

REPORT OF THE WSCUC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM

To Ashford University
April 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. If the institution is granted candidacy or initial accreditation by the Commission, this report and the Commission action letter will be made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Visit

In 2005, Ashford University (previously The Franciscan University of the Prairies) was acquired by Bridgepoint Education, Inc. (Bridgepoint) and became a for-profit Limited Liability Company. With the development and growth of the online division, Ashford University's (Ashford) headquarters moved from the original Clinton, Iowa campus to San Diego, California. As a result, Ashford applied for eligibility status from the WASC Senior College and University Commission in August 2010. Ashford offers 70 active degree programs (64 undergraduate and 6 graduate) with an additional 4 graduate degree programs pending approval. Traditional bachelor degree programs are offered at Ashford's Clinton campus; online bachelor and master's degree programs are offered at both the Clinton and San Diego campuses.

Bridgepoint, a publically traded company, is also located in San Diego, California. In addition to owning Ashford, Bridgepoint owns the University of the Rockies in Denver, Colorado, and educational technologies that include Waypoint Outcomes (assessment software) and Constellation (digital course materials). Shared services agreements between Ashford and Bridgepoint include, but are not limited to, finance, information technology, human resources, legal, and learning resources. Additionally, there are four units (two at Ashford and two at Bridgepoint) that collectively support the data needs of Ashford: assessment (Ashford), institutional effectiveness (Ashford), institutional research (Bridgepoint), and business intelligence (Bridgepoint). Academic oversight (curriculum and instruction) is the sole responsibility of Ashford.

As of December 2014, 274 full-time and 2,470 associate faculty instructed and supported 54,120 students at both the Clinton and San Diego campuses. Undergraduate students account for 87% of Ashford's students, 12% graduate, and 1% non-degree seeking. Degree seeking

students are enrolled across four colleges: Forbes School of Business (39%), Health, Human Services, and Science (25%), Education (19%), and Liberal Arts (15%).

The mission of the university “is to provide accessible, affordable, innovative, high-quality learning opportunities and degree programs that meet the diverse needs of individuals pursuing integrity in their lives, professions, and communities.” With 91% of its students 25 years or older, the average age of the Ashford student who enrolls in an online program is 35. Many of Ashford’s students are the first in their families to attend college. As part of meeting its mission of accessibility, Ashford’s students (in aggregate) exhibit five of the seven student risk factors identified by the US Department of Education: working full-time while being enrolled, being a single parent, having dependents, being financially independent, and having delayed college enrollment.

In 2012, Ashford applied for initial accreditation with the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). At its June 2012 meeting, the Commission denied Ashford’s initial request, outlining several specific concerns—concerns that were detailed in the July 3, 2012 Commission Action Letter. The Commission invited Ashford to reapply for accreditation, with a Special Visit scheduled for spring 2013. At its June 2013 meeting, the Commission found Ashford was in substantial compliance with all four Standards. The subsequent July 13, 2013, Commission Action Letter indicated that while Ashford was granted initial accreditation for five years through July 15, 2018, the institution would also be scheduled for a Special Visit in spring 2015. The six recommendations listed in the July 2013 letter and were the focus of this (2015) Special Visit are:

1. attrition, support for student achievement, and adequate levels of degree completion
2. adequacy and alignment of resources with educational purposes

3. adequacy of the Ashford faculty model and the role of faculty
4. effectiveness of program review
5. assessing student learning and ensuring academic rigor, and
6. independence of the Ashford Governing Board.

As Ashford primarily delivers its programs in an online format, its distance education programs were included within the scope of this Special Visit and embedded within the six issues as appropriate.

B. Quality of the Special Visit Report and Supporting Evidence

The Ashford Special Visit Report (the report) was clearly written and organized around the six main issues identified in the 2013 Commission Action Letter (noted above). The team reviewed the report and the supporting documents prior to the visit, and during the team conference call developed a number of questions and lines of inquiry to extend the review further. While the report provided the foundation for the campus visit, the onsite interviews and discussions provided the necessary information to answer questions and shape the team's findings.

The team found that the extent of supporting documents to evidence the claims made in the report were well-developed and thorough. The team found that Ashford addressed the issues and concerns raised by the Commission through an institutional culture that grasped and demonstrated the importance of this Special Visit. The team found that Ashford's description of the report development process was accurate, and that the process included broad participation from all campus stakeholders—from faculty leadership to the Board of Trustees.

C. Description of the Team Review Process

During the team conference call, team members divided the responsibilities for the writing and inquiry that would be conducted, enabling the members to explore questions, prepare lines of inquiry, and draft preliminary documents to guide the visit. The team discussed the preliminary schedule that included an overview presentation of Ashford's instructional model. The team agreed that it would remain together as one group for the majority of the meetings, and that separate meetings requiring follow-up or a more focused conversation would be scheduled as needed.

During the visit, the team had ample time to meet with a broad cross-section of over 100 university members that included: senior administrators; executive and associate deans; department and program chairs; faculty senate; full-time and associate faculty; cross-university teams for assessment and quality assurance, curriculum and innovation, and retention and graduation. Meetings with key units including student support services, institutional research, finance, operations, the new general education division, and the library and writing center. The team also met with the Board of Trustees (board). More focused sessions included exploring Waypoint, the REAL dashboard, online course discussions, and retention efforts. The team chair presented the eight commendations and six recommendations to the president prior to presenting those statements to an assembled group of Ashford faculty, staff, administration, and board members at the exit meeting on April 10, 2015.

SECTION II – TEAM ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

Issue 1: Attrition, Support for Student Achievement, and Adequate Levels of Degree Completion

Ashford has continued its work towards increasing student retention and graduation rates. Initiatives are selected and continued based on extensive data collection and analysis. The institution evidenced the initiatives to the team in the report and onsite with more in depth lines of inquiry into the following efforts: 1) class size reduction; 2) student success orientation; 3) reading, engagement, assignments, and logins intervention (REAL); 4) minimum age requirement; and 5) conditional admission period.

Ashford faculty and staff have leveraged their unique ability to collect large amounts of student engagement data to inform how they can best support students to successfully persist. This data driven culture is perhaps most clearly evident in the first five courses within the general education program, where students move through sequenced courses so that skills in reading, critical thinking, digital literacy, information literacy, and composition are built upon each other and made more meaningful to the student's learning pattern. (CFRs 2.10, 4.3)

The faculty and staff have focused a significant amount of their efforts on the crucial entry period immediately following admission. Courses have been re-sequenced and the content reworked in order to increase students' initial success and preparation for subsequent coursework. Ensuring that students are introduced to Ashford's educational model and that academically underprepared students are provided the opportunity to identify potential problems has helped to increase Ashford's retention rates. Although the university will need several more years of comparative data to ensure a full understanding and appreciation of the multiple strategies and changes they have made, the initial analyses are very promising. (CFRs 2.10-2.13)

In addition to new students, Ashford expanded its retention and graduation rate efforts to include continuing undergraduate and graduate students. The faculty and staff continue to identify courses that act as bottlenecks to student persistence, and work to increase students' access to content pedagogically while maintaining the mastery requirements of the learning objectives. Ashford also continues to offer specialized support for high-need or at-risk populations, including active and veteran military personnel, students with disabilities, and those students identified as academically high-risk with readiness and college advisors who work specifically with these student populations in order to support them in enrollment and persistence efforts. (CFRs 2.13, 2.14)

As a result of co-curricular reviews, Ashford has also increased and modified its student services support to benefit students. Increased training for faculty and universal access course design has helped to increase access for students with disabilities. The new work that career services has done with outside companies and organizations has increased students' awareness of and access to outside employment and internships. Similar industry partnerships with the academic colleges and divisions, has also allowed for faculty to better align the curriculum with students' current and future needs. Ashford has undertaken a substantial amount of work, investing significant amounts of monetary and human resources into the development of student success initiatives. However, Ashford retention initiatives are not always clearly mapped back to the reasons they have determined students leave. (CFR 2.11)

The university has implemented a number of retention and success initiatives, has identified additional initiatives for implementation, and has yet a third list of proposed initiatives for implementation. Although the research and assessment staff are now more closely involved in the implementation and development process, the number of initiatives raised concerns for the

team regarding the sustainability of such efforts. Ashford's unique ability to collect data in a very rapid manner is a strength but the institution should consider steps to ensure that changes continue to now be made in a deliberate manner that allows for careful and thorough assessment of the effectiveness of its initiatives. In addition to change management, the retention and graduation committee may also consider carefully mapping the success initiatives to the leading causes of student attrition they have identified. (CFRs 1.2, 4.1)

Issue 2: Adequacy and Alignment of Resources with Educational Purposes

Since the 2013 Special Visit, Ashford has made a number of investments to further strengthen and to maintain key academic and student support areas. The university hired additional full-time faculty, bringing the total to 274 in December 2014. Since spring 2013, Ashford has also maintained an average of 10% of its classes being taught by full-time faculty. Reductions in the student-to-full-time faculty ratio dropped from 240 in June 2013 to 198 in December 2014, and Ashford's undergraduate class size has remained stable from 23.9 in June 2013 to 23.5 in December 2014. The university created a vice president for student affairs and retention position, the Adequacy and Alignment of Resources Subcommittee, and staffed the writing center with four full- and two part-time staff. (CFR 3.1)

Additional investments included the creation of a faculty development fund of \$1,000 per full-time faculty member, per year and student success pilots to test new strategies with the promise of improving student retention. According to the report and confirmed during the visit, these investments were made despite a decline in enrollment from nearly 70,000 students 2013 to just over 54,000 in 2014. Admissions Advisory & Marketing (AA&M) increased from 2013 to 2014 from 37.4% to 40.5% (projected) as highlighted in the self-study due to a planned shift in the student acquisition model which leveraged TV and internet search/banner advertisements.

Yet, even with the online student enrollment decline, total student instructional costs and services accounted for 50.9% (2012), 59.5% (2013), and 56.4% (projected 2014) of the university's budgetary allocations for the past three years. The board reinforced to the team its commitment to prioritizing investments in instruction and student success. (CFRs 3.1, 3.5)

Issue 3: Adequacy of the Ashford Faculty Model and the Role of Faculty

Ashford has continued to improve its ratio of full-time to associate faculty, as well as improve the overall student to full-time faculty ratio from 240:1 (June 2013) to 200:1 (September 2014). The stability in full-time faculty numbers (290 in June 2013; 294 in June 2014) despite the decrease of 10,000 online student enrollments during the same time period, has led to an increased capacity to attend to the growth and development of associate faculty. In discussions with the team, full-time faculty demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in this regard and indicated that their workload is distributed in such a way that they have sufficient time and resources to mentor and support associate faculty without sacrificing their own development and research. Associate faculty echoed the availability and willingness of full-time faculty to support their ongoing development. The institution takes seriously its commitment to support and develop associate faculty members and to provide students with the best faculty possible. (CFRs 3.1, 3.10)

In considering the extent to which the number of full-time faculty was sufficient, the team also considered the access to continued support and services that students receive through the division of student affairs (e.g., advising, health and wellness, community service, career service), and the fact that faculty leverage outside resources (tutor.com, etc.) to facilitate student learning. Taken together, this web of interrelationships between full-time faculty, associate

faculty, student affairs, and outside resources, allow for an agile faculty to continue to foster student success and meet students where they are. (CFR 2.13)

Additionally, faculty have developed their capacity to oversee annual assessment and program reviews. Faculty demonstrated a working knowledge of curriculum maps, and the relationship of those curriculum maps to outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels. Faculty lead rubric development and revise the end-of-course surveys to ensure they remain relevant. Faculty are not merely participants in assessment, they are partners in this work and consistently demonstrate a willingness to use data to drive decision-making that improves student performance and achievement of student learning outcomes. (CFR 2.4)

Ashford's faculty have clear ownership of program reviews, which have been expanded to include institutional comparisons. When appropriate, Ashford provides faculty with additional release time to complete program reviews. Program directors include feedback from full-time and associate faculty as a routine part of program reviews. A subcommittee of the assessment committee also completes regular assessments on a random sampling of program reviews to ensure quality and alignment with institutional expectations. Supported by an updated program review manual, the faculty senate reviews evidences of student work to ensure program review quality and consistency. (CFRs 2.4, 2.7, 3.10)

Ashford's faculty continue to ensure that there is sufficient consistency in rigor across course offerings. The Instructional Specialists—newly renamed Faculty Support and Development Associates (FSDA)—appear to be a critical part of this endeavor. In meetings with both associate and full-time faculty, the FSDAs were universally praised. The FSDAs (who are also classified as associate faculty) partner and support the work of their peers by monitoring student participation in the class, ensuring completion of assignments, and serving as a

pedagogical resource as needed. Several faculty remarked that they do not have this support structure at other institutions—FSDAs are both tied into and a part of what makes this aspect of the Ashford model unique. (CFRs 2.1, 3.1)

With respect to the faculty role in improving persistence and degree completion, faculty have demonstrated they are deeply engaged in this process. Faculty members participate on the Retention and Graduation Committee, and are leading the redesign of entry-level courses to provide a consistent introductory experience that puts students at the center. The 2014 decision to separate General Education from the College of Liberal Arts has allowed for the development, under the leadership of a dean and three program directors, of a team of faculty who are dedicated to student retention and persistence in courses identified as high enrollment and low persistence courses. Discussions with faculty revealed that they are data-driven in their understanding of retention and persistence issues, and are taking steps to ensure that students also continue to achieve course learning outcomes. (CFRs 2.2a, 3.10)

The team was able to meet with faculty leadership and was encouraged how the governance process has evolved to meet the changing needs of the faculty. The effectiveness of the committee structure was also noted, particularly in its transparency and its ability to quickly bring suggestions and ideas from general faculty forward for action at the senate level. During meetings held on site the team was able to verify that the changes made to faculty governance have strengthened it as a system and it is an emerging and valued voice in institutional decision-making (CFRs 3.7, 3.10).

Through discussions with faculty, the team was able to explore the evaluation of associate faculty. Associate faculty are evaluated based on their Instructional Quality Review (IQR), the instructional specialist score, and the end-of-course evaluation—with the IQR

carrying the most weight. The team found that when discussing with associate faculty, most were unaware of all components of their evaluation, specifically the instructional specialist score. The team found that while the instructional specialist score is confined to the mechanics of the course (e.g., posting assignments, comments, grades in a timely manner), in the past it created a perceived ambiguity between the supportive role of the instructional specialist and the evaluative nature of the score, and therefore was no longer shared with associate faculty. It was also made clear to the team that any associate faculty could request their score at any time and it would be shared with them.

Issue 4: Effectiveness of Program Review

During the time since the last team's visit, Ashford has reviewed course sequencing, resourced program reviews, and implemented tools to increase the consistency of review quality. The institution identified the need for a program review manual revision to assist faculty in the program review process. The program review manual now provides program directors with templates and examples of program review components, as well as clarifies the program review process. The faculty senate, in consultation with university administration and staff, updated both the manual and templates. By providing a clearly documented process and expectation exemplars, Ashford has empowered its faculty and program directors to identify needed changes more effectively. (CFRs 2.7, 3.10)

The faculty have actively reconsidered the sequencing of courses, both within and outside formal program review. Faculty have used a variety of measures, including faculty and student surveys, program reviews, and institutional data to confirm that courses are provided in an appropriately scaffolded sequence. Faculty work closely with student and academic support units to ensure the changes are implemented with minimal affect to students. Faculty senate

involvement has been particularly beneficial when the review has recommended curricular changes. At the time of the visit, the institution was on track to have completed over 75% of all its academic program reviews by summer 2015, with a 100% completion rate by the end of 2016. (CFR 2.6)

Changes that emerge from reviews are tracked through a structured action plan process. Including changes to curriculum and services to students, changes are recommended by the faculty, resourced by the administration, and implemented by faculty and staff. These action plans help provide accountability to ensure improvements are carried out, and help close the assessment loop. Information on how changes affect student learning and persistence is collected, and the changes themselves are then also assessed to ensure they achieved the desired outcomes. (CFRs 2.6, 2.7)

Having completed impressive amount of work on bolstering and fulfilling program reviews, there are still some areas for continued improvement. Institutional Learning Objectives (ILOs) are not yet assessed in a holistic, institution-wide manner. Although ILOs are included in program reviews and other segmented assessments of university work, Ashford has yet to develop a process for ensuring institutionally that students are learning what the institution has determined is important for them to learn. Described as an “aspirational” state, the development and implementation of a cohesive, institution-wide assessment plan of ILOs represents an important next step in Ashford’s assessment development.

Issue 5: Assessing Student Learning and Ensuring Academic Rigor

There is strong evidence that Ashford embraces the assessment culture and a core value of continuing improvement. The urgency of assessment permeates the entire organization, from the board members to faculty, from library staff to student advisers. Only in one example did the

team have concerns regarding the expectations and consistency of online discussions (academic rigor). The team found that some faculty assigned the same grade for differing levels of student contributions, and that grading rubrics were not always consistent with stated expectations.

However, the team also found that there is a university-wide faculty committee that is focusing on updating the course discussion grading rubrics. The committee is strengthening the rubrics for both qualitative and quantitative requirements and is planning to fully implement the improved rubrics into each course, allowing for adjustments as needed. Ashford faculty, staff, and administrators perceive assessment as an essential component of quality instruction, and affirm that only through relevant data can the institution know what is and what is not working in the dynamic world of online adult learners. (CFRs 2.4-2.6)

Assessment is deeply embedded in Ashford's course development and revision process. From the conceptualization of a course, assessment staff work hand in hand with faculty members and instructional designers to build in assessment tools. The Waypoint Outcomes Assessment system, broadly integrated in courses throughout the university, plays a critical role in evaluating course level student learning outcomes. Faculty (both full-time and associates) find the Waypoint system very useful in streamlining grading, facilitating feedback, and increasing instructional efficiency and effectiveness. This makes course assessment less burdensome and easily adoptable. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 4.4)

Based on the Waypoint rubrics, a course Dashboard is available for faculty to monitor student learning in a particular course, mapped against Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Faculty can view how each student is doing in his/her course, and also check historic data for tracking student progress.

Ashford also embraces external peer reviews. Course reviews through Quality Matters continue to expand in scope. Since 2013 visit, a large majority of all Ashford course have been recognized for meeting Quality Matters standards, almost all Ashford faculty have been trained as Quality Matters reviewers, and faculty from 150 institutions have participated in Ashford's Quality Matters course review. (CFR 4.4)

Ashford has enthusiastic assessment staff (11 staff members in total, including four at the Clinton, Iowa campus and seven at the San Diego campus) who serve as liaisons between the Business Technology Services group who maintain the Waypoint system and faculty. Assessment staff work closely with faculty members in course design and revision, providing assessment expertise to faculty, while responding to data requests from faculty members in course, student sub-population, and learning outcome specific inquiries. (CFRs 2.4, 4.1)

Ashford has been collecting a large quantity of data at course, program, and institutional levels, including both direct and indirect measures. Direct measures of student learning outcomes include the Waypoint rubrics and grades, ETS proficiency, an Ashford-owned critical thinking exam created in conjunction with Pearson, an information literacy assessment (SAILS), Peregrine disciplinary specific tests in the Forbes School of Business and College of Education, as required by their respective disciplinary accreditation agencies, and indirect measures included in end-of-course surveys, alumni surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the uniLOA survey. At the time of this visit, the total number of data records collected from Waypoint rubrics is 219 million. While the coverage and depth of the outcome data are not necessarily even, support personnel are able to respond to specific data requests in a quick and effective way. (CFRs 2.3, 4.1, 4.4)

Overall, the team found that Ashford is willing to test new approaches and initiatives (based on data) in order to improve instructional quality and student success. Data are used to make positive changes, and the short course cycle provides easier and more frequent opportunities for change. It is commendable that large scale initiatives were often piloted at a smaller scale (e.g., in a college first), before being implemented widely across the university's programs. Examples of initiatives included class size reduction, student success orientation, conditional admission period, and age requirement. Data from the general education capstone communication assessment, the critical thinking section of the ETS exam (external), and SAILS were used for the redevelopment of the first five entry-level general education courses. (CFRs 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

While data availability and usage can be limited and fragmented, especially around institutional level learning outcomes, Ashford's enthusiasm, determination, and tireless effort to assess and improve student learning to ensure academic rigor is to be commended. Ashford's assessment efforts have taken a more inward, reflective perspective, and a more meaningful context to situate and interpret Ashford's data in order to look outward and gain a better understanding of various peer institutions and their respective populations would be useful to the institution. (CFR 4.7)

Through the examination of the NSSE data, the team found some encouraging indications of how Ashford students compare against other institutions in terms of their academic engagement levels. For example, while Ashford student interactions are lower than its comparison groups (i.e., Plains Private, Carnegie Class, and National), and this lower interaction is understandable given the student population Ashford serves, Ashford has shown a higher level of engagement in the following areas than all of the three of its comparison groups:

- prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
- longer papers (number of papers between 6-10 pages and 11 pages or more)
- frequency of reviewing notes after class
- summarized notes after class

Additionally, Ashford students:

- rated higher quality of interactions with academic advisors, faculty, and other administrative staff
- spent more time doing community service or volunteer work
- spent more time on assigned reading
- evaluated the educational experience higher and would go to the same institution again

The team was encouraged that Ashford is actively participating in a few key higher education initiatives so it can better understand the graduation rate for the online, adult learners, develop aspiration statements of institutional research practices, and work with American Institutes for Research on a Gates Foundation project for developing different metrics. (CFR 4.7)

Issue 6: Independence of the Ashford Governing Board

Ashford is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bridgepoint Education, Inc. The relationship is maintained through the Ashford trustees as Independent Board Members and Bridgepoint Education, Inc., as the Sole Member. Ashford's president is appointed and reviewed by the Ashford Board of Trustees (board) and serves *ex officio* on the board. The annual operating and capital budget of Ashford is approved by the Ashford board and is ratified by Bridgepoint. (CFR 3.9)

Regarding the board's relationship with its parent company, Bridgepoint, the team found clear lines of authority and responsibility. The relationship is delineated in a series of operating

agreements, the most recent being the *Eighth Amended and Restated Operating Agreement*, effective January 2014. As evidenced in board minutes and reinforced during the visit, the board clearly asserts control over the academic and fiscal operations of the university. There was evidence in the board agenda and meeting minutes that the board engages with the University leadership to review and approve the annual budget. There was evidence in the board minutes and in the onsite meetings with board members that the board develops clear goals for the university relating to persistence and completion, quality assurance, and rigor. (CFRs 1.5, 3.9)

The board standing committees are Executive, Academic Affairs, Financial Audit, Financial Planning/Budgeting, and Strategic Planning. As evidenced in the Special Visit report, the Financial Planning/Budgeting Committee reviews and approves the university's annual budget and quarterly reviews, and supports the university's commitment to academic rigor through its resource allocations. The Academic Affairs Committee monitors student progression and learning outcomes. The Strategic Planning Committee is integrated into the strategic planning and management process of Ashford. As evidenced in the board minutes, standing committees have focused on academic policy, academic quality assurance, planning, institutional integrity, leadership, budgets and operations. In addition, the board has supported its development by following best practices from the Association of Governing Boards. (CFRs 3.7, 4.6)

The board has expanded the number, diversity, and strength of its trustees. At the time of the 2012 Initial Accreditation application, there were 11 trustees; at the time of the 2015 Special Visit, there were 15 members serving (out of a possible 17 maximum as specified in the operating agreement), including a new board chair appointed in 2013. The high quality of the

board members was evidenced in their biographies and from their deep experience and commitment to student success expressed during the site visit. (CFR 3.9)

The current operating agreement specifies that for any set number of total board members (e.g., 7, 11, or 15) Ashford will appoint the majority of board members and the Sole Member will appoint the remainder. While the intention of the language is to ensure the university will have the majority of board appointment, the team was concerned that board members remarked that the language was more of a policy formality than it was a practice, as they (Ashford) appoint board members more frequently, and at more than a simple majority than the Sole Owner. While the team supports the ways in which the board is operating, the operating agreement should accurately reflect those positive practices in order to ensure a unified focus on Ashford's student success. An accurate operating agreement that aligns practice with policy (see *Eighth Amended and Restated Operating Agreement*, sections 5.2 & 5.2 (a-k)) will provide Ashford with important protections in the event of organizational changes at the Sole Member (Bridgepoint). Additionally, the current language in section 5.6 (b) may want to be reviewed, as it could also put the university in a vulnerable position due to personnel changes at the Sole Member or changes affecting the priority currently being given to student success priorities (CFRs 1.5, 3.9)

SECTION III – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The team commends Ashford for their tremendous effort preparing for the Special Visit. The documents and the visit schedule were comprehensive and thorough and the rapid turnaround on additional requests was outstanding. (CFR 1.8)
- Regarding student achievement and degree completion, the team commends Ashford's commitment and energy in taking the Commission's recommendations and concerns

seriously. There is strong evidence of a sustained focus on continuous improvement in student success enabled by a culture of teamwork and evidence-based decision making.

- The team recommends that Ashford continue to strengthen alignment between the actions they take to improve student success and what they know about why their students may be leaving. (CFRs 2.10, 4.1, 4.3)
- Regarding adequacy and alignment of resources with educational purposes, we commend Ashford for continuing to increase their investment in key academic and student support areas, including full-time faculty, student affairs and student success interventions, despite declines in enrollment and revenue during the past two years.
 - The team recommends that the Ashford Board of Trustees and the president continue their commitment to student success by ensuring the continued prioritizing of academic funding. (CFR 3.5)
- Regarding adequacy of the Ashford faculty model and the role of faculty, the team commends Ashford for developing an engaged faculty culture coupled with a wide variety of student support roles and resources. There is evidence to suggest that the faculty staffing levels are appropriate for Ashford for both full-time and associate faculty.
 - The team recommends Ashford strengthen full transparency in their associate faculty evaluation processes to align with their institutional values. (CFR 3.2)
- Regarding effectiveness of program review, the team commends Ashford for completing the assessment loop through the use of action plans.
 - The team recommends that Ashford develop and implement a university-level plan for assessing institutional learning outcomes. Although it is clear this is

happening at the program level, the team recommends that this process be rolled up to the institutional level. (CFR 2.7)

- Regarding assessing student learning and academic rigor, the team commends Ashford for taking WSCUC's concerns and recommendations seriously and rallying across all levels of the institution to take appropriate action.
 - The team recommends the institution continue its diverse efforts to ensure quality and consistency of student work. (CFRs 2.5, 2.6)
- Regarding independence of the governing board, the team commends Ashford for building and effectively organizing a board whose talents, commitment and board functions are strongly aligned with Ashford's student success mission.
 - The team recommends that the next operating agreement between Ashford and Bridgepoint fully reflect the strong collegial practices that have been established between the Ashford Board of Trustees and Bridgepoint in order to continue to ensure their well-developed alignment ensuring the independent governance of Ashford. (CFRs 1.5, 3.9)
- The team commends Ashford for sharing their learnings and innovations through participation in higher education conferences and encourages them to continue seeking out like institutions and those with similar socio-economic student demographics to share best practices and more deeply develop Ashford's distinguishing characteristics. (CFRs 4.6, 4.7)