these primary sources has been in decline over the past several years leading to the projected budget deficit of approximately \$5.3M for FY2020. Student headcount fell from a fall 2014 enrollment of 1107 students to the fall 2019 enrollment of 647 students, with significant decrease in revenue generated from tuition and fees. Revenue from tuition and fees fell from approximately \$33 million in FY2018 to \$27 million in FY2019. MCU has not raised its tuition in four years; the board has approved a 3% increase in tuition for each of the next two years. The institution's tuition discount rate has been 38% and is being raised to 44% to address increased competition from peer institutions.

Based on financial statements from the institution, donations and gifts have declined over the past three years. In 2018-2019 most of the \$1.3 million shortfall occurred in advancement revenues, and indicators suggest a shortfall in 2019-2020. This must be considered a major priority for the president and the advancement office to avoid further erosion of the financial status of the institution.

As such, the institution has constructed both its 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 budgets with deficits, recognizing these deficits are not sustainable over the long term. In its estimation, the institution has adequate reserves and property to operate with a deficit budget for three years. Sources of funds to cover operating deficits until the institution realizes its enrollment target of 900+ FTES and associated revenue include the following: bank balances, line of credit in place, board-designated reserves, refinance of loan on the residential villas, sale of parts of the Oceanview campus not used by the university, and external partnership/affiliation opportunities. In addition, the lease for the Waterfront campus in San Pedro expires in 2021 which will return \$500,000 annually to the budget for operations, debt service, or reserves. By selling some of its assets, centralizing its operations, and reducing staffing, MCU can generate enough cash to remain solvent for a limited time period (judged to be two to three years if a requisite increase in enrollments does not materialize).

The team examined MCU's audited financials for FY2019 (preliminary draft subject to change for management review), with comparative totals for FY2018,. The summary of the independent auditors' results related to internal controls over financial reporting found no material weakness, significant deficiencies, or non-compliance material to financial statements. Similar findings were expressed for internal control over federal awards, and MCU was evaluated as qualified as low-risk auditee.

The team found the board to be engaged fully in overseeing the current financial crisis. Board leadership confirmed its commitment to prioritize funding for strategies to increase enrollment growth, especially admissions and marketing. The board indicated its awareness that the anticipated revenue shortfall will again draw on cash reserves and necessitate reductions in operating expenses.

Clearly, the institution has made difficult decisions in the past and must continue to employ aggressive actions to increase student enrollments and reverse revenue shortfalls. The team commends the institution for addressing each of the Commission's recommendations with vigor and genuine commitment to the institution's immediate budgetary challenges and long-term financial solvency. The team, while remaining cautious about the institution's ability to overcome these enormous challenges for enrollments and financial sustainability as projected over the next three years, is confident the institution has mobilized to employ assertive actions to address immediate operating deficits and to achieve balanced annual and multi-year budgets—essential for institutional viability and long-term sustainability. (CFR 3.4)

### ***Facilities Constraints (CFR 3.5)***

The university has heeded the Commission's recommendations and embarked on an assertive enrollment growth strategy. In doing so, the institution is challenged with regard to facilities, e.g., the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Conditional Use Permit includes enrollment limits and campus usage conditions. The president has begun to build positive relationships with the local community to address these enrollment caps.

### ***Employment Actions and Lawsuits (CFRs 1.7, 3.6)***

Fewer than two years ago in the midst of a previous Special Visit from WSCUC, the Marymount California University campus faced a crisis of leadership. The still-new president was in the process of departing, and the campus community was in a state of considerable anxiety and even fear. The board and key members of the leadership team took quick and necessary action, much of which is documented in other sections of this report. Given the issues the campus was facing fewer than two years ago, it is not surprising that the university is dealing with some residual legal action. Prior to and during this Special Visit, the President was straightforward in acknowledging current legal action, while using appropriate discretion in not discussing any proprietary or personnel details. The board and executive leadership have considered strategies for managing risk and have made important strides in responding to employee concerns. This work, along with the changes in reporting structure, should lessen the institution's vulnerability to legal action and to allegations of conflicts of interest.

## **SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Findings***

Overall, MCU has demonstrated its compliance with WSCUC recommendations for each of the seven areas identified for immediate action to be evidenced by this Special Visit. Campus constituencies engaged in extensive work and initiated many initiatives in a short time period. At the same time, these multiple and urgent priorities with non-negotiable timelines mean the campus has limited ability to demonstrate, with data, that their actions have resulted in institutional improvement. The team expects

that evidence resulting from data, benchmarks, and metrics for key performance indicators will be presented at the time of the next Accreditation Visit.

It should be noted that despite these enormous challenges, campus constituencies overwhelmingly expressed positive and hopeful attitudes. They exuded a confidence that the institution is now on the right path for restored health, with all working together to serve students and achieve institutional goals.

## COMMENDATIONS

1. **Response to Commission Recommendations.** The campus addressed each of the Commission's recommendations with vigor and genuine commitment to the institution's immediate budgetary challenges and long-term financial solvency and has done so in accordance with WSCUC standards.
2. **Campus Climate/Morale.** Administrative and Board leadership—complemented by high level of engagement among faculty and staff—took action to evaluate and realize its mission commitment to an environment of openness, integrity, collaboration, and respect.
3. **Reporting Structures.** Significant changes in governance and reporting structures have improved institutional functioning and avoid compliance and regulatory conflicts.
4. **Enrollment Plans.** Senior leadership has engaged reputable higher education firms and consultants with a clear focus on student recruitment and enrollment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Financial Sustainability.** Continue to employ assertive actions to cover operating deficits and to achieve balanced annual and multi-year financial/budget planning—essential for institutional viability and long-term sustainability. (CFR 3.4)
2. **Enrollment Growth.** Continue urgent and aggressive actions to address the institution's highest priority for enrollment growth/management that is at the core of its long-term financial sustainability. (CFR 3.4)
3. **Strategic Planning Implementation.** Implement fully the strategic plan, integrated with enrollment and marketing plans; demonstrate progress toward achievement of strategic priorities through assessment data/metrics. (CFR 4.6)
4. **Academic Planning.** Continue to engage in strategic academic planning focused on raising MCU's academic reputation and visibility with branding that emphasizes MCU's academic distinction to attract and retain students. (CFR 3.4, 3.10)

5. ***Explore Potential Affiliations.*** Explore possible relationships with other higher education institutions and providers with the goal of expanding enrollment and developing economies of scale. (CFR3.4)