

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT**

To: Columbia College Hollywood

April 6-9, 2021

Judith Maxwell Greig, Team Chair
President Emerita
Notre Dame de Namur University

Laura Palucki Blake, Assistant Chair
Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Effectiveness
Harvey Mudd College

Tomás Gomez-Arias
Dean of the College of Business Administration
California State University, Stanislaus

Dominick Tracy
Associate Provost
California College of the Arts

Maureen Maloney, Vice President
WSCUC Senior College and University Commission

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT.....	2
A. Description of the Institution and its Accreditation History.....	2
B. Description of Team’s Review Process.....	4
C. Institution’s Reaccreditation Report and Update: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence.....	6
SECTION II – TEAM ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES.....	7
A. Evidence Reviewed by Team.....	7
1. Implementation of the 2020 Stabilization and Growth Plan.....	7
2. Improved enrollment and revenue projections, with leadership from a permanent CFO and implementation of sound financial management.....	12
3. Implementation of a Campus Budgeting Process.....	14
4. Development and Implementation of Comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management.....	16
5. A Qualified, Experienced, and Empowered Chief Academic Officer.....	21
SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS: ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY.....	26
SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW.....	28

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

This report of the Special Visit (SV) to Columbia College Hollywood (CCH) is a follow up to the Reaffirmation Review conducted in 2020. In that review, the team offered nine recommendations regarding the 2020 Stabilization and Growth Plan, enrollment and revenue projections, campus budgeting process, the faculty hiring plan, financial management, strategic enrollment management, academic and financial leadership, the integration of the Flashpoint Chicago campus, and board governance. In acting on the team's report, WSCUC deferred action until June 2021, and called for a SV to take place in spring 2021, focused on the issues of implementation of the Growth and Stabilization Plan, enrollment management, financial management, the campus budgeting process, and the hiring of a chief financial officer (CFO) and chief academic officer (CAO). This report of the SV focuses on six of the recommendations raised in the prior review (numbers 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 delineated in the Commission Action Letter); it is not a comprehensive visit of all aspects of the institution. The evaluation team is substantially the same as the 2020 team.

Description of the Institution and its Accreditation History

Since 1952, CCH has served the Los Angeles entertainment industry with entry-level professionals to serve in careers in television and film. Over the past decade the college has gone through a number of dramatic changes, one of which was to seek WSCUC accreditation. Eligibility was granted in 2011, followed by Candidacy in 2013, and Initial Accreditation was granted in 2014. The college also had a Special Visit in fall 2017 and a Substantive Change Visit in fall 2018. As a result of the college's first Reaffirmation of Accreditation Visit in 2020, the Commission deferred action until June 25, 2021, and scheduled an SV for spring 2021. Two

members of the Substantive Change Committee will also conduct a review and visit this spring and summer as a part of a proposed Substantive Change by CCH.

Accompanying the changes in identity and curriculum has been the addition of a branch campus in Chicago, previously called Flashpoint Chicago, via the Substantive Change process, approved in spring 2017. Flashpoint Chicago was previously known as Tribeca Flashpoint College; because it was previously a for-profit institution, the acquisition by CCH required approval not only by WSCUC but also by the US Department of Education (USDE).

CCH offers Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degrees in cinema, graphic design & interactive media, and visual effects, as well as Associate of Fine Arts (AFA) degrees in cinema, design & visual communication, and VFX & Animation. Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees in film and recording arts are also offered. CCH offers flexible course schedules across dual modalities--both online and in person--in two locations. In Los Angeles (LA), they operate on their Tarzana campus. In Chicago, they currently occupy space at 430 South Michigan Avenue on the campus of Roosevelt University, after vacating the space at their original 28 North Clark Street location in response to the campus closure necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December 2021, CCH had an enrollment headcount of 757 students, 511 of whom were in LA and 246 of whom were associated with the Chicago campus. Their 6-year graduation rate is 52%. The CCH academic calendar operates year-round, and as the two campuses continue to integrate they intend to operate on the quarter system.

Another important aspect of the CCH is its long-term operating partnership with Edcura. Edcura is a higher education services company that partners with CCH to provide marketing, enrollment management, strategic, and administrative services. CCH has undertaken this

partnership to focus its efforts on its core strengths in academic programming while gaining external assistance with marketing, recruitment, and other operating processes. Edcura markets to and recruits potential students, while faculty comprise the admissions committee and make admissions decisions. Edcura has assisted in designing some of the budgeting and operating processes, but decision-making is ultimately in the hands of CCH.

It is worth noting that all of CCH's activities in response to the Commission Action Letter have taken place entirely during a pandemic. During this time, they pivoted all courses across both campuses to an online modality, provided professional development to faculty to transition their courses, applied and received federal PPP and CARES Act funding, and are exploring a relationship with Roosevelt University that includes acquiring physical space for the campus.

The support extended to the team by CCH was very much appreciated. The team valued the candor, as well as the open and forthright manner in which comments were made in all of its interactions. The institution provided ample technical support for the remote review, and they were available to assist with the team's needs. The team's requests for additional information during the visit were met with a high degree of responsiveness.

Description of Team's Review Process

The team reviewed the institutional report and supporting documents and developed lines of inquiry to pursue during the SV. The team was interested in understanding:

- The implementation of the 2020 Stabilization and Growth Plan including the use of assets to increase cash flow.

- Progress in developing and implementing comprehensive strategic enrollment management that integrates marketing, recruitment, student retention and success, and student financial support.
- Implementation of sound financial management including increasing the cash cushion for contingencies.
- Implementation of the new campus budgeting process, including how it was conceived, implemented, and received by the campus.
- The impact of a permanent chief financial officer (CFO) who is primarily responsible to CCH especially with respect to CCH's competency for enrollment and revenue projections.
- The extent to which the hiring of a chief academic officer (CAO) has provided academic leadership for the faculty at both campuses and an academic strategic plan to inform the institution's strategic planning.
- The newly established partnership with Roosevelt University and what potential that partnership has to strengthen and stabilize the financial stability of CCH as well as to improve services, structures, policies, and culture.

During the team conference call in February 2021, team members divided the responsibilities for the writing and inquiry that would be conducted, enabling the members to pursue lines of inquiry and draft preliminary documents to guide the visit. The team discussed the preliminary schedule and agreed that during the visit it would remain together for some meetings, although separate meetings requiring follow-up or a more focused conversation would sometimes be necessary.

By virtue of its small size, CCH was able to engage many faculty and staff in the various activities around the visit. The team had ample time to meet with a broad cross-section of community members that included senior administrators, faculty, and the board of trustees. Meetings with key units included the academic leadership team (ALT), chief financial officer (CFO), chief academic officer (CAO), budget leadership team, financial management, department chairs, full and part-time faculty, and leadership from Roosevelt University. The team chair presented four commendations and six recommendations to the president prior to presenting those statements to the CCH Executive Committee at the exit meeting.

Institution's Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

CCH's institutional report was organized around the components delineated by the July 8th, 2020 Commission Action Letter. While the report provided the foundation for the visit, the onsite interviews and discussion provided the necessary information to answer questions and shape the team's findings.

The team found in the supporting documents sufficient evidence to support claims made in the report. CCH addressed the issues and concerns raised by the Commission through an institutional culture that understood the importance of the SV. The team found that CCH's report was completed under the leadership of the president. CCH clearly devoted time, expertise, and experience to assure the process was thorough and reflective. The president assumed the role as the college's chief executive officer; the CAO assumed the role as leader of the academic program. Due to the timing of the departure of the former accreditation liaison officer (ALO) and the hiring of the new CAO, the president served as the ALO for this visit and was the one responsible for mapping the college's own procedures and policies to the accreditation process.

SECTION II – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

Evidence Reviewed by the Team

This section of the report discusses each of the six issues identified by the Commission in its July 8, 2020 Commission Action Letter requesting the SV. Each issue corresponds to a recommendation that is delineated in the letter, which is noted in the heading. Each section reviews the evidence reviewed by the team on this issue, analyzes the effectiveness of CCH’s actions taken to date, and outlines findings and conclusions about CCH’s progress in addressing the issue.

Recommendation One: Implementation of the 2020 Stabilization and Growth Plan (CFR 3.1, 3.4, 3.5)

Last spring at the Accreditation Visit, CCH presented the team with the 2020 Stabilization and Growth Plan. This was necessitated by the convergence of a number of unfortunate factors including failure to project revenues and expenses accurately, delay in the acquisition of the Flashpoint Chicago campus and a restriction imposed on enrollments there, and a serious decline in tuition revenues. The plan included a number of elements, including the reorganization of financial operations, expense management initiatives, increased non-tuition revenues, the sale and leaseback of the Los Angeles campus, and improved retention efforts. The SV report from CCH included updates on these matters.

Financial operations have been reorganized, with a central role for the Office of Strategy and Sustainability. This team includes the president, CFO, CAO, and the senior vice president for customer success (an Edcura employee). Currently, they meet weekly to review enrollments, revenue, and issues related to sustainability. They have taken the lead in responding to the pandemic and in applying for PPP and CARES Act funding, both of which CCH received.

They were able to renegotiate the large lease that was outstanding in the Chicago campus at the time of the prior visit. The large balloon payment on the loan is no longer due immediately but has been pushed out three years to May 2023, and CCH only makes nine principal payments per year to help them navigate the leaner cash status of the summer months.

CCH has undertaken extensive expense reduction initiatives, which have been fairly successful in stabilizing the immediate financial situation. These reductions include a reduction in the rent in Chicago, which resulted in a dramatic savings of \$2.8M. However, the pandemic has caused CCH to realize that even that reduced footprint is more expensive than they can sustain. They vacated the space completely as of August 2020, as a result of the pandemic and have repeatedly tried to get out of the lease. They have brought in two potential sublessees, but those have not been accepted by the property owner. They assumed responsibility from Edcura of a \$792K letter of credit that had been posted as a security deposit; Edcura had apparently held the lease of the space prior to CCH. This letter of credit paid the rental expense for several months, but the funding was exhausted in November 2020. CCH continues to try to come to resolution with the property owner. The landlord has filed a civil complaint against CCH, and CCH has officially notified WSCUC. CCH has until the end of April 2021 to reply to the complaint. CCH feels with its non-profit standing, its repeated efforts to renegotiate, its presentation of sublessees, and other attempts that it will be viewed favorably by the courts. The administration indicated that it would carry a contingent liability on the books until the issue is resolved.

They have also done significant reductions in general operations, travel, departmental expenses, personnel, and board expenses. The team more deeply explored two categories of expense reduction, that in marketing and admissions personnel and that in course scheduling.

Too large a cut in marketing and admissions could limit future growth, which would ultimately undermine their sustainability. In meetings with CCH it became apparent that a more data-driven approach to marketing and recruitment, combined with changes in the marketplace that predated the pandemic but were accelerated by it, have allowed CCH to significantly reduce student acquisition costs from about \$10,000 per student to about \$8,000 per student. They have also achieved scheduling efficiencies, through the use of blended courses, which include students from LA, Chicago, and online students. Last spring CCH was encouraged with the initial positive reaction of students to the blended courses; in discussion with faculty, this still seems to be the case. Average course size remains low, at approximately nine students per section. Further work is being undertaken to increase both class size and the number of credit hours for which students are enrolled.

In addition, CCH has reduced the expense associated with student housing in LA by entering into a relationship with a third-party provider. They reviewed other third-party contracts and now complete their own financial aid processing. They had intended to do the same with human resources, but that is still currently staffed by Edcura. Security remains outsourced in LA, when the campus is operating; but that has been moot because of the pandemic. Occasionally information technology is outsourced on a project basis only. They have been successful in integrating many aspects of the LA and Chicago campuses. They indicated that one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic for them has been how having to operate remotely hastened this process to their advantage. They have succeeded in fully combining their platforms for accounting and financial management. The NURO retention platform (see Recommendation Six: Strategic Enrollment Management for a more detailed description) has been fully implemented in LA and much preparation has been done in Chicago. As soon as the Student Information System

(Campus Nexus) is fully combined across the two campuses which is expected this summer, NURO will be fully operational on both campuses. Several other systems, including Canvas (Learning Management System) and Parchment (for transcripts), have separate occurrences for Chicago and LA even when using the same service provider.

In addition to expense reduction, CCH also brought more balance to their financial situation and more parity between the two campuses by increasing tuition at the LA campus. While this may have resulted in some short-term financial relief, the institution is aware that further tuition increases are likely not viable and is working under the assumption that tuition rates will not be increasing. This puts additional pressure on increasing enrollments and cost efficiencies.

As mentioned above, the primary non-tuition revenues that CCH has been able to generate during the last year include federal PPP and CARES Act funding. They were successful with both applications. CARES Act funding has been completely forgiven, and they are well underway with the paperwork necessary to have PPP funding forgiven as well. As a result, the 2020-2021 budget shows only a \$220,000 deficit. The board has established a development committee; however, not as much progress has been made on fundraising, largely attributed to the pandemic.

CCH has made progress regarding the sale of the LA campus. The current location is in a relatively industrial area, with their immediate neighbors being a county storage facility, a roadwork facility, and a train station. Thus external interest in the campus has largely to do with its land value. At the time of the visit, CCH had signed a Letter of Intent with a large national company that operates storage facilities. That company's operation rules require them to complete all due diligence with respect to city entitlements before completing a purchase. CCH

expects this process to take at least one year and perhaps as much as eighteen months. During that time, the intended buyer will both invest in the entitlement process and give CCH non-refundable deposits, which will increase over time to amount to approximately \$500K. While this operation may improve the institution's short term cash position by more than \$6M, it will also increase ongoing leasing costs in the long run. Leadership at CCH believe that a more appealing location, however, may also result in improved enrollments and that building maintenance and renovation expenses will be reduced.

Efforts to improve retention have been highlighted; however, such efforts are not yet bearing the full intended impact. CCH attributes the failure largely to the pandemic; however, the latest IPEDS data show declines in both retention and graduation rates prior to the pandemic after the acquisition of the Chicago campus.

Finally, CCH is pursuing a partnership with Roosevelt University in Chicago, which they believe has great potential for expansion of academic offerings and financial strengthening. They are currently renting limited space from Roosevelt to house their in-person film production activities, primarily student productions. This fall they anticipate having their own dedicated space on the Roosevelt campus. Because they are entertaining a major governance modification, through which Roosevelt would become the sole member of the CCH corporation, they are pursuing this project through the WSCUC Substantive Change process. The SV team and the Substantive Change team share one member in common to help keep the processes aligned as much as possible. At the time of the visit, CCH and Roosevelt have put the Substantive Change request on hold, while each campus deals with issues and the due diligence process is pursued.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on CCH, as on all of higher education. Therefore, they have not made as much progress as anticipated on the three specific goals with

which they concluded the 2020 Stabilization and Growth Plan. Goal one, to achieve a balanced budget by year end of FY2020, which ends March 31, 2021, was largely accomplished, with a deficit only on the order of \$200K. Goal two, to begin generating non-tuition revenue, was achieved through PPP and Cares Act funding, but not through fundraising per se. The final goal, to achieve a cash surplus from operations by year end of FY2021, which ends March 31, 2022, will likely be accomplished with the help of additional federal relief funding.

Recommendation Two: Improved enrollment and revenue projections, with leadership from a permanent CFO (CFR 3.4, 3.8), and implementation of sound financial management (CFR 1.7, 3.4, 3.7)

Improved enrollment and revenue projections- One of the primary factors which led to the financial crisis in which CCH found itself was poor forecasting of enrollments and revenues. In 2019, CCH had one of its largest graduating classes ever; however, the then CFO had inadequately modeled the impact of those graduations on the tuition revenue for the next academic year. This resulted in a major shortfall. The CEO responded by bringing in an interim CFO, charged with overhauling financial management and particularly the mechanisms for forecasting enrollments and thus revenues and cash flows. Those projects were in their infancy when the prior team visited last spring.

That interim CFO has now been hired on a long-term contract, with great hopes to professionalize the function. He comes with significant experience and necessary skills and has as his immediate goals to balance the budget and improve the budgeting process. With leadership from him and significant assistance from the Edcura team, financial management and enrollment management have been significantly upgraded. The team was able to view spreadsheets, which are updated weekly, on headcounts, tuition revenues, and cash flows. These spreadsheets inform a daily dashboard, which the Leadership Committee reviews together on a daily basis. Most

planning and execution is currently based on population tables that establish the current headcount of students, units enrolled in, and associated tuition revenues. These tables (projected and actual) drive academic and operational needs, which in turn drive budgets and expenditures. This practice is allowing CCH to align expenditures more closely with tuition revenue and academic needs on an ongoing basis and react swiftly to emerging changes. At the same time, this focus on short term changes may be limiting the ability of senior leadership to focus on a long term vision for the institution.

A Strategic Enrollment Management plan has been developed. (For more, see Recommendation Six below.) With a reduction of both personnel and marketing spend, but more efficient implementation, the reorganized admissions team has increased the results of recruitment by 19% year on year and some months dramatically. For example, in December 2019, 25 students were recruited; in December 2020, it was 94. The pandemic emphasized for CCH the importance of forecasting realistic enrollment goals. The goals currently stated are much more conservative and reasonable, and connected to marketing expenditures with clear metrics. Importantly, enrollment projections are now directly connected to marketing spend on different channels, with clear metrics for lead acquisition and conversion rates at a granular level that gives the institution more control over where, how, and at what cost to recruit students.

The new Strategic Enrollment Management plan also serves as a tool for the board of trustees to assign specific goals to the CEO and exercise their control duties. The board has access to the data, and, given the emergency situation recently they have been monitoring very frequently. As conditions improve and become less characterized by the need to respond to very short-term changes, the board will be able to focus on longer term goals for the CEO and his senior team.

Implementation of Sound Financial Management- The institution has recently consolidated its term loan and line of credit balances into a single term loan. This new agreement requires principal and interest payments in October-June, and interest only payments in July-September. This arrangement more closely aligns the timing of loan and tuition payments and smooths out CCH's cash flow position. All remaining principal (approximately \$2.7M) becomes due in May 2023.

In parallel, the institution is planning to sell its LA campus and has identified a potential buyer with whom negotiations are well advanced. However, closing on the property is currently conditional on the buyer securing necessary permits for the intended use of the facilities. The timing of those permits is uncertain, although the institution estimates 12 to 18 months as a possible range. Selling its current campus will have the dual benefit of reducing the indebtedness levels of the institution, and opening the opportunity to occupy a new space in a more appealing location with a smaller, more efficient, and cost-effective footprint.

The team paid special attention to CCH's cash flow models to assess whether they were realistic, tractable, and allowed the institution to identify periods of low cash positions that can be anticipated and managed without the need for emergency short-term financing, as well as react to changes in student enrollments. The institution provided the team their current cash flow spreadsheet with both actuals to date, and forecasts for the full financial year, and the CFO explained how it was built. The institution updates and reviews its cash flow projections and positions on a weekly basis. The team found that the model is based on realistic revenue assumptions based on current and anticipated enrollment numbers (the "population tables" in the institution's nomenclature), as well as detailed and consistent budgeted expenditures.

The team requested the latest data about CCH's cash position. As of April 1, 2021, CCH had a \$1.3M cash position that the institution expects to increase to \$2.5M by the end of March 2022. While these projections are realistic, they are the result of significant cash infusions from federal programs estimated at approximately \$3.4M in FY 21-22, with the potential for an additional \$4M from the American Rescue Plan (ARP). (ARP funds are not included in the institution's cash forecast.) Without these programs, the institution is expecting a \$600K negative cash flow, excluding one-off items such as a Department of Education Letter of Credit and another one with Edcura related to CCH's lease obligations for its former Chicago campus. Although the medium-term cash position seems favorable, the long-term cash position of the institution depends on the sale of the existing LA campus; securing a cost-effective lease in a new LA location; eliminating the contingent liabilities associated with its Chicago campus lease; continued growth in enrollment and non-tuition revenue; further reducing student acquisition costs; and additional operational efficiencies. Failing those improvements and at their current burn rate, CCH might run out of cash by 2025. It is the case that inclusion of ARP funds means CCH might have cash for much longer. It is also the case that the long-term cash position depends on several contingencies that, to date, have been very difficult to execute.

Recommendation Three: Implementation of a Campus Budgeting Process (CFR 1.7, 3.4, 3.7)

The new budgeting process developed by the CFO is significantly different from the one existing before his arrival. While the previous process was top down and not connected to enrollment projections, the current process is based on enrollment projections for the year shared with the different departments for them to use to determine their own needs and prepare their initial budget requests. Budget managers have more interaction, understanding, and satisfaction

with the new budgeting process. Thus, the resulting budget follows a bottom-up, enrollment-based, consultative process before being ultimately approved by the board of trustees.

The team observed that Edcura is an influential actor in enrollment planning, student recruitment and monitoring enrollment data. The team was also able to ascertain that admission decisions are made by a faculty committee and are not outsourced. While the relationship with Edcura has brought much needed expertise and discipline to CCH's enrollment management planning and practices, it has also resulted in a short-term focus and in blurring the boundaries between CCH and Edcura in strategic decision making. As an example, a number of Edcura employees also hold CCH titles, sit on CCH's strategic leadership team, and participate in the determination of CCH's operating budgets. The WSCUC Substantive Change Manual indicates that WSCUC review and approval is required if "...the possession, direct or indirect, of the power to direct or cause the direction of the management and policies of an institution..." is with an entity other than the accredited institution. CCH should consult with the WSCUC Substantive Change office to ensure Edcura's roles and responsibilities do not trigger a change of control review.

Recommendation Six: Development and Implementation of Comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management (CFR 2.10, 3.4, 4.1, 4.6, 4.7)

As CCH continues to strive towards sustainability and growing their student population, the importance of having a Strategic Enrollment Management plan to guide them is paramount. In a document shared with the team called "Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2021-24" CCH delineated their efforts to identify, recruit, enroll, retain, and graduate a student body in accordance with their mission and goals while also maintaining fiscal sustainability. Major

findings, including the articulation of specific objectives, actions, and measures for each area are summarized below.

Marketing- CCH uses a data-driven approach to monitor and modify its marketing strategy. They have delineated two marketing goals: 1) increase the percentage of CCH applicants who rate CCH as one of their “top choices” and 2) reduce the marketing cost of acquiring new students by 10% per year for each of the next three years. To meet these goals, they have focused on both effectiveness and efficiency. To date, they have tightened up their messaging to prospective students, and revamped their website to focus on the value of a CCH degree. CCH understands the power of being in LA and has developed marketing that differentiates CCH from the rest of the market. In order to measure the success of these efforts, they examine the cost per lead, conversion rate, conversation rates of admission counselors, and conversion and yield rates per program.

Recruitment- CCH understands that recruitment and marketing are not silos and that recruitment efforts are informed by marketing data. CCH is focusing efforts here in finding the “right” students to improve the conversion from interested to enrolled student. The pandemic has necessitated a shift in recruitment efforts away from the more traditional campus visit and CCH has made use of strategies that focus on the student’s needs and how CCH can help them meet their goals, rather than simply showcasing the college’s virtues. These include virtual open houses, workshops and guest speakers, and online presentations and seminars for high school students, for example, a screenwriting workshop that gives prospective students a taste of what coursework in screenwriting at CCH would be like. Additionally, training conversations between department chairs and admissions counselors have helped the admissions counselors truly understand the CCH brand and its offerings. This has resulted in better representation of the

college to students. CCH's overall goals with respect to recruitment are to enroll 270 new students in Los Angeles and 155 new students in Chicago in 2021, and to increase the new student population by 4% each year from 2022-24. Student-centric recruitment strategies appear to be successful, although the pandemic has resulted in lower enrollments than they had hoped. Measures they are using to evaluate success of recruitment operations are largely at the admissions counselor level and appropriate: conversion rates, yield rates, number of appointments, number of interviews, and number of applications submitted.

Student Retention and Success- In 2020 CCH implemented NURO, which is a retention platform that summarizes student data regarding student finances, class attendance, grades, and other relevant student information to provide an early warning system about students at risk. Currently, the Los Angeles campus is fully trained on this software, and as mentioned above, CCH anticipates utilizing it on the Chicago campus when the SIS conversion is complete. The NURO software allows those who interact with students--advisors, department chairs, student affairs staff, etc. to all access real-time information from a single source, identify issues early and have strategic conversations with students to offer the resources they need. This is particularly valuable during the pandemic, when the informal check-ins between students, faculty and staff that happen so frequently in hallways and in offices are not possible.

In their Strategic Enrollment Management plan, CCH acknowledge that that the majority of attrition takes place between the first and second year of college, CCH has focused many of their efforts for improvement during this critical time. They have expanded student orientation programming to include a workshop series that focuses on student success and covers topics like resources, finances, safety, and diversity. They also have created a First Year Experience (FYE) class that is mandatory for all new students and required for graduation. The course helps

students develop skills like time management that will be needed for success in college and beyond, along with specific CCH support. The LA campus has a FYE manager who is the main point of contact for all LA students. The FYE manager also runs the workshops for new students and monitors and tracks the progress of all their conditional admits under the Learning Success Program.

CCH has employed what they refer to as complimentary registration. Registration traditionally was a passive process, where students were expected to take responsibility for enrolling in courses each term. Frequently this meant students would underload, register for courses that did not forward their progress to graduation, or fail to register at all. The academic team is now actively engaging with students to assist them through the process. This high-touch, high engagement model of registration is working well, and fits in with the other student-centered support efforts employed at CCH. Their measures are a 30% improvement in retention for 2021.

Financial Support for Students- the vast majority (90%) of students at CCH require some form of financial aid, in the form of loans, grants, or scholarships. Additionally, the pandemic increased financial challenges for many students. CCH understand the impact financial concerns can have on a student's ability to progress in their degree program, and has several mechanisms designed to improve financial support. CCH has historically used scholarships as a recruiting tool for new students, but has broadened scholarship opportunities for continuing students. Additionally CCH has instituted flexible payment plans. CCH does not want short term financial distress to be a barrier to remaining in school. They work with students who have past-due balances to allow students to remain in school without overburdening their resources. As mentioned previously CCH has pursued governmental relief programs and was able to take

advantage of \$702,000 in student support from the CARES act in 2020. Perhaps most significantly, in 2020 CCH transitioned from a third-party financial aid servicer to managing the process internally. This has reduced response time and increased the quality of service to students and their families. CCH has a goal to maintain a very low 15% discount rate, and that goal has been embedded in budgeting systems and is transparent across the institution. To measure success, CCH will look at actual vs. budget discount comparisons at the end of each term, discount percentage for each population pool and completeness of calendar each term.

CCH introduced the 100% initiative early on in its Strategic Enrollment Management plan, which it articulates as “100% attention and commitment to achieving 100% of the college critical initiatives” During the visit, the team heard multiple times about the “100% goal” from administrative staff, which was interpreted by some CCH employees to the team to be a 100% retention rate and a 100% graduation rate. Most, if not all, colleges and universities would tell you that their goal is to retain and graduate every student they enroll. In practice, conversations about enrollment, retention and graduation at CCH, or at minimum, with external constituents like an evaluator team, would be aided considerably by the employment of the standard definitions, terminology, and timelines that are used for reporting to the federal government, accreditors, and the public (e.g., full time enrollment (FTE) vs headcount, 4 and 6 year graduation rates, cohort default rates). For example, the CCH goal of a 30% increase in student retention in 2021 leaves room for confusion and misunderstanding about what the actual retention rate is, and whether or not the goal has been met. Having a goal of a 91% retention rate, which is a 30% improvement on their earlier rate of 70% is unambiguous. Using the conventional metrics of higher education will facilitate conversations about their outcomes with

other constituencies who seek to understand CCH, and allow them to compare their own practices and outcomes against those of similar institutions.

CCH has implemented a new set of processes that help the entire college focus on student enrollment management. The goals have been shared and attended to across the organization and are overseen by the Leadership Committee (LC). The LC meets daily to review critical data and projections. While on the one hand this level of transparency allows CCH to remain close to their plan and make important strategic and tactical decisions quickly, looking at data as often as CCH does (e.g., enrollment, registration, attrition, and leave of absence numbers daily, individual admissions counselor performance three times a week) may not permit CCH to take a more proactive and integrative stance. They are always reacting to the latest data, rather than taking a long-range view. As the plan matures, CCH might consider engaging in longer planning cycles that allow them to build on their existing information in more enduring ways. For example, efforts at predicting enrollment yield could be expanded into a wider goal of shaping an incoming class, and documenting retention rates from first to second year, second to third year, and third to fourth year, along with graduation rates and job placement rates, will help CCH measure and articulate their success.

Recommendation Seven: A Qualified, Experienced and Empowered Chief Academic Officer (CFR 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.10)

The 2020 Commission Action Letter called for CCH to hire “a qualified, experienced, and empowered CAO” after a series of interim appointments in this role. In November 2020, the college hired a permanent, full-time CAO. The team observed that in his four months at the institution--all of it under the conditions of the pandemic--the new CAO has begun building the

necessary trust with key faculty leaders on both campuses and soliciting the faculty's input on relevant matters.

Furthermore, the CAO has joined the Executive Committee and the Office of Strategy and Stabilization, meaning Academic Affairs is now represented on the bodies with responsibility for analyzing, revising, and implementing the college's key strategic initiatives, including the 2020 Growth and Stabilization Plan and the critical faculty hiring plan. A review of the CAO's curriculum vita evidences experience appropriate to the task, and in conversations both with him and with faculty and staff, he brings ethical leadership and enthusiasm to the CAO role.

Since his arrival, the CAO has focused on unifying academic oversight of the two campuses and on developing an academic plan that can shape institutional planning. There are four initial priorities for the CAO's academic planning effort: enrollment growth, improving educational quality, faculty development, and the integration of the Chicago and LA campuses. The academic planning to unify the LA and Chicago academic programs now includes the potential partnership of CCH and Roosevelt University, presenting a host of new opportunities and complexities. In addition, CCH planning focuses on improved retention as a key growth strategy, so chairs are being encouraged to review this within their programs. Department chairs have been tasked this year with engaging their faculty and reporting about priorities and opportunities in each of the four priority areas. The CAO intends to use these reports to shape a formal academic plan in turn, demonstrating CCH's approach to faculty and shared governance.

In the team's meeting with department chairs and faculty to assess the effects of having a CAO in place, the team learned that since arriving the CAO has focused on unifying the Office of Academic Administration (OAA) through the institution of a weekly OAA meeting, which

now incorporates chairs on both campuses to improve OAA coherence as a unified team within a single institution. The reporting structure has also been realigned, with department chairs on both campuses all now directly reporting to the CAO, removing an interim layer. While this restructuring has some obvious and aligned benefits, the team also heard from faculty concerned about a) the lack of communication around the decision to adopt a single chair for programs with distinct cultures spanning two campuses and b) about the model itself, which may result in reduced meaningful contact for faculty on one campus with their chair.

The team noted that the CAO contributes significant expertise in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to CCH, a commitment he shares with the faculty on both campuses who have been particularly active through a newly formed DEI committee. Initial results of the faculty-administrative focus in this area of mutual interest include faculty-led syllabus review workshops to ensure content is inclusive, and OAA oversight of all faculty hiring to ensure searches are attracting diverse candidates. The progress on these efforts may provide a useful template for future OAA initiatives on a range of academic priorities. Overall, the team was impressed by the depth of the faculty and administration's commitment to DEI, noting that DEI leadership was a featured element in their CAO search materials.

The team had been particularly curious to learn whether the appointment of a CAO without a practical or academic background in any of the CCH degree programs would prove challenging when providing leadership to those programs and their faculty. The team heard that, on the contrary, there was an appreciation from department chairs that the CAO did not come from one of the degree fields--which some felt might have privileged that field over others. The team also learned that faculty leaders had been significantly involved in the CAO search process. Additionally, the team heard from departmental leaders that what they wanted in a CAO was

leadership rather than disciplinary expertise, and there was consensus in the meeting with that group that the new CAO is providing that while respecting their expertise and engaging with them to learn more about their disciplines.

At the same time, the team heard from a significant number of faculty on both campuses that there is considerable work to be done on communications and support that affect their ability to be successful. For instance, the team heard that there had been inadequate notification and planning related to significant curricular changes necessitated by the quarter-semester conversions in Chicago and that faculty whose chair had recently departed had not received explanation for the departure nor for the administration’s plan to replace the chair on their campus with a single chair for the programs on both campuses. Other faculty reported that last-minute changes to registration codes had caused needless confusion and duplicated work and some reported a lack of material support to adequately deliver their courses. While faculty demonstrated eagerness to collaborate with colleagues and administration on academic planning, resourcing, and unification efforts, the team observed a need for broader administrative engagement and a clarified faculty governance structure on this front.

The institutional report mentioned the formation of an Academic Leadership Team (ALT) as a “key voice of the faculty to ensure proper governance” on both campuses, which is an important step towards the Commission Action Letter recommendation that CCH “provide academic leadership for the faculty at both campuses.” However, the team was concerned that the inclusion of the president on what appears to be the primary faculty governance committee (ALT; CCH does not have a faculty senate or other similar body), could be considered an impediment to faculty fully engaging in a governance role. During the visit, the team learned that

thus far the president's inclusion on the ALT was appreciated by department chairs and was accepted as a productive engagement rather than stifling.

The team did note that the institution's recently-revised Faculty Handbook (2019) does not mention the ALT, instead identifying the Academic Leadership *Committee*--consisting of the dean of Academic Affairs, department chairs, and the director of faculty resources (i.e. exclusive of the president)--as the means through which "faculty members are encouraged to voice their opinions on curricular and policy matters" (page 10), new curriculum is reviewed and approved (page 29), and revisions to the *Faculty Handbook* are vetted. This committee did not appear to be functioning at the time of the visit, having been superseded by the ALT.

The Commission's Action Letter articulates the need for the "empowered" CAO role as, in part, to help ensure that the faculty perspective is well represented and that it "exercises effective academic leadership and acts consistently to ensure that both academic quality and the institution's educational purposes and character are sustained." The successful hiring of a CAO and their inclusion in key strategic discussions is significant progress on this front; however, the team noted that the infrastructure for effective faculty governance still seems underdeveloped at CCH. For instance, "faculty governance" is mentioned only once in the *Faculty Handbook*, and the team noted that the sections entitled "Academic Committees" and "Committees" listed in the table of contents of the handbook appear to be absent in the body, with the only committee mentioned being the Academic Leadership Committee. From this and the visit, the team concluded that CCH would benefit from a more clear delineation of its faculty governance structure and from ensuring it is accurately reflected in the *Faculty Handbook*, which would in turn support the CAO who is expected to serve as a linchpin.

As noted above, the CEO has been serving as the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) for the past year. After the SV, CCH leadership indicated that the ALO responsibilities will be transitioning to the CAO. While he has some experience in the ALO role, the team recommended that additional training would be useful to ensure that CCH is fully supported in assuming this important leadership role.

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS: ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

While it was not one of the six areas to be addressed in the SV, the relationship with Roosevelt University was mentioned in several sessions. This section summarizes the information the team learned with the knowledge that plans for the future will be reviewed under the Substantive Change review.

The presidents of CCH and Roosevelt University were introduced to each other approximately two years ago by the CEO of Edcura. Over the past couple years, they have had discussions about what a potential partnership between the two institutions might look like. When CCH vacated their previous Chicago space due to the pandemic and the expensive lease, they asked Roosevelt about utilizing some of their space for staging student productions. CCH currently utilizes space at 430 South Michigan Avenue on the campus of Roosevelt University. This fall CCH anticipates having its own identified space on the campus. The presidents now have weekly meetings to continue to explore possible strategic dimensions of the relationship.

The academic programs at CCH and at Roosevelt University have little overlap and much potential synergy. There are currently weekly meetings of academic leadership from the two campuses exploring possible student exchanges and new programming, such as an MA in

recording arts. The two teams see advantages in not having to build programs from scratch and are identifying policies and practices on the other side for adaptation and adoption. They are optimistic about further developing the academic partnership, while maintaining CCH's distinct identity, much as The Chicago College of Performing Arts (CCPA) has done. As CCH considers this partnership, the team recommends that it pay careful attention to the coherence of a CCH degree in light of the partnership.

CCPA merged with Roosevelt University in 1954; however, it has maintained a distinctive conservatory approach to its programs in music, theater, and dance. In an interview with the team the dean of CCPA indicated that possible synergies could be beneficial for the conservatory students; for example, integrative and technical courses from CCH could be appropriate electives for the typical narrow focus of a conservatory curriculum. The interim provost at Roosevelt suggested that Roosevelt's strong liberal arts foundation could be helpful to support choices for CCH students, particularly in Chicago. Currently there are 12 Roosevelt students and one dean enrolled in CCH courses and approximately 100 CCH students in Roosevelt general education courses. The leadership of both campuses see CCH's focus on narrative storytelling as aligning well with Roosevelt's focus on social justice.

The CFOs also meet weekly and are evaluating how the two institutions might share academic and physical plant. CCH students in Chicago already have been granted access to campus housing, library, recreation, and other services. The CFOs are also considering other efficiencies, such as shared services for Title IX, IT, accounting, and financial aid.

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

Findings

- CCH has made good progress, even in spite of the pandemic, on key issues since last year. Their finances are somewhat stabilized, and they no longer have a large balloon payment looming in the immediate future.
- CCH is working to better align its revenues and expenses; significant expense reductions were achieved over the two years.
- The receipt of both PPP and CARES Act funding assisted in offsetting some tuition losses experienced because of the pandemic.
- Because of the urgency of the issues that have been facing CCH, their planning cycle has been very short term in nature. The team believes that taking a long-term view and clarifying the vision of what they want CCH to be would assist in decision making, help the leadership to be better able to handle disruption, and thus strengthen institutional capacity. Having a strong board and a cohesive management team now positions CCH to turn its eyes more from the present to the future.
- The energy, innovation, and data analytics that come to CCH because of its partnership with Edcura are positive. However, this year the team noted a need for more clear boundaries, so that the nature of the relationship does not risk becoming too entangled.
- The institution, in collaboration with Edcura, has developed an idiosyncratic set of student acquisition and retention metrics. These metrics are useful for some purposes and have helped the institution become data-driven. They are also not standardized and limit CCH's ability to understand or discuss its performance in relation to other comparable

institutions in critical areas like 4- and 6-year graduation rates, or Full Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollments.

- As detrimental as the pandemic has been to enrollments at CCH, as at many institutions where in-person, hands-on instruction is central to the educational enterprise, CCH has taken good advantage of the situation of working remotely to strengthen collaboration across the two campuses and to make great strides in the campus integration project.

Recommendations:

The team commends CCH in particular for the following:

1. Developing a Strategic Enrollment Management plan that integrates the areas of marketing, recruitment, retention, financial support, and process improvement. The plan is based on more reasonable enrollment assumptions, making more accurate projections, and is beginning to result in more predictable enrollments. This has been accomplished while reducing both marketing and recruitment expenditures.
2. Hiring and empowering a CAO to provide stable leadership for the Office of Academic Affairs and represent academic priorities in institutional decision making.
3. Developing a data-driven budget process that consults the necessary stakeholders and results in budgets and cash-flow models which are detailed, realistic, and tractable.
4. Hiring a CFO who is deeply engaged with and brings appropriate competency to enrollment and financial management and planning.

Recommendations:

The team recommends the institution respond to the following issues:

1. Increase the emphasis on student success, including the use of more conventional retention and graduation measures and results to allow for benchmarking against peer institutions; deepening understanding of longer-term implications; and aligning policies and practices to support the success of all students. (CFR 1.2, 2.10, 4.1)
2. Pursue a better balance between long-term stability and flexibility when managing real estate holdings and leased facilities, using sound financial management strategies including maintaining sustainable levels of indebtedness, cash reserves and long-term recurring expenditures. (CFR 3.4)
3. Establish and document clear strategic, financial, and operational boundaries with Edcura to ensure CCH maintains appropriate autonomy and control. (CFR 1.5, 3.7, 3.8)
4. Articulate the philosophy and pursue strategies that guide a sustainable relationship with Roosevelt University and maintain coherency with the meaning, quality, and integrity of CCH degrees (CFR 2.2, 2.2a).
5. Formalize and implement the faculty governance structure and ensure it is accurately reflected in the *Faculty Handbook*. (CFR 3.7, 3.10)
6. Ensure that the CAO has the adequate capacity, support, and resources to carry out his ALO duties (Accreditation Liaison Officer Policy).