

REPORT OF THE WSCUC VISITING TEAM

SEEKING ACCREDITATION VISIT 2

For Institutions Seeking Initial Accreditation

To Westcliff University

March 20 - 22, 2018

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The team evaluated the institution under the WSCUC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective judgment for consideration and action by the institution and the WASC Senior College and University Commission. 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. Once an institution achieves either candidacy or initial accreditation, the team report and Commission Action Letter associated with the review that resulted in the granting of either candidacy or initial accreditation and the team reports and Commission Action Letters of any subsequent reviews will be made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I — OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Description of the Institution and Visit

Westcliff University (previously Irvine University) seeks initial WSCUC accreditation, having been granted candidacy status by the Commission in its action letter dated June 30, 2017. In its letter, the Commission identified specific areas for continued development and subsequently scheduled the SAV 2 visit for March 2018.

Westcliff University was purchased by its current owners in 1993 as a proprietary institution, catering to the working adult by providing a small portfolio of degree programs in a blended instructional delivery modality. The California Bureau of Private, Postsecondary Education (BPPE) approved the institution's name change to Westcliff University in 2012. The institution offers a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree (DBA) in Business Administration, a master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) degree, and a Bachelor's of Education degree program.

Westcliff achieved accreditation by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission on June 12, 2014. The institution pursued eligibility through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), was granted eligibility on May 10, 2016 and granted candidacy just over a year later. In its action letter granting candidacy, the Commission commended the University for the following:

1. Taking the process of accreditation seriously. The institution exerted an enormous amount of effort to create documents, plans, and exhibits that will serve it well in its journey towards continuous improvement.
2. Adopting and embracing the language, tools, and processes of assessment.

3. Creating a positive culture with a high level of energy and a sense of “family” that permeates every segment of the institution.
4. Demonstrating a high level of commitment to and enthusiasm about the notion of supporting students to be successful.
5. Employing a high-quality instructional delivery approach that spans both online and blended modalities, notably the synchronous delivery model.
6. Engaging in the program review process and benefitting from the development of structures such as the Academic Leadership Team that support its collaborative spirit and culture of improvement.

In its review of the institution’s compliance with the Standards, the Commission noted the following regarding each standard:

Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

The Commission found that Westcliff University had demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 1 at a level sufficient for Candidacy, and that CFRs 1.1, 1.2, and 1.4. required further work, as excerpted from the action letter:

- CFR 1.1 *Institutional statements of purpose*. The Commission recommends that Westcliff University reevaluate its statements of institutional purpose, especially as they relate to the market of students the university is targeting, to better clarify and sustain the demographic and target student population, both international and domestic, it intends to recruit, admit, and serve.
- CFR 1.2 *Retention and graduation, and evidence of student learning*. The Commission recommends that institutional data on retention, graduation, and evidence of student

learning be more prominently displayed on its website including percentage metrics for graduation, retention, and student satisfaction and the actual numbers of students that these rates represent.

- CFR 1.4 *Diversity of hiring and admissions criteria, and administrative and organizational practices*. The Commission expects the institution to continue to make progress in the area of diversity of faculty, toward greater alignment of faculty race and ethnicity with the students it serves.

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objective through Core Functions

The Commission found that Westcliff University had demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 2 at a level sufficient for Candidacy, and that CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11 require further work, as described in the following:

- CFR 2.1 *Sufficient numbers of faculty qualified for the type and level of curriculum offered*. Westcliff University will need to ensure appropriate numbers of faculty to continue curriculum improvement work as enrollments increase.
- CFR 2.2 *Institution mission, which guides the meaning of its degrees and processes that ensure the quality and integrity of its degrees*. The meaning of the university's degree, as an institution serving a global student population, is evolving. As it does, the Commission expects that the meaning, quality and integrity of its degrees will become more consistent and coherent.
- CFR 2.2a. *Core competencies*. The Commission recommends that Westcliff University revisit its General Education courses to either more specifically and intentionally align them with the separate core disciplines or determine that it should develop a separate

General Education curriculum that appropriately supports existing and any future undergraduate academic degree programs.

- CFR 2.3 *Student learning outcomes and standards of performance, within courses and co-curricular programs.* The university should continue to mature its systems of measurement of educational effectiveness, both within its courses and in its coeducational programs.
- CFR 2.4 *Faculty-developed student learning outcomes and standards of performance are assessed for achievement measurements.* The Commission recommends that the institution's faculty continue their work to ensure quality standards through regular, systematic assessment and program review.
- CFR 2.6 *Expectations for student learning embedded in standards used to evaluate student work.* Westcliff University must continue its nascent practices of learning outcomes assessment to make certain that its standards are met through the evaluation of student work.
- CFR 2.8 *Research, scholarship, and creative activity.* The Commission recommends that the institution review the rigor and depth of scholarship in its capstone courses by benchmarking with comparable institutions.
- CFR 2.9 *Linkages among scholarship, teaching, assessment, student learning, and service.* The Commission recommends that the university further clarify expectations pertaining to scholarly activities among its faculty.
- CFR 2.10 *Collects, analyzes and displays disaggregated student data regarding time to completion, achievement and satisfaction.* While acknowledging that the institution has

plans to further evaluate disaggregated data regarding student achievement, the Commission supports the team recommendation that additional instruments, both quantitative and qualitative, be developed and added to the assessment plan in support of continuously improving student achievement. The university is also encouraged to include evidence of student achievement on its website in a way that makes it is easy to find and retrieve (as referenced earlier in CFR1.2).

- CFR 2.11 *Co-curricular programs integrated and aligned with goals are assessed for effectiveness.* The Commission recommends that Westcliff University continue to develop learning outcomes and an assessment process for co-curricular programs and activities.

Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

The Commission found that Westcliff University had demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 3 at a level sufficient for Candidacy and that CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, and 3.10 require further work as described in the following:

- CFR 3.1 *Sufficient, qualified and diverse faculty and staff to support programs and operations.* Because the university's model relies heavily on part-time adjuncts who only teach one or two courses a year, it is recommended that plans to add more full-time faculty be implemented to ensure adequate support for program development and improvement.
- CFR 3.4 *Financial stability, clean audits, sufficient resources; realistic plans for any deficits; integrated budgeting; enrollment management; diversified revenue sources.*

Westcliff University must prepare a formal, multi-year budget that includes a realistic enrollment management plan aligned with projected revenue.

- CFR 3.5 *Facilities, services, information and technology resources sufficient and aligned with objectives*. The Commission recommends that the institution continue to develop and mature a comprehensive integrated alignment between enrollment expectations, realistic program development, concomitant infrastructure development, and anticipated labor costs. The university needs to continue to develop plans for technology replacements, Learning Management System upgrades and enhancements, and general office technology.
- CFR 3.7 *Clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes*. The Commission recommends that a scalable staffing model with clear reporting lines, including appropriately qualified faculty, be developed.
- CFR 3.10 *Effective academic leadership by faculty*. The Commission recommends that faculty continue working together to develop a rigorous process of program review.

Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

The Commission found that Westcliff University had demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 4 at a level sufficient for Candidacy and that CFRs 4.1, 4.6, and 4.7 require further work as described in the following:

- CFR 4.1 *Quality-assurance processes in place to collect, analyze, and interpret data; track results over time; use comparative data; and make improvements*. The Commission recommends that faculty focus on calibration and consistency in the assessment of

learning outcomes and in grading. In addition, plans should be made to ensure sufficient student services staff as enrollment grows, such that they will continue to monitor online course activity and report that activity to faculty.

- CFR 4.6 *Reflection and planning with multiple constituents; strategic plans align with purposes; address key priorities and future directions; plans are monitored and revised as required.* The Commission recommends Westcliff University prepare more detailed strategic and budget plans in line with enrollment projections and the costs of new academic degree program development.
- CFR 4.7 *Anticipating and responding to a changing higher educational environment.* The university should engage in formal and systematic market analysis and environmental scans as part of its program development planning process.

In granting Candidacy, the Commission confirmed that Westcliff University has met all WSCUC Standards, at least at a minimal level; and it directed the SAV 2 team to focus its attention on the areas requiring further work that were cited in the June 30, 2017 Commission Action Letter.

The Institution's Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 Report

The team found Westcliff University's Institutional Report in response to the Commission Action Letter of June 30, 2017 to be thoughtful, comprehensive, and on-target to the points the prior team had raised. The availability, accessibility, and quality of supporting evidence had improved markedly from the prior visit. On-site interviews confirmed that contributions to the process had been made from administrators, faculty, and associates from across the university. The interviews also reflected a common theme: the WSCUC process of self-review using the

Standards of Accreditation had a significant and favorable impact on the institution and its various stakeholders.

Response to Issues Raised in the 2017 Commission Action Letter

Westcliff University's President Anthony Lee expressed in his interview with the visiting team that the institution "had worked very hard to respond to the issues that had been raised during the 2017 site visit and subsequent action letter." That statement summarizes the culture of responsiveness and engagement that the team found to be pervasive. While further details regarding institutional response to specific criteria-for-review are provided later in this report, the following briefly summarizes key themes and responses, by Standard.

- *Standard One* – The University clarified its statement of purpose and better articulated its target market, clearly lives out its mission to provide high quality education to underserved populations on a global scale, responded very favorably with a plan to expand its aspirations regarding diversity and inclusion, and successfully articulated the manner by which it established partnerships in foreign countries.
- *Standard Two* – Westcliff University has hired a significant number of new faculty since the last WSCUC visit. The team learned during the interview process how the University oriented and on-boarded new faculty, and was impressed in interviews with the degree to which faculty conveyed pride about the mission and the clarity of expectations. Faculty expressed confidence in the efficacy of the model whereby collaboration between faculty and partner facilitators in places like Nepal functioned, as well as with the support they receive from Student Services in pursuit of student's success.

Assessment activities had matured across the university in the 12 months since the prior

visit. Whereas the theme of interviews the prior year had been on plans and aspirations, evidence was provided pertaining to the outcomes of the assessment process, along with samples of improvement.

- *Standard Three* – Westcliff University has responded well to the Commission’s recommendation to prepare formal, multi-year budgets that include realistic enrollment management plans aligned with projected revenue. Five-year budget models provided for review show that the institution projects revenue based on several probable scenarios tied to an enrollment management plan. The planning and consideration for infrastructure and technology has improved as well, and progress has been made over the past year in defining and developing organizational structures and alignments. Interviews also demonstrated that faculty are engaged at significant and varying levels of academic oversight for the academic programs.
- *Standard Four* – The institution has responded directly and effectively to recommendations associated with CFRs 4.1, 4.6 and 4.7. A clear plan has been put in place in which the faculty focuses on calibration and consistency in the assessment of learning outcomes and in grading. The university is pursuing a thoughtful and strategic approach to create a balanced student to staff ratio that appropriately considers the institution’s learning objectives. Further, Westcliff University has taken seriously the recommendation to engage in formal and systematic market analysis and environmental scanning in exploring new programs and in the review of its existing programs. There is concerted effort at many levels of administration to review and act upon trends in the market which impact international higher education.

The visiting team also examined feedback from the confidential email account, which was monitored by the assistant chair during the visit. The feedback was very favorable about the institution and there was nothing indicating a potential issue to be examined further.

SECTION II. EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH WSCUC'S STANDARDS AND IDENTIFIED CRFs FROM PRIOR SEEKING ACCREDITATION VISIT

A. Standard I: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

CFR 1.1 – Institutional Statements of Purpose

The Action Letter expressed a concern about the continued breadth and lack of focus of Westcliff University's statements of purpose, and asked the institution to reevaluate them "to better clarify and sustain the demographic and target population." Through the institutional report, but to an even greater extent through on-site interviews with the Board of Trustees and CEO, key themes regarding institutional mission emerged.

For example, it became evident that the University truly is focusing not only on international students, but on those in underserved locations, most notably the country of Nepal. The institutional report explained that fully 49% of the university's student population is from this country (page 8). In interviews, Nepalese students expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to pursue an education of this quality, suggesting that such opportunities were scant in their home country.

Another emergent theme regarding the university's statements of purpose was the aspiration to provide a "practical" education. Since the prior visit, the mission statement had been amended to include the modifier "practical." The intent is that in the developing and underserved markets that Westcliff University targets, students would be able to gain an

education that would help them obtain employment and make a meaningful and practical contribution.

This is not to say that Westcliff University wishes to abandon its interests in recruiting students from U.S. community colleges. Assuming the university becomes WSCUC accredited, it desires to reach international community college students, but again with a decided emphasis on those who may be able to return to their home countries upon graduation.

CFR 1.2 – Retention and Graduation, and Evidence of Student Learning

The primary emphasis of the Commission Action Letter pertaining to CFR 1.2 was the lack of public visibility to key performance metrics such as persistence and graduation rates. Westcliff University responded by increasing the size of its Institutional Research staff, obtaining a powerful software tool, and creating a tab on its website home page that allows viewers to easily access information about the university and its key metrics.

While the progress that has been made in the area of transparency has been impressive, an interview with the Institutional Research (IR) team indicated that there is a strong interest to move more aggressively into the realm of predictive analytics, whereby certain factors can be isolated which may impact student success for the populations the university serves. The IR team was able to articulate their role in developing and responding to research questions in an effort to provide university leaders with the evidence they need to support high quality decision-making.

The team also has created a process whereby university stakeholders may request their support through an online portal. Requests are prioritized on the basis of anticipated impact to the university and its planning processes.

CFR 1.4 – Diversity of Hiring and Admissions Criteria, and Administrative and Organizational Practices

Perhaps the greatest evidence in support of Westcliff University's progress in having a faculty workforce that better reflects its student body is that fact that they have hired 42 faculty from Nepal where, as expressed earlier, 49% of the university's student enrollment resides. In reviewing the curriculum vitae from a sampling of these faculty, it is evident that they are well qualified to serve in the roles they now occupy. Many of these faculty are not defined as "core," but rather are "academic facilitators" who provide support and remediation to Westcliff University students in their country.

As expressed in interviews with the Board of Trustees and the Faculty Senate, the Senate has recently created a Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Committee that, as part of its charter, intends to more deliberately pursue ways to improve the diversity of the faculty and staff who serve the student body.

One of the more inspiring on-site interviews conducted by the visiting team was with a sampling of students. Their appreciation for the support provided by the institution was palpable, but the notable observation by the visiting team was the remarkable ethnic and national diversity reflected in the students who were gathered. Students were from the Congo, Iran, Brazil, Germany, China, India and Nepal, to name a few. Westcliff University continues to make progress in the area of diversity.

B. Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objective through Core Functions

CFR 2.1 – Sufficient numbers of faculty qualified for the type and level of curriculum offered.

In the year since the SAV 1, Westcliff University has hired additional faculty to support its increasing enrollment. The College of Business fulltime faculty currently number twenty-three with 16 residing in the United States and seven residing in Nepal. The Education programs have three fulltime faculty members and the general education non-degree program is overseen by a single faculty member. This is a significant increase in the number of fulltime faculty reported in SAV 1. The total 2017 enrollment in the College of Business was 1,343 students and in the College of Education, enrollment totaled 25 students.

CFR 2.2 – Institution mission, which guides the meaning of its degrees and processes that ensure the integrity of its degrees.

The university core values of honesty, integrity, mutual respect, personal accountability, social responsibility, global citizenship, and inclusion are reflected in the learning outcomes and mapped to the university mission. In addition to providing evidence of student learning outcomes that flow from the institutional, program and course level, the institution has provided evidence of the importance of the complete student experience by developing learning outcomes for the library and advisor experiences and rubrics for the assessment of co-curricular activities. In January 2018, the university held a Global Online Collaborative Team Competition supporting the values of mutual respect and global citizenship. The mission, core

values, and core competencies are included in the catalog along with the Institutional Learning Outcomes for the three degree levels.

CFR 2.2a. – Core competencies.

The Commission recommended that Westcliff University revisit its General Education courses to either more specifically and intentionally align them with the separate core disciplines *or* develop a separate General Education curriculum that appropriately supports existing and any future undergraduate academic programs.

The General Education (GE) non-degree program underwent curriculum revision in 2017 to serve as the foundation for the two current undergraduate degree programs and future bachelor's level degree programs. The faculty developed seven Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that align with the Institutional Learning Outcomes and the seven core competencies. A one-year program evaluation was conducted in fall 2017 which included benchmarking against a competitive set of institutions with similar GE programs and assignments were re-evaluated and mapped to the PLOs using a stepped level plan leading to mastery. Six signature assignments provide the opportunity to engage in assessment across the program and the complex set of disciplines represented within the GE curriculum.

CFR 2.3 – Student learning outcomes and standards of performance, within courses and co-curricular programs.

The Commission recommended that the university continue to mature its systems of measurement of educational effectiveness, both within its courses and in its coeducational programs. Meaningful co-curricular experiences have subsequently been developed to support student learning across all encounters. The faculty, staff and administrators eloquently spoke

of how the institution is a learning experience for all constituents and that they are enthusiastically engaged in learning and continuous improvement. This is evident in the efforts undertaken to develop meaningful co-curricular activities and associated learning outcomes, rubrics and methods of assessment which, having been created, will be implemented in 2018. Students are encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities through an events calendar, as well as online and in-class announcements. Exemplars of these activities are two Intercollegiate Athletic Programs, men's basketball and men and women's track and field. Student athletes have the opportunity to compete against teams from other institutions in Southern California. Additionally, in the fall of 2017 a Westcliff University Honor society (Kappa Eta Epsilon) was established to recognize students who have achieved academic excellence.

CFR 2.4 – Faculty-developed student learning outcomes and standards of performance are assessed for achievement measurements.

The Commission recommended that the institution's faculty continue their work to ensure quality standards through regular, systematic assessment and program review. The university has developed a comprehensive assessment of student learning outcomes that strives to include all constituents and foster a culture of learning throughout. To this end, all programs have learning outcomes that map to the Institutional Learning Outcomes and to course learning outcomes. Outcomes at the course level are constructed progressively from initial to developed, culminating in mastery. Outcomes at each level are mapped to assignments. To foster engagement and understanding of the learning outcomes at each level, students are asked to participate in self-assessments related to course learning outcomes and to demonstrate mastery by completing a final portfolio.

A university assessment coordinator oversees the assessment processes and program reviews. The Faculty Senate committee on performance assessment is charged with providing leadership and information on assessment activities. The academic leadership team discusses assessments, data and implementation of recommendations and the Institutional Research Team has a dedicated staff member that works with the faculty and the assessment coordinator in support of their assessment activities.

Each program undergoes a five-year review as well as annual reviews, intended to gauge the effectiveness of action plans and make adjustments as needed. A Program Review Cycle has been created for years 2016 through 2021. Currently, the assessment process has completed the first two years of the cycle and four five-year reviews have been conducted. The review of the assessment process itself should continue, in order to provide an opportunity for ongoing improvement.

CFR 2.6 – Expectations for student learning embedded in standards used to evaluate student work.

The Commission had recommended that Westcliff University continue its nascent practices of learning outcomes assessment to make certain that its standards are met through the evaluation of student work. The university assessment plan and processes center on the review and evaluation of student work based on carefully crafted rubrics developed to assess student achievement of program learning outcomes and Institutional Learning Outcomes as evidenced in signature assignment, portfolios and capstone projects. In addition, the seven core competencies are mapped to the program learning outcomes and measured through the review of course learning outcomes. Faculty members assess capstone projects and portfolios,

and sessions to establish inter-rater reliability and calibration are conducted two to three times a year. The five programs have identified culminating experiences to provide summative program assessment results. At the undergraduate and master's degree levels, a capstone course and a capstone portfolio provide summative program assessment activities and results. At the doctoral level, the dissertation block and oral defense are the culminating experiences for program learning outcomes assessment. The data are analyzed with assistance from Institutional Research and used to support continuous improvement.

CFR 2.8 – Research, scholarship, and creative activity.

The Commission recommended that the university review the rigor and depth of scholarship in its capstone courses by benchmarking with comparable institutions.

Benchmarking of rigor and depth of scholarship was undertaken with a comparative analysis of capstone experiences by discipline and degree offering.

Based on the analysis of evidence provided for undergraduate and master's level comparison, Westcliff University programs provided research opportunities that had similar or more rigorous research requirements than those against whom comparisons were made. At the doctoral level, no students have completed the dissertation or oral defense requirement thus no direct comparison of dissertations was available at this time; the requirements to both peer and emulated comparative programs had the same requirements for completion.

CFR 2.9 – Linkages among scholarship, teaching, assessment, student learning, and service.

The Commission recommended that the university further clarify expectations pertaining to scholarly activities among its faculty. The university acknowledged that faculty have an important role in the development of student research through direct teaching,

mentorship and co-authorship. The university has developed two options to recognize student scholarship. The *Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research* has published two volumes with contributions from both faculty and students and submissions have increased with each successive publication. Additionally, the second annual Student Research conference recognizes and promotes student scholarship.

The faculty at Westcliff is composed of scholar-practitioners, which aligns with the university mission of providing practical, innovative, high-quality distance and campus academic programs. The university provides funds to support faculty engagement in professional development and in the last year, faculty from both the College of Education and the College of Business have engaged in professional development activities. The Faculty Handbook does not specify any requirements for hiring, evaluation, or promotion through rank for scholarship. To support the culture of research, a baseline requirement for research and scholarship that aligns with the scholar-practitioner model should be implemented. Scholarship of this nature can be progressive by rank and recognized over a period of time and could conceivably include a variety of scholarship products including conference presentations, article submissions, and poster sessions. In addition, research can include both contributions to advance knowledge in a discipline as well as to advance teaching and learning in a discipline.

CFR 2.10 – Collects, analyzes and displays disaggregated student data regarding time to completion, achievement and satisfaction.

While acknowledging that the institution has plans to further evaluate disaggregated data regarding student achievement, the Commission supported the team recommendation that additional instruments, both quantitative and qualitative, be developed and added to the

assessment plan in support of continuously improving student achievement. The university was also encouraged to include evidence of student achievement on its website in a way that makes it is easy to find and retrieve (as referenced in CFR 1.2).

Westcliff University has increased its capacity for Institutional Research and data analysis. The disaggregated data regarding student satisfaction, graduation, retention, core competencies, student success, time to degree, course evaluations and demographics is publicly available online at <http://ir.westclif.edu>.

CFR 2.11 – Co-curricular programs integrated and aligned with goals are assessed for effectiveness.

The Commission recommended that the university continue to develop learning outcomes and an assessment process for co-curricular programs and activities. The institution has developed learning outcomes for extra-curricular, co-curricular activities and student facing administrative services including athletics, student events, community service, career services, financial aid, admissions, institutional research technology and international affairs. The development of the rubrics for comprehensive co-curricular experiences is commendable and the ongoing implementation, analysis of data and improvement will serve to support the core competencies and the meaning and quality of the degrees.

C. Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

CFR 3.1 – Sufficient, qualified, and diverse faculty and staff to support programs and operations.

Westcliff University has given additional attention to this CFR over the past year, having developed both administrative staff and faculty plans that tie to anticipated enrollment levels through 2022. Student-to-faculty ratios have been given consideration in the plans, as WU seeks to reach a 10.1 to 1 ratio and reports a current 8.7 to 1 ratio.

Program development processes are still evolving, and evidence was provided to show how the institution considers new degree program viability in the markets it targets. During interviews, team members expressed how internal resources and capacity are considered before taking on new ventures.

It is still unclear if the university fully appreciates the value and need for a sufficient number and percentage of full-time faculty to support the fulfillment of its mission. The university proposes between 18% and 23% of faculty (full-time equivalent) be full-time in the plans it has created dating through 2022. While part-time faculty who have appropriate qualifications and significant teaching experience can be a great benefit to a program, the university is encouraged to consider the possibility of increasing the percentage of full-time faculty, given the rather natural difference in commitment levels between full-time and part-time faculty. It may wish to consider growing its full-time faculty population at a faster rate than what is proposed in their 5-year plans to ensure higher levels of programmatic quality.

CFR 3.4 – Financial stability, clean audits, sufficient resources realistic plans for any deficits; integrated budgeting; enrollment management; diversified revenue sources

Westcliff University has effectively responded to the Commission’s recommendation to prepare formal, multi-year budgets that include realistic enrollment management plans aligned with projected revenue. Five-year budget models that were provided demonstrates revenue projections based on various scenarios tied to an enrollment management plan. The university continues to produce clean audits, remains debt free and maintains modest contingency reserves.

The university is highly dependent on student tuition revenue generated through Nepalese partnerships, as nearly 50% of the university’s enrollment is tied to these sources. While the university has recently entered into agreements with organizations in Egypt and Dubai, it may also want to consider other global markets for potential partnerships to further diversify revenue sources. Increasing domestic student enrollment (as it plans to do) will help to additionally offset potential revenue swings in the international market.

Westcliff University provided increased detail in its planning as compared to the SAV 1 visit; however, of particular concern is the amount of planned funding dedicated to future staffing costs. In general, funding estimates for staffing seem low and potentially contradictory given plans to increase staff seniority levels and add more executive management over the next 5 years. In addition, the visiting team learned that the plan to increase compensation for executive staff over the next 5 years is conservative. While such an approach is the prerogative of the university, the team wondered if it is realistic.

Fringe benefit costs for employees also appear to be low. The university may wish to consider using benchmark or other sources of data as it relates to salary and benefits costs in higher education to assist with planning for its labor expenses. More importantly, as it seeks to continue to grow and be competitive, attracting and retaining a professional and experienced staff will be key.

CFR 3.5 – Facilities, services, information and technology resources sufficient and aligned with objectives

Westcliff University’s planning and consideration for infrastructure and technology has received significant attention since the SAV 1 visit. The 5-year planning documents help give clarity in this area; potential scenarios and models have been developed and student and faculty feedback is continually sought, particularly on the use and functionality of the Learning Management System (LMS). The visiting team also received feedback from students on how easy and practical the LMS is. While positive feedback is shared by institutional constituencies, the university would be well served to be vigilant in planning for improvements in instructional technology and delivery, given its importance to the core of the institution’s business.

CFR 3.7 – Clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes

Westcliff University continues to make progress in defining and developing its organizational structures and alignments. The executive leadership team has made several organizational changes and plans to add additional senior managers over the next 5 years that mirror higher education organizations of comparable size. Feedback received from staff members during the visit supports that management is actively engaging with them and

listening to their needs. In addition, many of the staff were thoroughly involved in the accreditation process and participated in major decisions.

The university is encouraged to consider bringing in additional professional expertise with direct experience in higher education in key functional areas as the institution grows. Areas of specific concern for a quickly growing institution include accreditation, institutional research, instructional design and educational technology.

CFR 3.10 – Effective academic leadership by faculty

Westcliff University has demonstrated that the faculty is engaged at many levels of academic oversight for its programs. Faculty, chairs and deans continue to be passionate and deeply committed to student success and progress. The faculty senate is active and academic committees meet on a recurring basis. The creation of the Learning, Innovation, and Teaching Excellence Center (LITE) in the past year is an excellent initiative to engage faculty, particularly with onboarding and professional development.

The university conducts substantive program reviews. The visiting team evaluated evidence that included reviews of the Bachelor of Arts in Education, the Bachelor of Business Administration and the Doctor of Business Administration. These program reviews include a framework that is composed of the following elements: purpose, methods, analyses, and reflections. The institution is encouraged to continue to enhance and develop the review process, standardize and format reports more consistently across all programs, develop action plans, metrics and goals that are quantifiable to assess progress year over year, and seek out best practices from other regionally accredited institutions that have demonstrated mastery in this area.

D. Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

CFR 4.1 – Quality-assurance processes in place to collect, analyze, and interpret data; track results over time; use comparative data; and make improvements.

The Commission action letter recommended, "...that (A) faculty focus on calibration and consistency in the assessment of learning outcomes and in grading. (B) In addition, plans should be made to ensure sufficient student services staff as enrollment grows, such that they will continue to monitor online course activity and report that activity to faculty."

A general summary was provided to the visiting team of the results from the first two formal calibration meetings, in July 2017 for the College of Education and in December 2017 for the College of Business. A review of the evidence showed meaningful processes being established involving spot-checking and mini-calibrations performed. Those interviewed reported having informative exchanges between the raters based on comparisons of their results. The participants attempted to understand the process of their work, seeking to explain large differences in initial scores and searching for the source of those differences. The institution thus provides evidence that data are used to inform future processes and institutional learning consistent with the intention of the CFR.

The university also provides a good summary of the rationale and philosophy behind the importance of adequate student support-services staff, which has grown as enrollment grows. The Faculty and Administrative Staffing Plan details the process for staffing growth over the next 5 years.

The university is also pursuing a thoughtful and strategic approach in order to create a balanced student to staff ratio that appropriately addresses the institution's learning objectives. The university proposes to remain below a self-imposed 30 to 1 student-staff ratio for the next 5 years. To date, it has maintained 23.1 students per staff average as its enrollment has grown. It is laudable that as the student enrollment is projected to increase, Westcliff University is committed to sustaining and/or improving the current average.

CFR 4.6 – Reflection and planning with multiple constituents; strategic plans align with purposes; address key priorities and future directions; plans are monitored and revised as required.

The Commission action letter also recommended WU prepare more detailed strategic and budget plans in line with enrollment projections and the costs of new academic degree program development. Subsequently, formal, multi-year budgets that include realistic enrollment management plans aligned with projected revenue have been prepared. The institution projects revenue growth based on various probable and seemingly reasonable scenarios tied to an enrollment management plan.

As discussed more extensively in CFR 3.4, WU has developed a detailed strategic and budget plan with multiple scenarios in line with enrollment projections and costs of new academic degree program development. It is commendable that the institution has developed revenue projections based on a range of probability-based scenarios aligned with the enrollment management plan. The success of these strategies may ultimately depend, in part, on paying close attention to the salaries and benefits it offers to its growing and increasingly

more experienced workforce as well as implementing its plan to add more executive management staff in the next 5 years.

CFR 4.7 – Anticipating and responding to a changing higher educational environment.

The Commission recommended that the university “...engage in formal and systematic market analysis and environmental scans as part of its program development planning process.” The institution has responded with a concerted effort at many levels of administration to review trends in the market. Evidence was provided of how the institution is maintaining a watchful eye on the landscape of trends in international higher education. By way of example, the College of Business conducted a formal survey of 12 online US institutions, 12 on-ground US institutions, 12 international schools, and 12 additional peer online universities in the US in order to examine the long-range market potential for a MBA program.

Both the president and provost systematically review professional resources in order to keep abreast of best practices and the emerging geopolitical climate directly affecting international student recruitment. Thoughtful and strategic use of these data show evidence that the institution is a “learning institution” which attempts to meaningfully anticipate and respond to a changing landscape of higher education.

SECTION III. FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting team observed that Westcliff had made progress from the SAV 1 visit in its effort to meet all four Standards of Accreditation. Only the Commission is authorized to make the final determination as to whether or not an institution complies with the Standards.

The team would especially like to recognize Westcliff University with the following

commendations:

1. The institutional report was well organized, and the university was very responsive to requests for information.
2. The university's culture is committed to student success, and the student's enthusiasm about the university is the greatest testament to this assertion.
3. The institution's addition of a faculty Senate committee devoted to Diversity, Inclusion and Equity is commendable.
4. The synergistic relationship between academics and student services in support of students is exemplary.
5. The university's Institutional Research capabilities have progressed significantly by providing transparent, public-facing institutional data in support of assessment of student learning activities.
6. The executive team is perceived to provide excellent institutional leadership.
7. The faculty and staff are very engaged and integrated in operations and decision-making processes.
8. Institutional constituents appear to genuinely live out the university's mission at all levels-- from students, faculty, administrators, and the executive team including the President and the Board of Trustees.
9. The commitment to the faculty-led assessment plan resulting in student learning outcomes which are clearly and explicitly stated at the institutional, program and course levels.

10. For valuing, promoting and supporting research, scholarship and creative activity as evidenced by the semi-annual publication of the *Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research* featuring faculty and student research and the annual student research conference.

The team also offers the following **recommendations** as areas for further focus and development:

1. The Board of Trustees should develop a formalized process of self-review and professional development (CFR 3.9).
2. The institution should develop and implement a continuous improvement process for the maturation of Student Learning Outcomes that align with the needs of the local communities that Westcliff University serves (CFRs 2.2, 2.3, and 2.6).
3. In support of the institution's staffing plans, the university should benchmark higher education exemplars and seek resources to assist in the planning and development of its compensation and benefits plan in order to continue to attract and retain a high performing workforce (CFR 3.4).
4. The institution should engage professional roles in the areas of accreditation, institutional research, instructional design and education technology to support program development, academic operations, and the changing external environment (CFR 3.4, 3.7, 4.7) and to help sustain its institutional capacity and educational effectiveness (3.7).

5. The institution should clearly articulate in the Faculty Handbook and in its contracts its definitions and expectations for research, scholarship, and creative activity for all categories of faculty (CFRs 2.8 and 2.9).
6. The university should continue the development, implementation and reflection on continuous improvement, for the co-curricular student learning outcomes (CFR 2.3).
7. Institutional Research should align their reporting of student demographic data with traditional federal definitions (CFR 1.4).
8. There should be a clear linkage between faculty scholarship and teaching practice as evidenced in assessment of student learning (2.9).

APPENDICES

1. and 2. Federal Compliance forms and Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators

The Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 took place only 11 months earlier in April 2017 and thus it is not necessary to complete the federal compliance forms and Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI) at the time of the *Seeking Accreditation Visit 2*.

3. Report on Off-Campus and Distance Education Programs

This area was also reviewed during the SAV 1 visit in April of 2017 and it was determined another review like this was not necessary since the university demonstrated significant improvement and follow up items that were mentioned in SAV 1 are being reviewed in SAV 2 related to retention and graduation data and instructional design support needs.