

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

SPECIAL VISIT

University of Saint Katherine

February 26-28, 2018

Team Roster

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution, its Accreditation History, as Relevant, and the Visit

The University of Saint Katherine (USK) was founded by Frank Papatheofanis, MD, PhD and incorporated on June 30, 2010 as Saint Katherine College. The institution name was changed to USK in November 2016. The California Bureau of Private Postsecondary Education approved the University for operation in 2011, but regulatory affairs have since transferred to the purview of the WASC Senior College and University Commission following its action to award initial accreditation in February 2016.

The University was originally in Encinitas, California, from 2010 to 2014, and moved to San Marcos, California, in August 2014. From its founding, the University has offered baccalaureate degrees (BA, BS) in liberal arts and sciences taught in the context of an Orthodox Christian worldview. Fourteen students enrolled in its first class in September 2011. At the time of this special visit, 142 students were enrolled in the institution. In May 2013, USK graduated its first student, and the number of graduates has grown to about 30 to date. The University has four full-time faculty members and 27 adjunct faculty. The administration team is composed of six full-time employees, including the President. USK also employs six athletic coaches who recruit and coach student athletes.

The University offers degree programs that focus on four major disciplines: BA in Arts and Humanities (with concentrations in Art, English Language and Literature, Interdisciplinary Studies, History, Music, and Orthodox Christian Theology); BA in Business Management; BS in Kinesiology (with concentrations in Health Science and Exercise Science & Sport Performance) & Health, and Exercise & Sport Performance); and BS Natural Sciences (with concentrations in

Biological Sciences and Chemistry & Biochemistry). Currently, USK occupies two buildings. The main building is composed of classrooms, library, chapel and administrative offices. This building also temporarily houses the science lab. The main building is approximately 12,000 sq. ft. The second building (6,000 sq. ft.) includes the athletic offices, an athletic training room, a dedicated study area and student commons, and additional instructional space.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

The purpose of this special site visit was to evaluate USK's progress on the three areas of concerns stated in the Commission's March 2, 2016 letter to the institution. The Commission requested that USK diversify its revenue sources, implement the strategic plan, and deploy a comprehensive enrollment plan. During the site visit, the 5-member team requested meetings with groups composed of appropriate representatives from USK and the governing board. The visit occurred at the institution's only location in San Marcos, CA, on February 27 and February 28, 2018. On February 27, various meetings were scheduled between 8:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. and ranged from 15 to 45 minutes in duration. Meetings were kept on schedule and guided by a list of questions determined in advance by the team that reflected areas of interest.

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

USK's special visit report focused on the three areas that the team primarily investigated during the visit: revenue sources, strategic plan implementation and enrollment management. The report also provided brief updates on other Commission recommendations: revenue, library and program review. USK's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, Office of Admissions, Office of Student Services, and executives in the President's cabinet contributed to the construction and assembly of the report. Staff, faculty, and administrators who contributed to

the report were invited to review the report and offer recommendation before finalization.

The report narrative was well organized, and focused on the specific recommendations identified in the Commission's letter on March 2, 2016. There were embedded links within the special visit report. Additional team-requested data and backup documentation were provided.

SECTION II – TEAMS'S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Budgeting, Income, and Continued Revenue Diversification (CFR 3.4)

“Demonstrate continued progress in diversifying the sources and increasing the amounts of revenue from sources in addition to tuition.”

USK's institutional report outlines the efforts that have been made to date to accomplish this objective. The report and interviews with University personnel confirm that USK has examined its fundraising efforts and the President continues to be the main fundraiser for the University. The University is still dependent on a small but committed group of donors that includes the President himself. The athletics department has begun fundraising efforts as well, but to date those efforts have yielded a relatively small result with \$30,000 in revenue against a 2017/2018 athletics budget of \$1,074,000.

USK has also recently engaged the services of a volunteer special assistant to the President, Dr. David Huwiler, who has a deep and broad background in higher education management. In discussions with Dr. Huwiler, the team was informed that his primary role with USK will be to assist in fundraising efforts, but a fundraising campaign of a substantive magnitude will require that the University has a goal for donors to give to. External donors are unlikely to donate simply to fund ongoing operations. If the University's planned move to Chula Vista, California, comes to fruition, Dr. Huwiler's services will be invaluable. That project is in

the early development stage, so it is too new to estimate an outcome.

USK's President engaged in a process of identifying other possibilities for additional sources of revenue which included examination of the auxiliary revenue sources of like institutions, as well as research into auxiliary revenue sources in the broader higher education community (CFR 3.4). In all, 14 sources in four categories were identified as being feasible for USK. Interviews with University personnel reveal that to date, revenue generated from these activities has been relatively small, and most are not yet implemented.

The visit team applauds USK's efforts to identify new non-tuition sources of revenue for the institution, but was unable to verify sources that to date have had a material impact.

B. Integrated Strategic Planning (CFRs 1.7, 1.8, 3.1, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 4.6)

“Implementation of the strategic plan, ensuring that it is inclusive, linked to a fully operative budgeting process, and supported by input from the institutional research office.”

In the strategic plan submitted by the institution there are 5 goals, which are then further defined by sub-lists of over 30 very broad strategic priorities. These 30 priorities are not 1) prioritized in time, 2) mapped together in defining the institutional effectiveness over time, nor 3) are they quantified in terms of their budgetary impact. Many of the sub-lists indicate that, either by direct or indirect means, there is no budgetary impact. This fact points to the lack of understanding of what is needed in a strategic plan.

Before the site visit, the team requested evidence of the progress of the strategic planning committee. The evidence produced was that the committee had not met since May 2017; as such, the USK didn't provide team requested meeting minutes from June 2017 to December 2017, and this was loosely supported in meeting with the strategic planning committee who indicated that they discuss a number of issues as a group and don't distinguish between the committees they

represent. Moreover, during the special site visit, there was a consensus that the mission outlined in the strategic plan, and the vision of the institution, was being compromised or at best shifting without conscious input from the constituents, other than the President. The focus has turned to recruiting athletes to comprise a student body. Although the special visit report indicates all institutional activities will take place in the new campus physical location, in interviews the team was told that the new site would focus on athletics.

In conversation with the members of the WSCUC steering committee, strategic planning committee and the President's cabinet (who are all the same individuals), the faculty, and the students, the findings suggest that the strategic planning process failed to include input from the faculty and other constituents. The Board reviewed the strategic plan presented to the by the President, according to the board members identified during a telephone call during the site visit. Importantly, there is no contingency plan should there be a catastrophic or unplanned event which removes the President, and no mechanism to review the performance of the President. In summary, the institution failed to follow the recommendation of the Commission in its March 2, 2016 letter: there is no linking of the operational budgeting process, and the data provided to project institutional effectiveness in student enrollments and success are unreliable.

The institution should consider embarking on a strategic planning process that charts a prioritized and streamlined institutional course, aligned with a realistic mission and vision, with timelines, budgetary items, physical space needs for education, and methods for attaining them, responsible parties, succession planning, and outcomes, that lead to its sustainability.

C. Comprehensive Enrollment Management (CFRs 2.12, 2.13, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1)

“Deployment of a comprehensive enrollment management plan with an eye to achieving diversity goals, recruiting and retaining qualified students, and providing student services in keeping with anticipated enrollment growth.”

USK’s special visit report describes a strategic enrollment management process that incorporates appropriate steps and elements of higher education enrollment management (CFR 3.4). The USK plan is built around the “entire student cycle,” and thus considers the life of a student from initial contact, to application, to admission, to matriculation, through retention and to graduation. The USK fundamental strategy is “institutional integration,” meaning enrollment growth and stability depend on the successful admission, matriculation, retention and graduation of students. Every division and office of the University has a responsibility and role to play in student success and thus stable enrollment. Oversight for USK’s Integrated Enrollment Management model is, primarily, the responsibility of the Dean of Admissions and Registrar in partnership with the President and Chief Financial Officer (CFRs 3.6, 3.7).

The evidence submitted as part of the University’s special visit report demonstrates the various tactics and strategies USK has adopted and utilized (CFR 3.4). For example, USK uses Tableau to develop benchmarking dashboard to aid comparisons with peer institutions and inform the Office of Admissions. Additional evidence includes a 2017-18 Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, sets of state-wide analytics, USK retention rates, a student success and retention plan, USK Strategic Enrollment Management Plan meeting minutes, and a MOU for psychological services.

The special visit report narrative attempts to provide a comprehensive and high-level description of the USK plan to grow and stabilize enrollment. While the narrative describes the evidence submitted, it fails to describe adequately a discernable strategy for enrollment management (CFRs 3.4, 3.6, 3.7). The narrative does not align with the 2017-18 Strategic Enrollment Management plan. The Enrollment Management plan is a marketing plan that

includes goals, yet the narrative does not indicate how progress is measured, if progress has been made or name challenges to progress. As well, beyond noting a few new student services have been developed and that a psychologist has been hired to assist with student success, the report fails to describe any effective and impactful progress in enhancing student services as a tool for retention and enrollment management. Nor does the report explain how the Student Success and Retention plan links to and supports the Strategic Enrollment Management plan (CFR 3.4).

Interviews during the team's onsite visit provided additional evidence. Interviews confirmed that enrollment management is the responsibility of the President, the Athletic Director and Dean of Admissions & Registrar. The Athletic Director and Dean of Admissions bear heavy responsibilities for recruiting and enrolling students to USK. The team is well aware of the importance of marketing the brand of a small school offering an Orthodox Christian education. USK leverages their "nationally-recognized" athletic teams as recruitment tools. The national recognition stems from two instances when the baseball team was featured in national media stories.

Interview evidence also revealed that USK utilizes recruitment strategies that target student athletes and non-athletes who want a Christian education within an 80-mile radius of the institution. Recruitment strategies included visits to targeted AVID classes in local high schools and community colleges, charter schools and home schools. USK also directly recruits to faith-based high schools across the state and the country (CFR 3.4).

Interview participants described student support services at USK as highly personalized and in development (CFR 2.13). The Dean of Students has crafted policies and procedures such as a Student Handbook and Title IX procedures. With such a small student population, faculty, coaches and administrators are able to maintain watchfulness over individuals and identify

students who may be struggling for any number of reasons. Indeed, faculty are acutely aware of time demands on their students and diligently adjust pedagogy to meet students' learning needs.

While the interviews provided additional detail about enrollment management at USK, the interviews failed to describe a concrete strategy for enrollment management. The strategy as described in the report, "institutional integration" that spans student enrollment to graduation, was never mentioned in any interview. Rather, the focus is solidly on recruitment and enrollment of student athletes. Individuals voiced concern about the ways in which the institution is currently meeting and plans to meet the learning and development needs of student athletes (CFRs 2.12, 2.13, 3.4, 3.7).

Finally, USK does not report retention rates by cohort, a format recognizable in higher education circles; rather the retention rates are reported by year, fall-to-fall. It is impossible to track a cohort of students over years to assess year-to-year retention and thus graduation. It would be helpful to USK to adopt retention tables as used by most institutions of higher education (CFR 4.1).

The team agrees that USK has failed to make progress in deployment of a comprehensive enrollment management plan with an eye to achieving diversity goals, recruiting and retaining qualified students, and providing students services in keeping with anticipated enrollment growth (CFRs 2.12, 2.13, 3.4, 3.7).

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE

In its March 2, 2016 letter to USK, the Commission made three recommendations to the institution for further development. The team's assessment of progress on these recommendations follows.

A. Additional Revenue

“Especially with WSCUC accreditation being awarded, the institution should pursue several already identified sources of additional revenue including increased enrollments matched with decreased discount rates, charitable contributions, and business alliances (CFR 3.4).”

With respect to pursuit of already identified sources of additional revenue, the team refers to the report on Special Visit Issue 1, “Budgeting, Income, and Continued Revenue Diversification” for a discussion of institutional progress on new revenue development and revenue from charitable contributions.

Enrollment at USK is rising, with new student matriculation up significantly since the institution obtained WSCUC accreditation (CFR 3.4). Fall term new student matriculants for 2015, 2016, and 2017 were 18, 59, and 74 respectively. While enrollment is rising, the team found a lack of progress in implementing a comprehensive enrollment management plan as outlined above.

Discount rates for the institution appear to have declined (CFR 3.4). The most recently available audited financial statement reveals discount rates for fiscal years ending on December 31 of 2017 and 2016 of 53.9% and 46.6%, respectively. Internal financial statements for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2018 reveal a discount rate of 37.1%, which represents a 31.2% decline year-over-year. The institution aims a target discount rate of 30.0%.

As noted, the fiscal 2017 financial results are unaudited. At the time of the site visit, the audit was not yet complete. The team interviewed the institution’s external auditors. Although they reported that the audit was progressing and that management was in all ways cooperative, their work was not at a stage where results could be reported.

Finally, financial statements for the current fiscal year were difficult to obtain.

B. Library Resources

“The institution should continue its efforts to enhance library holdings and searchable database, aligned with curricular needs, while also giving attention to strategies that ensure achievement of students' information literacy (CFR 3.5).”

During the course of interviews with USK staff, the visit team was informed that physical holdings of print materials have not increased since the institution was granted accreditation (CFR 3.5). This is in contrast to the information in the special visit report which states that USK “continues to increase its holdings of print materials.”

The institution librarian reported that the institution has negotiated an agreement with Azusa Pacific University to allow all USK students to have access to their electronic resources, which include EBSCO and JSTOR access. During the visit, the team confirmed that the new resources will be available in fall 2018.

C. Program Review

“The institution should ensure that, upon the graduation of sufficient numbers of seniors to allow for meaningful analysis, it implements its well-crafted program review protocols and uses the resulting findings for program improvement (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3).”

The institution has a program review handbook and has conducted program reviews for 3 degree programs (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3). The newly appointed Chief Academic Officer shared with the visit team that the Arts and Humanities program made structural changes based on its program review findings. However, no academic evidence can be found from the most recent two program reviews, conducted in 2017. The team believes that graduate headcounts are still too low for meaningful analysis (CFR 2.6).

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

Commendations

The team wishes to commend the institution for the following accomplishments and practices.

1. The faculty, staff, and students of the University of Saint Katherine are very committed to the institution. Their remarkable hard work for this university, especially given their multiple responsibilities, was evident in all of the team's interactions.
2. The USK focuses on students and the student experience is outstanding. The faculty, who teach in some challenging spaces, are remarkable in their willingness to adjust their pedagogy to meet the learning needs of their students.
3. The USK community treated the team with great hospitality during the visit and was very responsive to the team's requests on additional data.
4. Student services, though still a challenge given limited resources, have improved greatly in recent years with written policies characterized by best practices introduced by the Dean of Students.

Recommendations

For this special visit, the team had the task of investigating three areas of concern: revenue diversification, strategic planning, and enrollment management. In many respects, however, this visit came too soon. All three areas have not shown much progress since the last accreditation visit and some potentially transformative initiatives remain in their very early stages. The team has identified the following recommendations based on the inquiry into the three topics of the special visit.

1. Revenue diversification remains elusive. The institution should add new revenue streams.
(CFR 3.4)
2. Regular financial statements (balance sheet, profit and loss, cash flow) should be produced, shared and reviewed by the University leadership. (CFR 3.4)
3. The strategic planning process should be more inclusive of campus constituencies, including faculty. (CFR 4.6)
4. Budget allocations should be guided by the strategic plan. (CFR 4.6)
5. Data drawn from the Institutional Research Office should regularly inform the strategic and enrollment planning decisions. (CFR 4.2)
6. The enrollment management tactics should be prioritized according to a clear set of strategies and implemented accordingly. The enrollment management plan should include tactics for retention as well as recruiting. (CFR 3.4)
7. The Board should engage in development activities to create a strong culture of shared governance and to understand the responsibilities of a higher education governing board.
(CFR 3.9)