

REPORT OF THE WASC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM

To Patten University

March 30 – April 1, 2015

Team Roster

Dr. Barry T. Ryan, Team Chair
President and CEO, United States University

Dr. Patricia A. Breen, Team Assistant Chair
Provost, Pacific Oaks College

Douglas J. Geier, Team Member
Director of eLearning and Instructional Design, Golden Gate University

Darryl W. Lycett, Team Member
Chief Financial Officer, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

Dr. Christopher N. Oberg, Staff Liaison
Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, WSCUC

The team evaluated the institution under the WASC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective for consideration and action by the institution and by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities. 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 WASC website.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

- A. Description of the Institution and Visit
- B. The Institution's Special Visit Report: Quality of the Report and Supporting Evidence
- C. Description of the Team's Review Process

SECTION II. EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

- A. Issue: Governance
- B. Issue: Planning and Finance
- C. Issue: Faculty and Curriculum
- D. Issue: Assessment and Learning Outcomes

SECTION III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Visit

Patten University was founded in 1944 by Bebe Patten as the Oakland Bible Institute serving students in the Oakland, California area with faith-based programs developed upon the values of social justice, leadership, and service. In 2012 Patten University was purchased by University Now, Inc. (UNow), which also provides the personalized platform for Patten's online programs. With the approval of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College Commission (WSCUC), Patten began the transition from a non-profit sectarian institution to a for profit secular institution dedicated to making college education affordable to all qualified students. Currently, the flat rate tuition for online programs is \$3,480 per year for undergraduates, and \$5,988 per year for graduate programs. Patten University does not participate in Title IV. The university is currently closing its Fruitvale campus in Oakland and relocating to new space in the downtown area of Oakland.

Online programs include an associate degree in general studies with concentrations in business and criminal justice, bachelor's degrees in leadership, management and psychology, and master's degrees in business administration. According to the self- study, enrollment in the online programs as of spring 2015 is approximately 2,400 students.

Programs offered on-campus are the Multiple Subject and Single Subject Teaching Credential programs and the Masters of Arts in Education. These programs are approved by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. All other campus-based programs are in the process of being discontinued. The associates of arts in general studies degree is also offered off campus at its San Quentin site. At 5% of total enrollments, approximately 120 students are currently enrolled in campus or site-based programs.

Patten University was initially accredited by WSCUC in 1980, at which time the Oakland Bible Institute became Patten College. In its Educational Effectiveness Review for reaffirmation in 2008, issues related to strategic planning, enrollment management, financial management, and sustainability led to a Special Visit in fall 2010.

In February 2011 the Commission accepted the Special Visit report and placed the University on probation with accreditation to continue during the probation period. The Commission also requested an Interim Report in fall 2011 and scheduled a Special Visit in fall 2012. The Commission accepted the Interim Report and requested another Interim Report to be submitted March 2012.

In May 2012 a Substantive Change Site Visit was conducted to evaluate the change in Control/Ownership of Patten University by UNow due to the extent to which this change would transform the institution from a not-for-profit faith-based to a for-profit secular institution. The Structural Change Panel of the Commission acted in June 2012 to approve the proposed change of ownership/control. The Special Visit scheduled for fall 2012 was changed to a Comprehensive Review scheduled for spring 2013.

Additionally, in February 2013 the Substantive Change Committee acted to “Not Accept”

the proposal for the online Associate of Arts degree in General Studies. After modification, the proposal was approved by the Substantive Change Committee on August 6, 2013.

As a result of the 2013 Comprehensive Review, the Commission acted to remove the institution from probation and reaffirm the accreditation of Patten University, to schedule the Offsite Review in spring 2017, to request a progress report in spring 2014 on issues related to governance; planning and finance; faculty and curriculum; and assessment and learning outcomes, and to request a Special Visit on these same issues in spring 2015. Specifically, the Commission requested that the Special Visit Team assure continuing advancement in these four areas as well as the Standards:

1. Governance, with a focus on the Board of Trustees relationship with UNow, decision-making structures, integrity and transparency, and communications to its stakeholders regarding the new mission and purpose of Patten University,
2. Planning and Finance, regarding the success of the 5-year strategic plan and enrollment management, and reports and controls for operating budgets,
3. Faculty and Curriculum, including a review of evidence that the University provides for timely graduation, faculty ratios and qualifications, new faculty orientation, and sufficiency of technology training, and
4. Assessment and Learning Outcomes to determine whether student learning has improved across modalities, the effectiveness of the assessment process in improving student learning, and communication regarding learning outcomes.

Three additional substantive change proposals have been submitted and approved since the comprehensive review.

B. Quality of the Special Visit Report and Supporting Evidence

The Special Visit Report prepared by Patten University demonstrated an awareness of the issues and recommendations made by the Commission. The report was well-organized, readable, and clear. The Executive Summary and the Reflections for Moving Forward sections were helpful in illustrating the institution's priorities upon review and reflection about the process. The ad hoc steering committee responsible for the preparation of the report included most, if not all, of the academic and administrative leadership of Patten. A variety of small and large group meetings with various stakeholders within the University were held to facilitate the self-study writing process. An external consultant was retained to provide technical support with planning and preparing the self-study. All constituencies during the visit seemed knowledgeable about the self-study and its findings.

Not all issues were addressed directly and with evidence. Comprehensive data on student learning; retention and graduation, faculty sufficiency, long-range planning, and financial metrics were not included in the self-study, though some additional data provided at the campus. The "Reflections and Moving Forward" section of the self-study does not directly address the areas of concern identified in the Commission's action letter. Reaching financial sustainability, Board turnover, finding staff and faculty who are the right "fit" for Patten, and early intervention with struggling students were identified as areas to improve. Future goals, also not directly tied to improvement in the concerns include raising student awareness about their financial options, building

relationships with major employers, and deepening Patten's relationships with organizations in the Bay Area, specifically Oakland in order to fulfill its social justice and community service mission.

C. Description of the Team Review Process

Initially, the Special Visit team members individually reviewed the report and related documents, and completed the worksheets. These worksheets were compiled and discussed in a conference call on February 27, 2015 during which the team was oriented to the visit by the WSCUC liaison, the worksheets were discussed, individual assignment were confirmed, requirements for the meeting agenda as well as additional information needed was determined, and logistics were arranged.

During the visit, the team met with nine members of the Patten staff including the President, Interim CAO, Registrar, Finance AVP, Senior Manager of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, the ALO and Dean of Online Programs, Dean of the Campus Programs, and Chairs for the Education and Business and Management programs. The team met with three Board members including the Chair, and two staff members from UNow, including its founder and Executive Vice President of Product and Technology. Open forums were held separately with students and faculty. The Special Visit Assistant Chair reviewed the confidential email account.

SECTION II – TEAM ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

A. Governance

The WSCUC action letter of July 10, 2013, instructed the university to address the following items with regard to governance, and for the visiting team to review that response. The team was to evaluate how:

- a. The institution's Board of Trustees has managed its bridge relationship with the parent organization, UNow.
- b. The creation of a new decision-making structure within the institution, based on the new Bylaws, has worked.
- c. The recently established organization structure is achieving integrity and transparency.
- d. The new Patten mission and purpose have been articulated to faculty, staff, students and other stakeholders (e.g., describe the institutions' communications' plan and its implementation).

The Relationship with UNow (CFR 3.9)

The team has reviewed the materials submitted by the university and also engaged in numerous interviews and discussions with key members of the university community during the site visit. In summary, the team makes the following observations:

- With regard to the Board's relationship with UNow, it should be noted that the entire "original" Board (with the exception of the president, an ex-officio member) was appointed by UNow in 2012. Nine of the ten members were appointed in December, 2012, and one was appointed in June, 2013.
- There do not appear to be any additional members appointed since June, 2013.

- The Bylaws call for three classes of members, i.e. one-third rolling off each year, with staggered three-year terms. This process has not yet begun, although the team was told classes would begin to be implemented in December, 2015.

With a very significant financial interest in the outcomes of the university as one of the two significant constituent parts of the business entity, it is understandable that UNow would want to work very closely with the Board. So, for example, while all current Board members are listed as “independent,” UNow representatives attend preliminary or informal sessions with the Patten Board prior to the formal meeting as “guests” (including the UNow CEO at the September, 2014 meeting, the last for which minutes were provided).

In addition, according to the Bylaws, UNow has a unique position as “Member” (which term has apparently been changed to simply “UNow” by action of the Board, although this was not reflected in the Bylaws submitted by the university). As such, “powers delegated to the Board are subject to and limited by the Member” (i.e. UNow). This delegation and related limitation/s are not specified in the Bylaws. This was discussed with the CEO who indicated the Board would be reviewing the section in question.

In addition, the Member/UNow has express authority to appoint “delegates” to the Board. While they are not vested with voting power, they are allowed to attend Board meetings (other than in Executive session), and it appears this is primarily a vehicle for communication between the entities in a way that does not necessarily impinge on the independence and authority of the Board.

In Article 2(f) of the Bylaws, with regard to the question of Board member independence and a requirement that the majority of the membership of either the entire Board or any committee must consist of independent members, the following clause exists:

“Notwithstanding the foregoing, any violation of this Section 2(f) shall not affect the validity or enforceability of any action taken by the Board or a Board committee, and shall not affect the validity of any transaction entered into by, or undertaking of the Company.”

This clause, standing alone, introduces the hypothetical possibility that non-independent members, in some admittedly extreme scenarios, act as a temporary majority and such action could not be challenged by virtue of the language of 2(f). While other sections of the Bylaws properly define independence, there is the possibility of conflict between sections. This was also relayed to the CEO who indicated the Board would carefully review the sections thus noted.

Nevertheless, and in answer to the question raised in the WSCUC letter above regarding how the Board has managed the relationship with UNow, it is quite apparent that communication is regular and extensive, and that there is strong mutual interest in maintaining a close and mutually beneficial relationship. Certain aspects of that mutual interest necessarily involve a closer examination of the financial relationship – which is the heart of the matter that brought these entities together - which will be addressed below. **(CFR 3.4)** These aspects include UNow’s financial sustainability, the duration of UNow’s financial commitments to the university, basis for charges associated with service agreements, ownership of intellectual property, etc.

New Decision-making Structure (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 3.10)

While the previous decision-making structure is a little unclear, and perhaps not terribly important, the current structure appears quite reasonable and appropriate. Given its somewhat short time span, it appears to be working.

The flow is traditional, in that strategic planning and decision-making ultimately find their way to review and approval by the Board, with appropriate involvement at a high level by the board. The flow of the proposed plan upward, and then the execution by operational leadership downward, is funneled through the president and CEO, as it should be.

In addition to the annual process, there are quarterly updates provided to the Board, based on continual review and suggested adjustments to overall plans.

The president, administration and faculty leadership appear to be collaboratively engaged in decision-making about all key operational aspects of university life. There are no obvious conflicts or roadblocks as all are committed to the mission and success of the university.

Integrity and Transparency (CFR 1.7)

Essentially the same observations may be made regarding this point of inquiry. There is no hint of mistrust or lack of transparency with regard to the president, administration and faculty leadership. This does not appear to be an issue.

In addition, there has been a close, cooperative relationship with WSCUC, particularly with regard to communication with Dr. Christopher Oberg. This is commendable. (CFR 1.8)

Articulation and Communication of the New Mission

The institution has done well to involve faculty, particularly through the Senate, in helping to articulate and communicate the many changes that have occurred over the past few years and months.

B. Planning and Finance

The Commission's action letter in response to the comprehensive site visit in the Spring of 2013 highlighted three key areas where the institution needed to demonstrate additional progress and an analysis of the following:

1. The success of the 5-year Strategic Plan to date.
2. The success of the enrollment management function, both with respect to fiscal stability and to the mission commitment to serve inner city constituencies.
3. The creation and effectiveness of internal reports and controls to generate specific information to support the creation of operating budgets.

Success of the 5-year Strategic Plan

Not unlike the university itself, Patten University's 5-year Strategic Plan has evolved significantly since the special site visit in the Spring of 2013. At that time, the university's plan was to continue to develop its online presence as well as maintain and bolster its on-ground enrollment and campus structure. Despite significant efforts to grow on-ground enrollment, including the hiring of a full time on-ground Admission Team, the university did not see those efforts and investments produce the desired results. As a result, the university's on-ground student population has continued to decline over the course of the past two years. The university has commendably responded to this shift

in the distribution of the student body by re-doubling its efforts to grow online enrollment as well as work with its existing on-ground students toward graduation. In support of all on-ground students, the university has created Personal Graduation Plans (PGPs) for all on-ground students with a well-defined path to help all on-ground students either graduate from Patten or transition to another four-year school. In each case, students are offered support from a highly engaged Student Advising Team that are focused on helping them matriculate. All on-ground students have also been provided financial support in the form of reduced tuition and scholarships.

As a result of this significant shift, the university completed an update to their previous 5-year Strategic Plan to reflect and respond to the change in the enrollment landscape. Patten is now operating under a new 5-year Strategic Plan that spans the 2015-2019 timeframe. The university is to be commended for their efforts to implement the initiatives of the previous strategic plan and at the same time recognizing that those efforts were not producing the desired results and as a result the organization needed to revisit and revise its plan forward and realign organization priorities and resources so as to put the university in the best possible position to be viable in the long term. It was very clear to the team that if the organization had not course corrected as they did, the future viability and sustainability of the university would be at risk.

As a university that prides itself as being a “learning organization,” the Patten team engages in an annual review and update of the 5-year Strategic Plan and enlists the support of key stakeholders within the organization including university administration, faculty, and the Board of Trustees. This annual review process enables the organization

to reassess, evaluate and adjust as needed based on internal operating results and external trends.

Based on the most recent review completed by the university, the organization has re-established a short and medium-term set of goals and priorities that include quarterly enrollment goals as well as an operational budget. The budget itself is based on projected enrollment goals and the operational budget is based on key metrics including costs associates with each of the key functional areas of the organization including faculty, testing, marketing, facilities, and overhead. Based on the pro forma goals that have been set, the leadership team measures progress toward those goals on a monthly basis. In addition, the Patten leadership team reports out to the Board of Trustees on a quarterly basis on achievements and progress made.

As a recent update, despite significant progress toward their enrollment goals leading up to Q3 of 2014, some momentum was lost when the university and its parent UNow, entered into discussions with an outside party for the sale of the parent organization. As a result, key investments in ongoing marketing efforts were curtailed significantly. That decision has resulted in a decrease in the enrollment growth momentum that the university experienced leading up to and during the first half of 2014. Having now decided to forego any additional discussions relating to the sale of the parent UNow, the university is now fully re-engaged its marketing efforts and is seeing a result of the positive results previously experienced.

While the university does not have an enrollment and financial projection through the end of their revised strategic plan window, this does not indicate that they do not have a long-term perspective or are not planning for the future. Rather it is an indication that

they are working diligently and tirelessly to fulfill the commitment the university made to their on-ground students as well as working to ensure that the learning outcomes and experiences for all online students meet the quality and standards that are part of the Patten mission and values.

Success of the Enrollment Management Function

As discussed in the previous section, the university has undergone a revision to their long term enrollment strategy and now has a much larger focus on growing its online enrollment. The university is still carefully maintaining and supporting its on-ground student population and is offering on-ground courses until all current on-ground students graduate. Going forward, the university may continue to offer some of its on-ground programs (e.g. Credential Program, San Quentin program), but the university enrollment management function has shifted significantly since the last visit in Spring of 2013 and is primarily growing its online enrollment in the Oakland metro area as well as nationally.

As a result it has developed a comprehensive online marketing plan to support its renewed enrollment goals. As I mentioned in the previous section, the university has seen a significant increase in its online enrollment over the course of the past 18 months. Based on the most recent enrollment results, the university currently has ~2,400 students with approximately 120 of those being on-ground students. From a sustainability perspective, the university needs to grow enrollment to ~6,000 students at which point it will reach profitability. At the current enrollment growth rates (taking into consideration the delay experienced during Q4 of 2014) the university projects that it will reach a break-even/profitability by Q3 of 2016. Given that the university is currently operating at

a deficit, UNow is currently under-writing any operational deficits and has committed to continuing to do so until the school reaches the point where it can be self-sustaining.

That commitment is in writing in the form of a commitment letter from UNow CEO Bryan Newman to Dr. Stewart, however in conversations with Bryan Newman and Gene Wade (Founder and Board Chair Unow) that commitment will be renewed without expiration.

The enrollment management function has also evolved from the perspective that UNow has developed comprehensive technology into the Patten learning management system (LMS) such that there is a high level of student engagement and support for students that need help. The support is also tailored to the needs of the students such that those that do not need support and are progressing through their education are enabled to proceed at their own pace, and for those student where a higher level of touch-points or support is needed, that support is provided either through the centralized Student Advising, Financial Aid, or directly through faculty that make themselves available to students on an as-needed basis.

From a Financial Aid, perspective the university reports that it is currently having an issue with Bad Debt that seems to be coming from students who are allowed to enroll and take classes and either opt into a company reimbursement plan or an individualized tuition payment plan. This has resulted in a relatively high level of bad debt write-offs. To help manage this, a team recommendation would be to bolster the Company Reimbursement Program with a requirement that students provide proof that their companies have a tuition reimbursement program and endorse their employee's

enrollment in the school. The university may also consider revising their individualized payment plan process to limit the university risk and exposure in this area.

Creation and Effectiveness of Internal Reports and Controls

Patten is to be commended for responding to the Commission's recommendation to have the appropriate financial leadership within the organization and their commitment to establish a strong finance leader within the organization. This is evidenced by the hiring of Eric Wagenonner as their Assistant Vice President for Finance and Administration in June 2013. There is evidence that Mr. Wagenonner is fully engaged in the day-to-day operations of the school and serving as the financial lead for Patten. Mr. Wagenonner is responsible for all day-to-day financial activities including reviewing and approving invoices (accounts payable), approving faculty hires, and communicating financial results to the leadership and doing some analysis of operating results. However, from a financial control perspective, it appears that most financial controls are managed by the UNow finance team and that he relies heavily on that team for all financial reporting and key analysis. In addition, it did not appear that he was fully aware of and engaged in all financial matters the university including fully understanding the financial position of the university (income statement, balance sheet, statement of cash flow), managing key financials matters of the school including facility lease administration matters, and decisions on capital expenditures. This may be a reflection of the fact that the university is still operating in a deficit position and is fully reliant on the direct financial support of UNow. That is understandable given the nature of the financial relationship between the university and UNow. However, as the university continues to grow enrollment and approach financial self-sustainability, it

would be the team's recommendation that Dr. Stewart and Mr. Wagensonner continue to work with the UNow leadership team to fully develop his role within the school and to use an agreed upon set of key operational metrics or key performance indicators to effectively measure and evaluate operational effectiveness.

The office of Institutional Effectiveness, led by Lynette Garetz has made significant progress in the way data is being captured, managed and used to drive institutional decision making. There is strong evidence supported by sample reports that were provided to the team that the organization understands the value data-informed decision making and is continually working to improve in this area. Ms.. Garetz has direct access to the data and the organization is now in the process of developing the reports and dashboards needed to make using the data to measure operating results and drive accountability possible.

As mentioned previously the team recommends that Patten develop a well-defined set of operational metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) that the entire leadership team can use to evaluate operating performance on a consistent basis. Some of those metrics could include key Admission metrics (lead flow, conversion rates, cost per lead, cost per start), 1-year retention rates, loan default/bad debt, contribution margins by program, student/FTE ratios. Some of this data is being collected and shared but the organization would benefit from having an agreed upon set of metrics and a consistent reporting mechanism to improve awareness and accountability within all functional areas of the organization. In the absence of DOE participation, the school can use industry benchmarks within higher education to determine and assess "what good looks like."

C. Faculty and Curriculum

Since the last comprehensive site visit in 2013, Patten University has been working to address the issues related to faculty and curriculum outlined in the Commission's Action Letter of July 10, 2013. The institution was to demonstrate:

1. That course and program offerings provide what students need to graduate in a timely manner
2. That the hiring and qualifications of new faculty have responded to enrollment growth
3. That new online faculty are being incorporated into the Patten University culture
4. That the institution's technology training activities for faculty, staff, and students are appropriately robust

Course and Program Offerings

As overall enrollment continues to grow, Patten must ensure that course program offerings provide what students need in order to graduate in a timely manner. [CFR 2.1] Interviews with faculty, the Dean of Online Programs and other members of senior leadership indicate that Patten ensures the availability of courses--even if that means running a course for just one or two students--when that course is critical to a student's progression through their degree program.

The team reviewed the online platform and sample online courses ahead of the visit and also received a demonstration of some of the key features during the site visit. A standard layout of the courses allows students to focus solely on the course content, activities and assessment. The New Student Orientation course, also reviewed by the

team, acquaints students with the explicit learning outcomes structure and related progress indicators they see in each of their courses. [CFR 2.3]

Student performance data is displayed on the instructor dashboard. This allows faculty to efficiently track the progress of each student and to provide coaching as necessary. [CFR 2.3, 2.5] The platform also facilitates the sharing of information between advisors and instructors (using the Advisor Notes screen) so that students can be better advised and supported during their degree program. The high level of progress awareness displayed within the learning platform, combined with the support of instructors and advisors, helps each student progress as effectively and efficiently as possible through their degree program.

Hiring and Qualifications of New Faculty

As online enrollments continue to grow, Patten must respond by hiring qualified faculty in adequate numbers. [CFR 3.1] In interviews with faculty and Academic Affairs, the team learned more about faculty recruitment efforts and the plans for addressing future enrollment growth. Patten's leadership has drawn from their existing network of contacts to recruit new, qualified faculty and subject matter experts (SMEs) used in course development. Some of the SMEs are eventually offered positions to teach, and many adjunct faculty members transition into full-time faculty after they reach a certain threshold of students (150-200). This model has allowed Patten to bring on new faculty as needed and to easily scale as enrollment grows. Patten University's Academic and Enrollment Plan includes a target of one new faculty per 200-300 new online students, which is consistent with their current faculty-to-student ratio. A specific breakdown by

department is noted in the plan. [CFRs 3.1, 3.3] New faculty preparedness and ongoing development is discussed in the next section.

New Faculty Onboarding and Incorporation into Patten Culture

It is critical that all new online faculty are incorporated into a Patten University culture that values teaching and service. Hiring online adjunct faculty from outside the San Francisco Bay Area expands the pool of qualified instructors, but also adds to the challenge of integrating them into a single culture. Several activities and resources address this challenge. All new online faculty must complete an online orientation course (PFO 101), delivered on Patten's online learning platform, that acquaints the new faculty member with the features and pedagogical model. New faculty members are also assigned a faculty mentor. [CFR 3.3] While new faculty may rely heavily on their mentor prior to teaching their first course, this relationship typically extends well beyond this onboarding period. This enhances faculty preparedness, as well as their connection to the university's culture. In team meetings and interviews regarding faculty development, including an open forum with faculty, it is clear that there is a high degree of satisfaction with the online orientation and other support provided to new instructors.

Informal check-in meetings of full-time and adjunct online faculty are held weekly to build community, share ideas, ask questions, and identify concerns. All online faculty members are invited to attend these meetings, facilitated by web conference software and/or conferencing calling. Though these meetings are not required, the team discovered that there is strong and regular participation on the part of adjunct faculty members. While strong attendance contributes to the new faculty member's identification

with the culture at Patten, it is also an indication to the team that there is a strong sense of ownership, enthusiasm and pride among all Patten faculty members.

Patten has demonstrated that the efforts to effectively onboard and support new online faculty are working well at their current faculty numbers. As emphasized in the Recommendations section of this report, the team encourages the university to continue to develop deliberate processes and supports in order to scale the collaborative academic spirit and ensure that new faculty are incorporated into the Patten culture. [CFR 3.3, 4.6]

Technology Training

Given the reliance on online learning to Patten's success, it is critical that the technology training provided to students, staff and faculty is appropriately robust. [CFR 3.5] Technology training on Patten's proprietary online learning system is provided to students mainly by way of the new student orientation course, PSS100. The team reviewed this course before the site visit. The orientation provides students with guidance on how to navigate the platform and library resources, access media, and how to participate in discussion forums. In addition, it provides information about how to access the built-in technical support feature.

In addition to the standard training provided to new faculty discussed above (i.e. the Faculty Orientation Course), regular training opportunities are provided in faculty development meetings. Trainings related to new learning platform features are often facilitated by the parent organization, UNow. Discussion between the team and faculty in an open forum indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the technical training that is provided.

D. Assessment and Learning Outcomes (CFRs 1.2, 1.3, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 3.8, 4.4)

The Commission's action letter reflecting the spring 2013 Special visit to Patten University commended the university for its progress in developing assessment plans and structures, including the creation of learning outcomes and the system for collecting evidence, but cautioned that it was in the "initial/emerging" stages of these activities.

The action letter stated that it expected to see significant progress by the visit in 2015 such that the institution was at the "developed" stage. It also expected to see significant evidence in meeting the Commission's new emphasis on the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees and the core competencies expected of bachelor's graduates.

Specifically, the team was to analyze the following:

1. How assessment and program review, currently in their initial/emerging stages, have contributed to student learning improvement. Note differences between online and on ground modalities, if any;
2. How the steps taken to provide authentic assessment evidence, and the actions taken as a result of the analysis of that evidence, have enhanced student learning; and
3. How successful were the measures taken to ensure that students are explicitly aware of the outcomes expected of them

Educational Effectiveness Overview

Considering the WSCUC educational effectiveness rubric which addresses the three components of Learning, Teaching/Learning Environment, and Organizational Learning, Patten may be considered at the developed stage for Learning; outcomes are established and communicated proficiency expectations are established, (CFRs 2.3),

program review processes are in place for curricula outcomes (CFT 4.1) and a Noel-Levitz survey includes some co-curricular functions (CFR 2.11) , and, presumably, the desired learning is achieved due to the mastery requirement in the course assessments. (CFR 2.6) Awareness of outcomes is central to the online platform. Outcomes listed on syllabi and relevant outcomes are identified in each course session. Regarding the Teaching and Learning Environment, the move to online programming with the new platform tightly aligns the learning process and all resources, activities and assessments are mapped to learning outcomes. Assessment and program review handbooks have been developed with the support of experts in the field and are comprehensive and inclusive of important elements. Two academic staff members have completed the Assessment Academy. (CFR 2.8, 2.9) The new Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning has contributed considerably to establishing an infrastructure for assessing student learning and improving institutional and program effectiveness. (4.2)

WSCUC's expectations for Organizational Learning introduce a compelling area of growth for Patten. Clearly, the traditional expectations for the assessment of student learning and review of program effectiveness are not evident in this special visit. With only seven online graduates to date, valid evidence is not yet available on the achievement of graduates, and no data was provided on how or whether recommendations from a program review had improved student learning or been included in budgeting and planning. (2.6) One-year retention data was provided for both online and on campus programs, but only the online data is disaggregated by student characteristic. (CFR 2.10) The report from the one program review shared with the visit team; the AA General Studies program taught at San Quentin (which was described as

the first ever conducted at the extension site), provided no data on learning but did make recommendations that would “enhance student learning in the program.” Although the handbook and a schedule are in place for its program reviews, Patten has not yet established a program review routine. Because of the capacity of the learning platform, the systematic collection and evaluation of student achievement data at the summative or graduate stage is clearly possible, but based upon conversation with staff, not yet a higher priority currently for Patten than is refining the effectiveness of the learning platform.

However, the culture of inquiry and evidence and the commitment to improvement in student learning at Patten University is evident in the design and use of the learning platform at the course level. The learning of every student is assessed and reassessed in every course to assure that the required mastery or competence is achieved by a student before progressing. To assure the integrity of learning data, assignments are evaluated by external reviewers and not course instructors. Assessment of data on student achievement in every class is evaluated by faculty in their bi-monthly programs reviews to determine whether changes to improve learning are needed in the course itself, and to determine whether predictive patterns for student success may be identified. (CFRs 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6) Assessment of student learning throughout the academic program is both constant and in real time, allows evaluation of the student, the program, and the faculty. Improvements in learning may, therefore, be direct and immediate.

In summary, finding on the specific areas of inquiry are:

Contributions to Student Learning

With seven graduates of the online programs to date, and one program review conducted for the San Quentin cohort, documentation on how recommendations from

these processes have improved the learning of graduates is not available. In-process assessment of student learning and improvement in course effectiveness is conducted continuously. Areas for improvement are identified however. The self-study report as well as conversations with faculty and administrators noted that a subcommittee of the academic senate is exploring ways to provide tutorial support in writing for online students. The San Quentin program review proposes program improvements meant to enhance student learning related to program alignment with the PLOs, a fundraising plan, additional space, faculty diversity, assessing student performance, and engaging faculty in program assessment.

Enhancements of Student Learning

As noted above, assessment of student learning for the purpose of providing advice to students on their progress at the course level and for the purpose of improving the course is on-going. Course level data informs course improvements which are made in real time. Documentation of changes made, pre- and post- change results, and the ensuing faculty discussion on the value of the changes could provide evidence of learning assessment and improvement at this level. With only seven graduates of the online program overall, a summative assessment of graduate competencies is not available, nor is it clear that this is a priority for Patten, given the robust nature of the course level assessments and the assumption that course mastery as a requirement for progress will lead to fulfillment of this requirement. However, the visit team's observation is that, while robust course assessment is essential and valuable, it does not replace the need for assessing the integration of student learning on a summative level to determine whether

the Patten graduate represents the full meaning, quality, and integrity of the Patten degree. (CFRs 2.6, 4.2)

In addition, while a correlation between students' learning at the course level and the core competencies required by the WSCUC standards might be logically assumed, clarification of the correlation as well as specific data on student achievement on these competencies is needed to provide evidence of bachelor student achievement of the core competencies. (CFR 2.2a)

Student Awareness of Learning Outcomes

As noted above, outcomes are listed on syllabi and relevant outcomes are identified in each course session. No students in either the open forum or the through e-mails submitted to the confidential account indicated that their learning expectations were out of line with their learning experiences other than the transition to online courses altogether. On the whole, online students were positive about their courses and instructors. On campus students expressed some concerns with the new need to have some of their courses online.

SECTION III – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations:

1. Academic Collaboration: Patten University's collaborative, inclusive spirit is evidenced through a commitment to the onboarding and mentoring of new faculty, expansion of the senate from "faculty" to "academic," affirmation of the adjunct faculty voice in academic senate, faculty and staff teamwork in weekly, biweekly,

- and monthly check in and review meetings, and the value placed on the “apolitical” environment.
2. Strengthened Financial Functioning of the University through the addition of a CFO and the development of an effective partnership with the CFO of UNow.
 3. Board Strength: Highly engaged, well-informed, diverse Board of Trustees committed to strategic goals of Patten University and to a productive and appropriate relationship with UNow Board of Trustees. Strategic and agile, able to support Patten’s need to reconsider goals under changing circumstances.
 4. Centrality of the Student: Student learning drives the operational priorities of the University; a pedagogy based upon learning science, continual assessment of and improvement in course design, accessibility of course support materials, proactive student advising, adaptation of course requirements to student readiness.
 5. Commitment to the Quality of Degrees through external validation of content through the Program Advisory Council, continuous assessment and improvement of programs, and the objective evaluation of student achievement.

Recommendations:

1. Review and revise bylaws as necessary in order to better insure the independence and independent decision-making of the Patten University Trustees. Further

-
- clarify the division of roles and responsibilities between the Boards of Patten University and UNow.
2. Strengthen internal processes, controls, and related financial functions within Patten to monitor and achieve budget goals, comply with financial good practice as well as requirements, assure sufficient resources to accomplish goals, and provide data necessary to inform decision-making.
 3. Develop a well-defined set of operating metrics and key performance indicators that the organization will use to measure operating performance. (Examples could be 1-year retention rates, completion rates, loan default or bad debt, contribution margins per program, lead flow, and cost per start.) In the absence of DOE participation, the school can use industry benchmarks to determine and assess “good” practice.
 4. Implement learning assessment and program review processes that capitalize upon the formative strengths and the real-time data of the platform to document and improve student learning on the required program and core competencies.
 5. In anticipation of enrollment growth, continue to develop deliberate processes and supports to scale the collaborative academic spirit between faculty and between faculty and staff and to incorporate new faculty into the Patten culture.

