

# REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

## SPECIAL VISIT To Abu Dhabi University

December 8-10, 2015

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 WSCUC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective judgment for consideration and action by the institution and by 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. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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## REPORT OF THE SPECIAL VISIT TO ABU DHABI UNIVERSITY

### SECTION I: OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

#### A. Description of the Institution, Accreditation History, and Visit:

Abu Dhabi University (ADU) is a private, for-profit, comprehensive higher education institution, chartered in 2000, accredited by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and regulated through its Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA). ADU operates on two campuses in Abu Dhabi city and in Al Ain. Its goal is to deliver high quality professional programs to meet the workforce needs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the region. The doors opened to 850 students in 2003. In 2010 ADU began delivering degree programs to the military at the Zayed Military College and the Joint Command and Staff College, both located in the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi University's vision is to be "an internationally recognized university for quality education and applied research that drives economic and social development in the region and beyond." The mission is "to produce highly qualified career oriented graduates in alignment with regional and global needs through excellence in teaching, student learning, faculty scholarship and engagement in community development." (*ADU Special Visit Report*, Institutional Overview, p. 5)

The University currently serves nearly 6,850 students, including 1,864 graduate students, a steady increase since its founding in 2003. A range of undergraduate and graduate degrees are offered based upon the American style of education; there are 26

bachelors programs and ten postgraduate programs (one post-graduate diploma, eight masters and one doctorate). The programs are organized into four academic colleges led by deans who report to the Provost: arts and sciences, business administration, engineering, and University College. While not organized as a college, the military program has an academic director who reports to the Provost in parallel to the deans. The Director of the Al Ain campus reports to the Chancellor and is delegated the authority of the Provost and the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance for the administration of the Al Ain campus.

Abu Dhabi University continues to be gender-segregated in undergraduate programs and coeducational in graduate programs. Gender distribution is approximately 60% female in non-military offerings and almost 100% male in military programs. Students of all nationalities are welcome at ADU, with 65 different nationalities currently represented.

Approximately 70% of the students are expatriates, most of whom have lived in the UAE for many years. Emirati citizens comprise approximately 30% of the current student body, though these figures become approximately 55% when the military cohort is included. In Fall 2015, there were 1,740 students enrolled in the graduate level programs (excluding the Military program), with 1,148 at Al Ain and 592 at Abu Dhabi. The University workforce is similarly diverse with 285 full-time faculty, comprising 203 full time and 82 adjunct, and 272 staff as of November, 2015, representing more than 45 different nationalities.

The University's programs continue to encompass a variety of different cultures and structures, as they were designed to mirror the past and present society and to anticipate the emerging future needs of the UAE. ADU is concurrently seeking WASC Substantive Change to offer the following degree programs: Bachelor of Law, Masters of Public Law, Masters of Private Law, Masters of Strategic Leadership, Masters of Engineering in Electrical and Computer Engineering, and an Executive MBA with the University of Tampa.

The Al Ain campus is fully integrated with the Abu Dhabi campus and students can take courses at both sites; all students at Al Ain can complete the first two years of all baccalaureate degrees there. Nine degrees are offered in their entirety at Al Ain. Students enrolled in other fields complete their degrees at the Abu Dhabi campus.

The main campus consists of one primary academic building with about 58 classrooms as well as several labs, multi-purpose rooms, faculty and administrative offices, two food courts, a library, an auditorium seating 630, and other facilities appropriate for a university, such as meeting spaces for student activities and relaxation. In addition, there are newer mechanical and civil engineering buildings on the campus that include classrooms, laboratories, and offices. There are separate student residences for men and women, each located on opposite sides of the academic building. There also are residence facilities for faculty and administrators. Currently, new building projects are underway in various phases of development, including a new Engineering building and a women's residence hall.

ADU operates under bylaws that specify the responsibilities of the various Boards, Trustees, its officers, and the principal university administrators. At the time of the WSCUC Diagnostic Visit in 2012 the University had a well-developed strategic plan, “Cultivating Excellence 2008-2013.” The recently revised strategic plan for 2014-2019 was in place for the 2014 WSCUC Visit and remains in place now. Currently, the strategic goals include to:

- Create a student-centered learning environment conducive to intellectual and professional student growth;
- Meet the needs of our stakeholders and be a responsive contributor to our community;
- Achieve academic excellence at every level;
- Deliver operational excellence across the institution;
- Support a collegial and innovative work environment; and
- Maintain a sustainable financial position with ongoing capacity to invest in growth and pursuit of excellence.

#### Accreditation History:

On July 6, 2012, Abu Dhabi University submitted its initial application to WSCUC for consideration of accreditation. In early December 2012, a team composed of Drs. James Appleton and William Plater conducted a Diagnostic Visit. The University was responsive to all requests from the team in preparation for the Diagnostic Visit. ADU’s initial application for WSCUC Eligibility was strong and met all 23 of the criteria. ADU was granted Eligibility in August 2013, giving it four years to achieve Candidacy.

The first Seeking Accreditation Visit (SAV-1) took place September 23-27, 2014. In February 2015, the WSCUC Commission granted Candidacy Status to ADU, with the requirement of a Special Visit to address six issues:

1. Development of Student Services
2. Implementing the Strategic Plan Related to Research
3. Development of an Enrollment Management Plan and Stabilization of Tuition based Revenues
4. Recruitment of Qualified Faculty and Staff
5. & 6. Governance Clarification

The institution's commitment to continuous improvement and quality was evident in the preliminary application for WSCUC accreditation and during the initial Site Visit, and remains so at this current stage of the WSCUC process. Further evidence of this focus on quality is demonstrated by ADU's successes in achieving the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (March 2015 at all levels at both campuses for a five-year period) and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation (2014/15 academic year for three flagship undergraduate programs and is in the final stages of attaining ABET accreditation for two additional programs), as well as ADU's International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2008 certification to ensure quality assurance and institutional effectiveness.

### The Special Visit:

The members of the ADU community uniformly were helpful throughout the preparation for the Special Visit. The visit schedule included meetings with key members of the University community and its stakeholders. Senior administrators, faculty, students, and staff were readily available for consultation during the visit, as were members of the Board(s). It was evident that the students, faculty, staff, administrators, and board members with whom the four-member site visit team (hereafter called The Team) met were engaged and invested in the accreditation process.

The focus of the Special Visit was to review the University's response to the issues outlined in the Commission Letter and discern the extent to which the responses outlined in ADU's Special Visit Report and the plans proposed were being realized by actual operations and resources. The Team continued to review how effectively the institution was developing evidence that could form the basis of on-going reflection in response to the emerging reality of the campus and its intricacies, especially in light of the cultural distinctiveness of a private, for-profit institution in an Islamic culture.

The Team had the opportunity to plan its inquiry before the site visit began. The breadth of professional experiences of the Team enabled the members to explore questions, prepare lines of inquiry, and draft preliminary documents to guide the visit. Having been together during the 2014 visit, the Team understood well the issues that were being addressed during the Special Visit. This preparation enabled the Team to use the time on campus efficiently for interviews and discussions to extend their understanding and confirm or correct preliminary findings.

The Team had adequate time to discuss various findings and to shape the conclusions, commendations, recommendations, and the confidential recommendation of the Team Report.

The site visit provided the opportunity to understand further the personal and organizational commitments to the University's mission in ways that extended beyond the initial findings presented in the Special Visit report and supporting documents.

#### B. Description of the Team's Review Process:

The Team conducted the site visit at the University's main campus in Abu Dhabi from December 8-10, 2015. The Team included four of the five team members who made the initial visit for candidacy/accreditation in September 2014, and were, again, accompanied by Richard Winn (WASC staff). Prior to the visit, the Team chair divided the responsibilities for the inquiry and writing that would be conducted based on the expertise and experience of Team members. During the Team conference call, the Team developed a number of questions and lines of inquiry to extend the review further. All requests for additional information were responded to quickly and thoroughly by the ALO.

On site in Abu Dhabi, the Team was welcomed warmly and appreciated the hospitality and pleasant accommodations. After a Team organizing meeting at the hotel during the first evening, Team members met with University leadership, academic deans, full-time faculty, heads of the new research institutes, administrators, student council and other students, and with members of the Board of Directors. Interviews extended over two days, focusing on the issues raised in the 2014 WSCUC visit and the subsequent WSCUC Commission Letter of March 2015.

The Special Visit report and supporting evidence provided the foundation for the campus visit, but the onsite interviews and discussions provided the necessary information to answer relevant questions and shape the findings. Throughout the process, additional documents were requested by the Team and were provided promptly by University staff.

C. Institution's *Special Visit Report*. Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report:

The Team found that the *Special Visit Report* addressed the issues and concerns raised during the WSCUC Initial Accreditation Visit of 2014. The institution appears to have taken the issues and concerns raised during the Review for Initial Accreditation and Commission Letter seriously and has developed effective plans and strategies to complete these major undertakings. The Team believes that the institution's continued self-review has led to a greater understanding of its effectiveness, development of processes for sustainability, quality improvement, and student learning.

Key Institutional Successes Since the Last Visit:

The Team noted the significant progress that ADU has achieved in responding to the issues identified in the March 2015 WSCUC Commission Letter. The number of actions and the deployment of resources were so significant, and were made in such a short period of time, that the Team took special care to review carefully the processes employed and the results achieved. The actions are summarized here:

- Refining of the Strategic Plan and ADU Values
- ISO surveillance audits with no non-conformities
- Receipt of AACSB accreditation

- Initiation of business process improvement activities in two areas
- Deployment of QlikView reporting solution
- Expansion of HR Self Service functionality
- Implementation of Customer Relationship Management system
- Implementation of online admissions application process
- Development of New Human Resources functions and Board Compensation Committee
- Implementation of new Board structure
- Three-year renewal of Military contract
- Launch of Research Strategy, including three Research Centers
- Creation of Strategic Enrollment Management Committee
- Development of *Strategic Enrollment Management Plan*
- Development of Director, Enrollment Management position
- Hiring of Student Affairs Director

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

ISSUE ONE: *Development of Student Services with a particular focus on appointing qualified leadership dedicated to the areas of responsibility identified in the team report.*

(CFRs 2.11; 2.13)

A well-qualified director of student affairs has been hired in the last year. The director has extensive experience in U.S. higher education and also served previously as the senior student affairs officer at a university in Dubai. Functional supervision for the position has been transferred to the Provost’s Office to enhance the development of faculty partnerships, co-curricular activities, and coordinated student support.

Responsibilities for the director include, as stated in the job description, oversight of “the leadership, implementation, attainment and evaluation of student satisfaction with campus life-- career services, counseling, student conduct, transportation, health

services, housing, visa services, student activities, and athletics.” In interviews with the director, she acknowledged that she has committed to the development of a strategic student affairs plan that will align with the institutional strategic plan (CFR 2.12). The director has also committed to developing program reviews using the Council on Academic Standards guidelines for student affairs programs (2.11, 2.13, 2.14).

Improvements were made over the last year to provide students with additional recreational facilities responsive to WSCUC Team recommendations for increased recreational space following student interviews during the last visit. A cricket field was constructed and opened over the last year and two new gaming rooms were designated and furnished near the cafeteria area to encourage community engagement and collegiality. Also responsive to expressed student needs, additional bus route coverage was increased to provide transportation for students from distant areas of the city. Thirteen new replacement buses were purchased.

Previously, the Student Council had only one position elected by the student body with the rest of the Council appointed by Administration. This was changed in the last year to provide for the election of the entire Council so that student needs might be communicated more autonomously and so that a stronger model of student governance might become operational. In addition, dormitory councils were revitalized to enhance communication with University Administration and to plan additional programs. A new housing unit for female students is scheduled to begin construction this year and a new dental clinic is being developed to supplement the on-campus medical clinic.

Last year, the University made a bold decision to make student internships mandatory for all students in good standing. In addition, two Career Counselors were added to the staff in fall 2015 and two more will be added in fall 2016. The Career Office is planning to expand their operations to implement this decision.

*ISSUE 2: Implementation of the Strategic Plan with the allocation of realistic resources in support of the development of the University's research capacities. (CFR 3.4)*

During its pre-accreditation development, ADU has focused on the challenges of sustaining excellence and enhancing competitiveness in the face of the country's rapidly changing needs and conditions. The institution's planning process, which continues to evolve, has been essential to its ability to meet these challenges. ADU has re-assessed the alignment of their resources with their strategic priorities, especially with regard to research to enhance teaching and learning and, over time, enhance the revenue stream.

During its September 2014 visit, the Team commended ADU's comprehensive planning process and detailed strategic plan, which provided a roadmap for the subsequent five years, and by which the institution could measure its progress. The Team applauded ADU's creation of a culture of evidence, including use of ISO and Balanced Scorecards. The Team also acknowledged that ADU had developed clear and measurable student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels, establishing the necessary institutional research and strategic planning infrastructure to support the achievements of the goals for student learning. The Team recognized the contributions of the Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) staff who were

deemed highly knowledgeable and effective. The IRE staff, through data gathering, surveys, analysis, and dissemination activities and through the development of student learning outcomes and other relevant assessment activities, provided information and tools to facilitate effective decision-making and strategic planning. The Team noted that ADU's five-year strategic plan was designed to ensure the long-term financial stability that will affirm and increase academic excellence, research achievements, and international recognition.

The WASC Team, however, was concerned in 2014 that the availability of financial support would limit the University's capacity to implement its plan fully. The University, at the time of that Visit, lacked a fully articulated research plan, and the resources necessary to achieve those goals were not dedicated in the budget. The Team noted that resources to grow enrollments, attract the research faculty the University desired, and fund faculty research, would require concerted planning and substantial investment. Levels of funding at the time of the 2014 Visit were deemed insufficient to achieve the goals to which the University aspired.

The Team recommended that ADU craft and implement practices and procedures to ensure the availability of financial resources necessary for institutional sustainability and success. This included the development of a hiring plan for faculty in concert with the plans for University expansion so that the cost and commitment to faculty excellence may be planned for appropriately. The Team noted that external factors, such as government security policies, the existence of government universities, and the extreme competitiveness of the local academic and student markets among the

UAE's more than 100 colleges and universities, would challenge ADU's ability to attract, develop, and retain the faculty needed to make enhanced research productivity and research contracts a reality.

The WSCUC Commission letter of 2015 noted the above factors and stressed that this Special Visit focus in part on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, with the allocation of realistic resources in support of the development of the University's research capacities. Consequently, the Special Visit Team found that in the intervening year, ADU has worked hard to develop and fund a sustainable and focused research strategy. The University has dedicated an investment of 6,000,000 AED [US \$1,620,000] annually for five years as seed money to support research. The new institutional architecture of ADU's research platform was confirmed, along with a newly crafted comprehensive Research Strategy. The Team regarded the creation of the Center of Excellence and three Research Centers (a Research Center in Sustainable Built Environments, a Research Center in Sustainable Business Processes and a Research Center in Smart Services for Smart Cities) as a solid beginning.

The principal objectives of ADU's research strategy are to:

- Produce research outputs of the highest relevance and quality;
- Support and develop further excellence among faculty and students;
- Contribute positively to the local and regional economy and society.

These Centers, whose implementation are based on the objectives listed above, are very strategic, especially given ADU's location and position in the world. Directors of the Centers, faculty, and students praised the formation of these centers as they foster

inter- and trans-disciplinary interactions and study, which have enhanced the educational program of ADU.

In response to the WSCUC Team Report of 2014 and the Commission Letter of 2015, ADU has been working to attract, nurture, retain, and promote outstanding research scholars. The addition of 53 faculty -- 20 replacement posts and 33 new faculty -- in such a short period is probably a record. Salaries have been increased significantly and benefits have been enhanced to help attract and retain excellent faculty and to compete well in the region.

Fostering the commercialization of applied research endeavors to the benefit of the Abu Dhabi Emirate and engaging students, both graduate and undergraduate, in the research enterprise will help attract students and hopefully, additional resources. A new structure for research grants has been created. In awarding ADU research grants, the criteria prioritize the leveraging of resources through external funding and collaboration, in addition to the resources provided in the existing budget.

ADU's goal is not to be a research university in the sense of the Carnegie Classification, especially given the limited government investment in university research. However, scholarship and research are highly valued, with a focus on multidisciplinary research to enhance the University's reputation in the region, help develop linkages with industry while improving the economy and life in the region, and enhance the education of students in both graduate and undergraduate programs. The Team found these goals entirely appropriate.

ADU has hired a Director of Research whose role is to promote the value of research and to invest wisely in faculty and student research projects in order to help

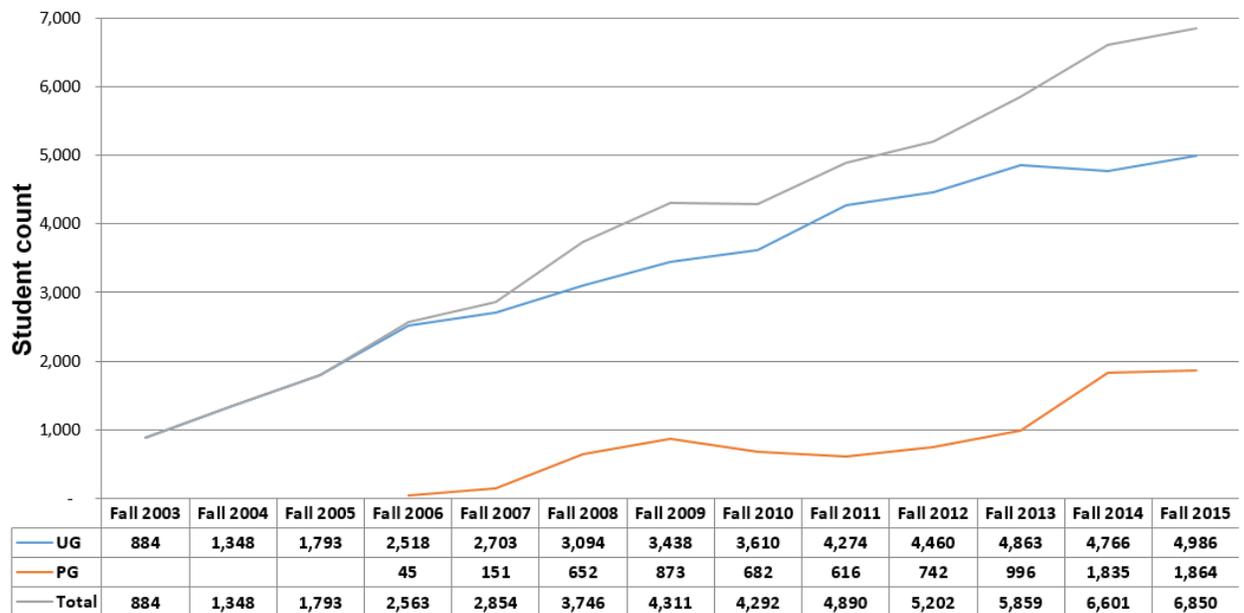
the University compete better for external funding, such as Abu Dhabi Education Council's (ADEC) limited research funds that have become available to all universities in Abu Dhabi.

Though the goals, objectives, and strategies have been articulated clearly, ADU could build in enhanced key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate, at each year's end, progress toward these strategic goals in addition to the number of faculty publications. These could include: the ability to attract and retain excellent faculty, the attraction of undergraduate and graduate students to research endeavors, enhanced retention of research-active faculty and students, the number of external grants applied for and obtained, and the receipt of external funding.

*ISSUE 3: The deployment of initiatives in support of enrollment management including growth, retention, and new program development to achieve tuition-based financial stability. (CFRs 2.2, 2.7, 2.10-14, 3.4, 4.6-7)*

Since the concerns stated in the March 2015 Commission letter about the development of enrollment management initiatives, ADU has focused proactively and assiduously to address enrollment management and growth, admittedly challenging priorities in the highly competitive market for higher education in the UAE. The Team noted the significant enrollment growth that has been achieved by ADU in the seven-year period 2008-2014: a growth of 90 percent over seven years. The University acknowledges the benefit it has received in this growth from enrollments in the Military Programs and in a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education program, which is projected to decline in the near future. Below is a graph showing all enrollments over the seven-year time period:

## Abu Dhabi University Enrollment Growth



The Team was favorably impressed with the work accomplished since the 2014 WSCUC visit to move forward on making enrollment management a University priority. Under the leadership of the new Provost, a Strategic Enrollment Committee, composed of Deans and Directors, has been established to intensify and clarify University enrollment management planning. Declaring that enrollment management should be “the central focus of the institution’s overall strategic plan,” the Committee is reviewing the Provost’s and Deans’ 53-page, analytical, *Strategic Enrollment Management Plan*. The plan is supplemented by an extensive and detailed market survey outsourced to a private contractor that is being used to help the Committee and University leaders assess the demand for proposed new programs and analyze their potential fit with the University.

The *Strategic Enrollment Management Plan* provides and analyzes enrollment data trends, discusses the market research for competitors in the UAE, lists comparative advantages and hindrances by College (and sometimes by program), establishes enrollment targets for 2019, and outlines enrollment strategy. It also acknowledges that, equally important to meeting goals for admissions numbers, the University must manage the student experience to improve retention and graduation rates and enhance student success—these are listed as the overall goals for the enrollment management process

Alongside the enrollment analysis, the Director of Advancement hired in 2013 has developed targeted programmatic marketing campaigns to highlight University quality standards, the achievement of AACSB and ABET accreditations, and other highlights. Attractive new publications have been created for each College with coordinated templates that provide a recognizable ADU identity. The Team was impressed by the extensive use of social media and social marketing that has been developed since the last visit, including 100,000 Facebook fans and 13,000 followers on Twitter. Also in the last year, the Admissions and Recruitment Office introduced an online application and payment system so that applicants need not visit the admissions office to apply or have their questions answered. In addition, 36 new computer admissions kiosks were installed on campus.. The Business Process Improvement exercise undertaken by the Admissions and Recruitment Office appears to have served the professionalization of the office and led to an increase in the perceived quality of service and a decreased application turnaround time. These steps address directly the 2014 WSCUC Team’s recommendations to expand and professionalize recruitment and

admissions operations and marketing and communication activities so that ADU might achieve its enrollment goals.

In addition to the above, the University has provided funds for the new position of Director of Enrollment Management. A search is ongoing and expected to conclude soon. The Director will report to the Provost and will consolidate enrollment-related functions beyond recruitment and admissions to include oversight, coordination, and planning of the entire spectrum of enrollment management related activities. The provision of experienced new leadership will deepen ADU's understanding of admissions and retention, accelerate ongoing efforts, and offload responsibilities from the Provost to allow him to focus on other University priorities.

The University acknowledges that to achieve its target enrollment of 8,187 students in the academic year 2018-19, the mix of students by program will need to be more actively managed. New programs within the College of Engineering have increased College enrollment by an average of 7% for each of the last four years, while programs within the College of Business Administration and Arts and Sciences have declined. The new programs currently being considered by the Substantive Change Committee, including the Bachelor of Law, Masters in Private/Public Law, Masters in Engineering, Executive MBA, and the Masters in Strategic Leadership are projected to increase enrollments substantially. The team carefully reviewed for each College the data on enrollment projections, tuition and financial aid assumptions, and market approaches, and found the planning assumptions sound, informed by strong evidence, and in active stages of implementation.

Retention and Graduation Rates: Significant progress and development of new approaches to retention and student success are evident since the Team visited a year ago. Funds were sequestered for another new position, Assistant Provost for Academic Projects, to manage and coordinate ADU's overall retention strategy. The new Assistant Provost meets bi-weekly with Academic Advisors to discuss further improvement of the advising process and retention initiatives. An excellent rapport has been established in this group. In addition, an enhanced application of 'Advisor Track' software was introduced to manage the advisee-advisor relationship, advising manuals were improved, and an expanded academic advising website with online forms was introduced. An Early Alert and Intervention System was developed using Faculty Mentors to provide mandatory intrusive advisement including closer monitoring and feedback for students in academic difficulty. Students will be able to communicate with their advisors through an e-Advising web portal that will also allow them to view their plan of study, grades, attendance, and other factors.

First-year students enroll in University College to complete their general education requirements. The already-active advising and tutoring programs were further developed and expanded over the past year, with a commendable number of new initiatives. These efforts include an increase of 90 percent in using the services of the Student Peer Tutoring program. Alumni now actively offer academic workshops or provide subject matter tutoring.

The concerted, research-based retention efforts of the past year have resulted in significant retention of first-year, full-time freshmen, from 81% in Fall 2013 to 89% in Fall 2014:

## Retention of First-Year, Full-Time Freshmen

Semester	First-time full-time 1 yr retention				% change			
	ADU	CAS	COBA	CoE	ADU	CAS	COBA	CoE
Fall 2009	77%	85%	72%	78%				
Fall 2010	83%	86%	84%	82%	8%	1%	17%	5%
Fall 2011	82%	92%	78%	82%	-1%	7%	-7%	0%
Fall 2012	81%	85%	77%	82%	-1%	-8%	-1%	0%
Fall 2013	81%	75%	82%	83%	0%	-12%	6%	1%
Fall 2014	89%	90%	93%	88%	10%	20%	13%	6%

In conversations with undergraduate and graduate students and student government officers, satisfaction with the University appears to be quite high. The two issues of concern that were raised, of which the University is aware, are dissatisfaction with the gender separation in classes and the consequent delivery of some classes via digital means wherein either the males or the females then view the class by video. The students in these sections stated they miss the in-class interaction with faculty.

*ISSUE 4: Review the financial commitments required to recruit and retain qualified faculty and staff in the context of ADU's competitive environment (CFRs 3.1-3, 4.7)*

The Commission letter of March 2015 indicated that the University should address its capacity to recruit and retain high quality faculty and staff in a competitive environment. The financial implications of doing so were consequently raised as well.

The University operates in a very competitive environment with regard to recruitment of highly talented individuals, both in the context of the UAE and in the broader higher education environment. The previous site visit team noted a relatively large number of full time faculty vacancies and inquired about the competitiveness of

salary and benefits packages being offered to faculty and staff. The vacancies at that point in time were concerning, but were predicted to become even more so given the University's growth plans. (CFR 3.1-3 and 4.7)

In response, the University pursued a two-pronged approach over the last year. First, and importantly, it sought the services of two external entities to assess the University's then-current salary scales and benefits packages, vis-à-vis the competitive landscape. Working with the University's human resources department, as well as a committee of the board of directors, the University responded to the received reports by making significant changes in compensation plans.

Second, in terms of specifics, top of salary scales were raised significantly for both faculty and staff, and new faculty classifications added, along with increased repatriation allowances. Benefits packages were expanded as well, including increased tuition discounts and education allowances, and enhanced offsite housing and vehicle allowances. Paternity leave has also been introduced. Importantly, a number of benefit related items have been formalized and clarified in order to reduce possible confusion and inconsistency. In short, the University has undertaken a thorough and comprehensive approach in its response to this recommendation.

The University's efforts have clearly had significant and positive results. The previous backlog of some 20 faculty vacancies has been eliminated, and over 30 additional positions related to growth have been filled as well. In addition, 50 staff positions have been hired, both replacement and new, and another 20 are budgeted to be filled by 2017. Thus, since the last site Team visit, there has been a 34% increase in the number of full-time faculty and a 23% increase in the number of full-time staff. The

entire staffing plan has been incorporated into the five-year budget plan and is on track. The significance of the capital commitment, including both hiring and compensation and benefit changes, is obvious (in excess of 5 million AED annually). The University appears to be providing substantial resources toward both recruitment and retention of critically important talent.

*ISSUES 5 AND 6: Clarification of the structure and membership of the Boards and Board member compensation (CFR 3.9) and Review and evaluate the effectiveness of the recently established governing board structure. (CFRs 3.7 and 3.9)*

In its letter of March 2015, the Commission noted its expectation that ADU would make progress in two areas related to governance: clarification of board structure and membership, and compensation thereof; and evaluation of the effectiveness of the recently adopted governing board structure.

In the first instance, the Team finds that the University has thoughtfully and carefully addressed the Commission's concerns. The three-Board structure has been clearly described and the relationships between and among them clarified. It is apparent that the Board-level decision-making processes are clear and consistent. Roles and responsibilities within the Board structure are likewise transparent. Board members appear to be deeply committed to the University and take their responsibilities conscientiously. (CFR 3.7 and 3.9)

The governing board (Board of Directors) also took action with regard to inquiries regarding compensation of members. There was a lack of clarity about practices as experienced by the 2014 WSCUC Visiting Team during the visit. This issue revolved

around whether the Chair of the governing board was receiving payment for services rendered in that role, and whether that had been a past practice only, or was continuing. However, a resolution was passed by the board of shareholders (and provided to the Team) to the effect that the prior practice of remunerating the Board Chair had been discontinued prior to the team's 2014 visit. In addition, the University has represented that no other board members receive compensation for their service. (CFR 3.9)

The second instance has to do with the evaluation of the governing board, in particular. To address this point, the governing board has amended its bylaws to require an annual self-assessment, conducted internally, with an additional external assessment required every three years. The first annual assessment has taken place, using an instrument that requires a number of reflective responses by members. A 24 question survey was distributed and results tabulated, analyzed and distributed. The Board drew conclusions about both areas of strength and areas in which the Board needed to improve. The Team urges the Board to continue to refine and elaborate upon the internal assessment instrument as provided to the Team, as well as close the loop by developing an action plan to address perceived areas upon which to focus additional attention. (CFR 3.7 and 3.9)

### SECTION THREE: OTHER TOPICS AS APPROPRIATE

In its report in 2014, the WASC Team raised a number of concerns about the fiscal stability of ADU, especially with respect to the implementation of the strategic plan and the degree to which the five-year projections were dependent on such matters as the University's contract with the UAE military, the annual cost of facilities, a large debt,

and competition for students with the over 100 other higher education institutions within the UAE.

The University addressed each of these concerns, as well as other fiscal matters, in its Special Visit Report. An important element of the University's response was the essential forgiveness of a US\$17.6-million debt held by the holding company, removing it entirely as an obligation of the University.

One of the major items discussed with ADU personnel, ranging from board members to officers of the University, was the five-year pro-forma statement submitted as an attachment to the ADU plan. In that statement, ADU has projected annual growth in tuition and fee revenue for its core business ranging each year from 12 to nearly 25 percent. Discussions with the responsible officials at ADU raised questions of the viability of increases of that size (81% over five years) and how that relates to both enrollment growth and the ability of students to pay those fees.

An additional area of inquiry was that of the University's contract with the military and the potential for continuation of that contract; along with the degree to which profits from that enterprise were being used to make a significant contribution to balancing the annual budget. The ADU Special Visit Report did acknowledge that the University has obtained a three-year renewal of the military contract through 2017-18, even though there is a pro-forma budget assumption that this contract will exist for the next five years. Each year that contract contributes between 23 and 33 million AED to the budget, after costs, with the net profits ranging from 27-38 per cent of revenue. While the budget projections exclude that overhead recovery, those funds are supporting the University's fiscal stability. The University is optimistic that the contract

with the military programs will continue, given the overall satisfaction with the arrangement to date.

The five-year projections also contain several other items that were reviewed by the Team. This included what is termed a “Group Transfer Cost” of about 15 million AED in each of the five years. In addition, Strategic Initiatives are being greatly expanded, ranging from 4.6 million AED in 2014-15 to 16.6 million by 2018-19.

The budget also contains a 69% increase in faculty and an increase in rent expenses of 55% over five years due to the construction of academic and related buildings. (It should be noted that ADU does not own its facilities. They have been built by the University’s holding company and leased back to the University on University land.) While these increased expenses are in line with the strategic plan, these are nevertheless very substantial expenses.

The Team extensively examined the University’s five-year pro forma budget projections with the CFO, members of the board of directors, the Chancellor, and the Provost, as well as with the financial advisor to the holding company for the University. Detailed, line-by-line analysis and exploration was pursued relative to assumptions, research evidence and the connection of the strategic plan with the five-year projection.

The conclusions of the Team are that the financial plan, while very ambitious, is basically sound. There are, however, several areas where the team feels that it would be prudent for the Commission to monitor financial outcomes and trends to ensure that the institution is on track to achieve its goals. The areas that drew the team’s specific attention include costs associated with the potential goal of expansion into Dubai, the continued viability of the Al Ain campus, the very substantial expansion of the research

budget, and assumptions made about fundraising, much of which is related to research support.

The budget projects a significant increase in research funding over the next five years. This increase is, in part, tied to a commensurate uplift in the capacity of ADU to raise support from outside sources. Given the legal and tax structure of the UAE, along with the fact that ADU is technically a private, for-profit institution, means that these goals will be quite challenging. The UAE has no equivalent to American institutions such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, presenting ADU with both challenges and opportunities that are unique and significant.

#### SECTION IV: FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SPECIAL VISIT TEAM REVIEW

The Special Visit Team finds that Abu Dhabi University has responded appropriately and thoroughly to each of the six Special Visit issues raised by the Commission in its March 20, 2015 action letter. Summary findings for each of the issues follow.

##### ISSUE ONE: STUDENT SERVICES

The Team finds that the University has responded fully and effectively to the Commission's recommendations to appoint qualified student affairs leadership and to strengthen the Division of Student Affairs. In particular, the Team noted the qualifications of the new director; addition of in-house Career Center staff; commitment and planning for student affairs strategic planning and program review; increased

recreational space for students; increased bus transportation to campus; strengthened student government organization and advising, secured funds to build a women's residence hall and dental clinic; and the several initiatives that strengthen student academic advising and academic mentoring. (CFRs 2.11, 2.12, 2.13)

## ISSUE TWO: STRATEGIC PLAN

The Team finds that the University has responded fully and effectively to the issues raised in the Commission's action letter regarding strategic planning. The Team commends ADU for its significant commitment to, and investment in, research in its Strategic Plan for Research and in its institutional budget. A comprehensive Research Strategy has been formulated, including the development of a Center of Excellence and three Research Centers, which focus on issues relevant to the region. A new Director of Research and 53 faculty hired since the last visit will further the research agenda. The Team commends the University for this significant investment in its vision. (CFR 3.4)

## ISSUE THREE: ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

The Team believes that the University has responded thoughtfully, comprehensively, and strategically to the Commission's recommendation to prioritize enrollment initiatives in order to achieve ongoing enrollment growth and tuition-based financial stability. The Team commends ADU on its strategic enrollment planning process and the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, as well as the several initiatives described above that have been deployed in a very short period of time to

support improved retention, the development of new programs, and marketing initiatives. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 3.4, 4.6-7)

#### ISSUE FOUR: RECRUIT AND RETAIN QUALIFIED FACULTY AND STAFF

The Team finds that the University has comprehensively and effectively addressed the concerns regarding the financial commitment to recruit and retain qualified faculty raised in the March 20, 2015 Commission letter. In the last year, the previous backlog of some 20 faculty vacancies has been eliminated, and over 30 additional positions related to growth have been filled. In addition, 50 staff positions, both replacement and new, have been filled and another 20 are budgeted to be filled by 2017.

The Team noted the Board and leadership's commitment to the compensation review conducted by external professional entities to assist in the assessment of its compensation and benefit structure for both faculty and staff. Of critical importance, the University again committed significant resources to act upon the resulting compensation recommendations. While staffing and compensation will always be in need of continuing review and adjustment, the Team commends the University for taking the recommendation seriously and for taking clear steps designed to improve recruitment and retention of the University's greatest asset, its faculty and staff. Finally, since all University appointments of non-Emirati staff and faculty are subject to contracts that require regular review and renewal, the Team suggests the advisability of a clear succession plan for all leadership positions ranging from the Chancellor to those at the level of deans and directors. (CFR 3.1-3 and 4.7)

## ISSUES FIVE AND SIX: BOARD STRUCTURE, MEMBERSHIP, COMPENSATION, AND EFFECTIVENESS

The Team finds that the University and its Board of Directors have responded fully and effectively to the concerns about governance as outlined in the March 20, 2015 Commission letter. The Board has made clear that no member of the Board of Directors receives compensation. The Board has also embarked on annual self-assessment and external review processes. (CFRs 3.7 and 3.9)