

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM  
SPECIAL VISIT

To Simpson University

Date of Visit  
October 10-11, 2018

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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.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>3</b>
A.    Description of the Institution, its Accreditation History .....	3
B.    Description of Team’s Review Process.....	4
C.    Institution’s Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence .....	5
<b>SECTION II – TEAMS’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
A.    Issue: Financial Strength and Sustainability .....	7
B.    Issue: Strategic Planning .....	13
C.    Recommendation: Use direct evidence of outcomes to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning.....	16
D.    Recommendation: Commitment to Diversity through recruitment and retention of students, faculty and staff .....	21
<b>SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE .....</b>	<b>26</b>
A.    Standard 3 .....	26
B.    Standard 4 .....	27
<b>SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW .....</b>	<b>29</b>
COMMENDATIONS .....	30
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	30
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>32</b>

## **SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of the Institution, its Accreditation History**

The institution has been in existence since 1921, named Simpson Bible Institute, and was initially based in Seattle, Washington. The mission of the Bible Institute was to support student spiritual growth and prepare missionaries for work around the world. In 1941, Simpson Bible Institute affiliated with the Christian Missionary Alliance and fourteen years later, in 1955, the campus relocated to San Francisco and was renamed Simpson Bible College. Simpson Bible College obtained its first WASC accreditation in 1969, and the college began adding new programs and broadened its offerings to add a liberal arts focus. Within two years, in 1971 they changed their name to Simpson College to reflect the growth that occurred. Finally, in 1989, the college moved to its current location, Redding, California, and in 2004, the College Board of Trustees voted to rename it Simpson University.

The University has four schools and each school offers various programs of study: School of Undergraduates (TUG); School of Nursing RN (Nursing); School of Adult and Graduate Professional Studies (SAGPS); and School of Tozer Seminary (TZ). Simpson offers 22 undergraduate and six master's degrees, in addition to several certificates. The current mission statement of the University is: *Simpson University is a Christ-centered learning community committed to developing each student in mind, faith and character for a lifetime of meaningful work and service in a constantly changing world.* A limited number of Tozer Seminary courses are offered in Woodland, CA. The institution also has an online program.

Since the initial accreditation, Simpson has struggled with meeting WSCUC standards, and in 1981 – 1990, the institution received a formal warning (1981), sanction (1983), probation (1987), sanction (1988), and warning (1990). In 1995 Simpson College received reaffirmation of

accreditation, but in 2006 and 2008, the institution received a notice of concern with reaffirmation, and in 2010 the commission removed the notice of concern. At the 2016 WSCUC visit with the evaluation team, several issues emerged, and the commission took action to place the institution on probation at the February 2017 meeting. The Commission Action Letter included two issues: 1) financial strength and sustainability, and 2) strategic planning. They further identified two recommendations for the institution: 1) Use direct outcomes to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning on a regular basis, and 2) improve diversity with recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty from diverse backgrounds and conduct training to reduce perceptions of privilege.

It is from this lens of struggling accreditation issues and recommendations that the October 2018 visiting team focused their attention. The team did not consider any substantive change follow-ups. During the visit, the team repeatedly referred to posted or printed institutional documents, their web home page, and verified/clarified assessments during face to face interviews with the Board, President, Cabinet, Chief Financial and Chief Operations Officers, Offices of Admissions and Student Development, and Committees such as Strategic Planning, Assessment/Program Review, Diversity and Retention. There was a wide representation of faculty, staff, administration and board members interviewed. The team also reviewed the confidential email account on the night prior to the visit on campus and throughout the visit.

## **B. Description of Team's Review Process**

The Special Visit team gained access to view the Simpson University Institutional Report on August 2, 2018 from the approved secure document storage ([wascsenior.account.box.com](http://wascsenior.account.box.com)) and began a review of the submitted documents to prepare the team worksheet to be used during

the teleconference meeting. The team used the Commission Action Letter, dated April 13, 2017 outlining four areas of focus. These four areas guided the team's in-depth efforts while reviewing all the evidences during preparations and eventual visit: financial sustainability, strategic planning, develop processes to measure evidence to improve teaching effectiveness and make a stronger commitment to diversity. The four members plus the WSCUC Liaison, Mark Goor, met by teleconference on September 6, 2018 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. to discuss findings, articulate follow-up questions, identify additional documents needed and construct a visitation meeting schedule with key individuals or committees. Shortly after the telephone conference, the chair, Kerry Fulcher, communicated with the ALO about additional documents requested and the supplemental tables were uploaded to box.com for the team to review. The chair also spoke by Zoom videoconferencing with the President, Provost, and ALO on September 19, 2018 and discussed the President's transition to this institution, his assuming a strong leadership role, and his impressions of the context of that specific institutional culture. They also discussed the results of previous WSCUC reviews and probationary status.

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

The team found Simpson's report to be well presented, and written with authenticity and candor. For example, the report acknowledged the "deteriorating business model," and "major leadership and staff transitions; low morale." The report was organized, neat, and covered each item discussed in the Commission Action Letter. The institution took care in providing myriad evidences and supporting exhibits. Numerous faculty, staff, and cabinet were involved in the development of the report. Evidences included the 59 page Institutional self-study, program reviews from 2017 and 2018, enrollment, retention, persistence, graduation dashboards, success

rates, and student profiles from various years, both aggregated and disaggregated reports that spoke to both success and diversity of students. There were several financial evidences with Board of Trustees financial report minutes included, plus, additional financial reports were provided as requested from the team upon the initial exhibit review. The newly revised/updated institutional strategic plan with forecasts and projections was also available for review. Evidences for program assessment included a template for programs to use annually (three annual program reviews included), and a PLO plan template. Regarding diversity in faculty, the team also reviewed dashboards on faculty disaggregated by program, rank, gender, and ethnicity. While the report was well written and included significant artifacts and evidences aligned with the issues identified in the 2017 Commission letter, the analysis and use of data to articulate and demonstrate clear and tangible improvements in strategic planning and financial sustainability was at times scant and in some areas vague. As a result, the Institutional Report gave the impression that significant work and progress had been made in the areas of policy and practice, but the overall question of whether or not this work had resulted in changes that would significantly alter the fundamental financial challenges of the university was unclear.

During its pre-visit work, the Visiting Team noted that significant leadership transitions had occurred since the last Special Visit, while some were still in process during the time in which the Institutional Report was being written, making it important to follow up on these questions and concerns during the onsite visit. In the report, the institution acknowledged there had been problems with lack of vision and over-reliance on opinion during this time, but that significant movement, changes, systems and processes have been put in place for them to conclude “Simpson is rising.”

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

There were two issues outlined in the 2017 Commission Action Letter, in which significant improvement had to occur. Additionally, two recommendations also provided specific direction for improvement. It was the four major issues, along with evaluation of Standards 3 and 4 that the Special Visit Team focused their questions and attention for the current visit. Each section defines the issue, results of the visit and the conclusions from the team.

### **A. Issue: Financial Strength and Sustainability**

The April 12, 2017 Commission Action Letter includes the following issue.

“Given concerns regarding financial stability and the turnover of staff and faculty, the President and Cabinet need to provide clarity about the strategic plan, engage the broader university with the planning process, and clearly communicate how the plan will be realized and how individuals and programs will be given responsibility for implementing key goals. (CFRs 1.7, 3.6, 3.7, 3.10, 4.5, 4.7)

### **Review of Evidence**

The WASC Special Visit team visited Simpson University on October 9-11, 2018. The team engaged with the President, the CFO, the ALO, the Dean of Students and Dean of Admissions, the Presidential Cabinet, the Strategic Planning Committee, Faculty, the WSCUC Steering Committee, the Diversity and Retention Committees, the Board, the Finance Committee, the Provost, the COO, the Assessment Committee and had a campus tour. Throughout our visit, we noted a high level of competence and engagement, and a team comprised of high integrity (CFR 3.6). We noted clear lines of authority and decision-making. In our discussions with the President, he stated that his initial impression of the team was that

they “were real good people who had not had access to decision making” in the past. He has worked to correct that issue. The clear and well-written strategic plan provided lines of authority and clarified the decision-making within the community.

Dr. Hall started at Simpson officially on June 1<sup>st</sup>, though it should be noted that even prior to his start date, he was engaged in the budget analysis and in the process of updating the existing strategic plan. He stated during our initial meetings with him that the day of our visit was his 100<sup>th</sup> work day, and the 133<sup>rd</sup> calendar day since he had arrived. Based on our discussion with him, with others on campus including the CFO and the Board, it was evident that Dr. Hall had accomplished much in those first 100 days to bring a real sense of optimism and direction to Simpson.

Simpson University’s fiscal year ends April 30. As such, the WSCUC Team was able to review the year-end audited financial statements for the fiscal period ending 2017 and a draft for the fiscal period ending April 2018 (CFR 1.7). In addition to an audit on Simpson’s financial statements, the appropriate federal compliance audit was also completed. For the period ending April 2017, the audit report was issued on August 25, 2017, indicating a clean or unmodified audit opinion. In addition, the audit of internal controls and compliance on federal funding indicated there were no items of non-compliance. This audit report was also issued on August 25, 2017.

During our visit, we were able to review the final signed copy of their audited financial statements for the period ending April 2018. The external auditors had just signed these statements. The opinion was a clean opinion, though subsequent discussion indicated that there was one minor issue with the Compliance Audit for Federal Aid. When asked about the delay in obtaining their final financial statements as compared to the year prior, we were informed that

the fires that had ravaged the area during the summer caused the delay. Individuals at Simpson had homes damaged or destroyed by these fires, and this affected the ability to complete the audit on as timely a basis as they would have liked.

## **Findings**

It was evident that the organizational structure is undergoing some changes as the new president establishes processes and procedures that work for his leadership style, and it's fair to say that after only 100 days in office, it's too soon to determine if those changes are complete or not. However, early evidence indicates an effective cabinet is in place, with individuals who have the requisite experience, education and knowledge to lead the organizations in their respective areas. The lines of authority appear straightforward and support the mission of the institution (CFR 3.7). The strategic plan has been embraced by the entire community and is being used to form the rubric against which decisions are made.

To ameliorate the budget deficit and produce positive financial sustainability, significant steps have already occurred. Budget reductions over the past two years, including the reduction in staff and faculty positions have resulted in projected savings of \$3.5M. Of that, approximately \$300k needs to be identified in the Provost's area and the Dickeson Academic Prioritization process model has guided those final decisions. The Board Finance Committee has mandated an annual balanced budget, and is meeting monthly with the CFO to measure progress. Enrollment for the 2018/19 fiscal year was greater than budgeted, and it is projected that Simpson will have a positive balance of \$65k at the end of the year (a \$1.6M positive swing over the prior year). The budget for FY 2019-2020 is being developed in a conservative manner, assuming flat enrollment, but including expenses for new programs that Simpson is developing, offset by \$40,000 in expected donations to pay for the startup expenses and savings from the Dickeson

Prioritization process. Finally, a modified zero-based budgeting approach has been put in place. While this was the first year to use such an approach, much was learned during the process that will be further refined and improved in subsequent years.

It was apparent the Simpson community has worked hard to develop a thorough strategic plan, with involvement of individuals across the campus to provide input and review. The strategic plan is well thought out, well written, with specific milestones, metrics, key performance indicators (KPIs) or tactics and includes specific financial endpoints. Accountabilities are well established and the plan has been communicated thoroughly at all levels of the organization. The strategic plan is easily accessible on Simpson's website and the accomplishment or status of individual tactics is communicated effectively to the community. Their new phrase "Simpson Rising" has rallied the institution to a new height.

The importance of the "Simpson Rising" strategic plan cannot be overstated. The President and others commented on the fact monetary and personnel resource decisions are based on the Strategic Plan. During interviews and discussions, the WSCUC Special Visit team heard and saw how employees' tasks were linked directly to the Plan. A key question internally posed to the faculty, staff and board and reiterated over again was "If you're not working on something related to the Strategic Plan, why are we doing it?"

Comparing the financial statements for the year ending April 30, 2018, to the audited financial statements for the two years ending April 30, 2016 and 2017, some financial concerns became evident during the review and interview process showing Simpson's financial condition had deteriorated in the time since WSCUC's last visit in 2016. And, as of April 30, 2018 Simpson was out of compliance on one debt covenant with their local bank around EBITA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Amortization) requirements. But the Special Visit team

recognizes that the institution has had effectively 18 months to enact major change. They received notice of probation on March 15, 2017, right before FY 2017-2018 started. This fiscal cycle saw a year of leadership search and transition, limiting the progress that could occur over that time. However, in the last 3 months prior to the 2018 Special Team visit, significant financial change has occurred.

Summarized financial data is displayed in Appendix A, table 1. Concerns specifically include:

1. Net tuition and fees have fallen 16% or \$2.4M in the past two years;
2. Total revenue has fallen approximately 10% or \$2M in the past two years;
3. Expenses have decreased by \$1.8M over that same time period, but as they were greater than revenue in 2016, the result means the institution continued deficit spending;
4. They have experienced a net loss in each of the last three years, resulting a decrease in net assets of \$3.1M or 22% from \$13.9M to \$10.8M;
5. Decreased total long term debt by approximately \$1.4M over this time, although this appears to be as a result of lower cash/investments, which decreased by \$900K over the same time period.

In addition to these findings of concern, the 2018 Special Visit team also identified reasons for optimism including updating the existing strategic plan to focus on long-term financial sustainability, the definition and use of leading and lagging metrics, measurements and accountabilities and the focus on enrollment growth through partnerships with international recruiters, local employers and partnerships with local high schools (funded via specialized grants). Further, the plan has creatively used excess capacity to provide further income, including housing scholarships to attract nearby students, renewing or making investments in

new programs – both academic and athletic – for enrollment growth. Changes to the executive leadership team have had a positive effect for the institution. During this transformation, the institution has engaged with the City of Redding and others. New programs being developed address the growing needs in the sciences and indicate a realization that the reason students chose to attend college is changing and that providing programs that lead directly to jobs will be important for the graduate of the future. This recognition is also informing decisions the University is making on budget allocations and faculty levels required.

In our discussions with individuals over the course of our visit, we found an employee base that is energized, excited, with improving morale and a real commitment to the University and to Dr. Hall. All employees were encouraged with the new direction that Simpson was taking and hopeful that the changes made and being made would yield positive results in both the short and long term if given time to work through the system. There is a sense of vibrancy and excitement as a new president and a new vision have taken hold of Simpson University.

The key question for Simpson is whether the changes that have been made have had enough time to fully realize results. While there is an anticipated 2019 year-end surplus of \$65,000 projected, this is still months away and would represent the first time in 3 years that Simpson ends its year in positive territory. From a finance perspective, it would instill greater confidence to see improved results over a sustained period. However, between the leadership changes and the commitment to the strategic plan and realistic approach to budgeting, we see great improvement across the campus that provides confidence in Simpson's future and are satisfied that they are on the course towards sustainability. The Special Visit team found the leadership team now in place is being proactive and forward thinking in addressing the changes in higher education (CFR 4.7). They clearly recognize the financial challenges they face and are

working diligently to address them quickly. They appear to be balancing well the need to reduce expenses and phase out poorly performing programs, while simultaneously investing in programs that will lead to future enrollment growth.

The 2018 Special Visit team left encouraged that Simpson University is on a path towards financial sustainability, and that the strategic plan was the document leading towards that state. Patience is needed to verify the steps being taken will yield the hoped for result, but Simpson is clearly on the right path. While much progress was made in clarifying roles and responsibilities of the management team, we would encourage Simpson to quickly name a permanent Provost and to move towards having the CFO report directly into the President. There is also some concern that the span of control exercised by the COO is too large for any one person to be truly effective in this role and perhaps this should be restructured.

## **B. Issue: Strategic Planning**

The April 12, 2017 Commission Action Letter includes the following issue.

“Simpson University’s strategic plan must also clearly articulate strategies for generating the resources necessary to support the educational mission, including enrollment and financial aid strategies, adequate faculty and staff to support the mission of the institution, and projections for net tuition revenue based on analytical models. It is critical that the Board and Executive leadership of the University provide regular and consistent information about the current year budget and budget planning for the years ahead to faculty, staff, and stakeholders.” (CFRs 1.7, 3.4, 4.6, 4.7).

## **Review of Evidence**

Strategic planning was one of two significant issues identified in the WSCUC Commission Action letter in April of 2017 that needed to be addressed. The context at the time was that the institution had experienced significant enrollment declines in Academic Year (AY) 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, which continued in AY 2017-2018. The visiting team recognized that the institution was not engaged in significant strategic planning that involved all of the stakeholders in a meaningful way. Any strategic planning that was occurring happened in silos in a distributed manner. Additionally, following the receipt of the WSCUC Commission letter, President Dummer announced that he would be stepping down as Simpson's president at the end of the AY 2017-18, initiating a presidential search and transition period. The Board took decisive actions to begin to address the financial challenges, launching a prioritization process to address immediate and longer-term issues. The Provost took leadership in working with the Simpson community on the development of a strategic plan framework involving broad participation from significant institutional stakeholders. The institution completed the strategic plan in August 2017 except for deciding metrics and personnel responsible. This progress on the development of a strategic plan slowed when the Provost resigned in February of 2018 to take a position at another university. An interim Provost was put in place and a search is currently under way to fill this position. President Hall was installed as the new President of Simpson June 1 of 2018 and the institutional report for the fall 2018 special visit was due to WSCUC at the end of July. The missing elements of the strategic plan were formalized in the summer 2018 prior to the Special team's visit in October 2018.

These leadership transitions hampered the institution's ability to complete the strategic plan and as a result, the strategic plan that was included in the institutional report, while containing viable ideas, was more of a skeletal framework that lacked the substantial detail that

was needed to determine the likelihood of it being successful in meeting the challenges faced by the institution. As President Hall became more acquainted with the institution through the summer, the institution kept providing updated information and progress reports to the Special Visit team through the WSCUC Box account.

## **Findings**

The onsite visit proved to be very beneficial in the Special Visit team's ability to assess the quality and status of the institution's strategic planning process and outcomes to date. The team was able to see a highly developed strategic plan with four areas of priority as its focus, as well as creating a byline "SIMPSON RISING." The strategic plan detailed specific goals and action steps with measurable criteria for each goal, identified resources needed for each action step, included key people needed to accomplish each action step, named the appropriate cabinet member providing oversite for each goal and established a timeframe for when each designated goal needs to be completed. It was clear that an enormous amount of work and institutional "buy in" for finalizing and implementing the strategic plan from all stakeholders had been accomplished in the short time since President Hall arrived on campus (CFRs 4.6, 4.7).

Significantly, a few of the action items from the strategic plan were able to be implemented prior to the start of the fall semester and led to higher than projected enrollment of new students and increased retention of existing students in the traditional undergraduate program, thus reversing a three-year negative trend in each of these areas. These early successes from their strategic planning efforts, plus strong leadership from President Hall has served to energize the entire Simpson community and effect a positive morale boost while ensuring a balanced budget that is projected to end in the black for the first time in three years (CFR 3.4).

Using the resources provided in the institutional report and exhibits, and during numerous on-site meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders, the concerns identified in the September 2016 WSCUC visit regarding strategic planning seem to have been addressed in the intervening time. The current Special Visit team found a centralized and coordinated planning effort with broad ownership and understanding of the strategic plan, institutional commitment to data informed decision-making and improved transparency using newly established communication channels. Additionally, there were reasonable action items with identified outcomes and assessment measures, well-developed accountability structures and a conservative, iterative, multi-year plan for budgeting, reinvestment and growth leading to projected financial and academic stability long term (CFRs 2.4, 3.7, 4.6, 4.7). Based on these findings, the Special Visit team concludes the institution has structures and processes in place that support an effective strategic planning culture (CFRs 1.7, 3.7). While it remains to be seen whether or not the strategic plan will continue to yield positive results moving forward, it was clear to the Special Visit team that the major issues previously identified related to strategic planning have been addressed and a very optimistic culture now exists at Simpson under new leadership.

**C. Recommendation: Use direct evidence of outcomes to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning**

The April 13, 2017 Commission Action Letter includes the following recommendation.

“While Simpson University has a foundation for regularly assessing and improving student learning, it is essential for the institution and its programs to develop further the capacity and processes to use direct evidence of outcomes to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning on a regular basis. (CFRs 2.6, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6)”

**Review of Evidence**

The Special Visit team reviewed various evidences as well as conducted interviews to form conclusions on the stated recommendation. The 2016 Report of the WSCUC Special Visit team, specifically pages 12, 23 and 26-27, as well as the 2018 Institutional Special Visit report, Appendices 58, 59, 60, and 61, provided rich data for analysis. Included in the review were the 2017 Tozer Program Annual Report (Master of Divinity) and 2018 Adult Studies/ASPIRE All Majors Program Annual Report. The team also reviewed Assessment Committee minutes, 2017 and 2018 Organizational Charts for Academic Affairs, Academic Dashboards, and reports on Faculty Profiles. Finally, the team reviewed a handout provided from Provost Council dated May 2018.

## **Findings**

Most of the annual program reports were submitted for review. In addition to the assessment of learning outcomes (one PLO and one ILO), some of the annual programs reports now examine student enrollment and faculty instructional load, plan for changes in staffing levels and course offerings, and present budget requests and recommendations. There is an Assessment Committee in charge of creating systems, monitoring reviews, and creating reports. They describe in the report that there is a significant amount yet to do regarding assessment.

The Special Visit team found assessment quality varies widely by program. For example, the 2018 Annual Program Report for the Adult Studies/ASPIRE programs contains an excellent narrative by the Dean of School of Adult and Graduate Professional Studies addressing many of the issues she is facing because of the merger of the School of Adult Studies with the School of Graduate Professional Studies. During the two years since the merger of the two schools, the Dean has become aware of a number of significant problems with the ASPIRE programs, most significantly in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. She also noted “many years’

of neglect of attention to basic details in overall program administration and governance.” In terms of program assessment, the Dean noted “reports that had been submitted for previous years included little, if any, meaningful data and virtually no analysis.” The Dean has done an admirable job over the past two years of addressing some of these issues, but needs full-time faculty support to provide the oversight to ensure educational effectiveness, including the capacity to conduct the annual program assessments and eventually cyclical program reviews for all of the ASPIRE programs.

As recommended in the 2016 Team Report, the next major step for Simpson was to articulate a program review process that incorporated the annual reports and other data sets in evaluating the effectiveness of the programs. One action by the institution to aid with evaluating effectiveness of programs was to consider multiple products. They settled on Taskstream to collect and store data used in program review (CFR 4.1). The institution continues to learn about program review but still needs formal training on the conduct. For example, during interviews with the Assessment Committee, they reported conducting annual program reviews since the 2014-2015 academic year yet were actually describing annual program assessment (CFR 4.5). When asked about training in program review the committee indicated they have not done comprehensive training. Training will be especially important given that many directors or faculty have only recently joined the institution (many less than two years in their position). Since the institution provides training monies each year (\$1200/person), faculty should be able to attend conferences on the conduct of full program reviews. The 2018 Simpson Special Visit Report (p. 47) acknowledges that the institution is planning to revise the nascent program review process to one that will operate on a 5 year cycle with the first program review reports planned for 2019-20. As part of the model development, the Simpson assessment committee plans to

review best practices in program review in its revision, including the guidelines outlined by WSCUC.

Except for the nursing and teacher credentialing programs, the institution is just beginning to consider how they should engage appropriate stakeholders, including alumni, employers, practitioners, students, and others in the assessment and alignment of educational programs (CFR 4.5). In addition, Simpson still does not engage external reviewers to evaluate the PLOs, graduation and retention rates, benchmarking results, evidence from appropriate stakeholders including alumni and employers, which are all part of an effective program review process (CFR 2.7). Review of Assessment Committee minutes for the two years indicates that the nascent assessment committee does not yet provide feedback on the quality of outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, benchmarking results and assessment feedback. Lastly, the Assessment Committee, which consists mainly of administrators rather than faculty, manages the assessment process while individual schools manage the curriculum development and revision process.. The curriculum development and assessment process, particularly program review, should be faculty-driven and generate evidence as to the comparability of outcomes between programs delivered online and on-campus and between those programs offered in both TUG and ASPIRE (CFRs 2.4, 4.4, 4.5). Integrity is normally ensured through multiple levels of curriculum oversight, program review, and other processes to assess student achievement. The Provost's Council provides oversight for curriculum development and approval; and the new Assessment Committee provides leadership in the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of assessment results and on-going administration of campus-wide assessment activities. To achieve mature assessment functions, curriculum development and revision should be more clearly linked to program assessment and review.

## **Faculty Sufficiency**

The institution acknowledged that non-traditional programs are primarily staffed by adjunct faculty, although each program utilizes full-time faculty from traditional undergraduate programs. They also acknowledged that there remains a need for greater full-time faculty involvement, as mentioned regarding non-traditional program reviews, and this will be addressed (2017 Response to the Special Visit team Report).

The Special Visit team concluded that Simpson does not deploy sufficient qualified full-time faculty to provide collective responsibility for the development and evaluation of the online curriculum offered by the School of Adult and Graduate Professional Studies. The A.W. Tozer Theological Seminary has zero full-time faculty and only one full-time administrative faculty (who is also the Dean and Interim Provost) devoted to two graduate degrees: (1) Master of Divinity, and (2) Master of Arts in Ministry leadership. The School of Adult and Graduate Professional Studies does not have any full-time faculty beyond the School Dean assigned to provide oversight for the ASPIRE programs and lead select graduate programs (i.e., the Organizational Leadership program).

In addition, the 2018 Simpson Special Visit Institutional report acknowledges that “throughout the previous three years (2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018), various full-time faculty positions have been put on hold after being vacated, and three filled positions were eliminated and this resulted in an overall decrease of nine full-time faculty: from 51 faculty in fall 2015 to 42 in fall 2017.” Administration conducted another series of faculty reductions in 2018 that resulted in a reduction from 42 faculty lines to 35 faculty for fall 2018. The breakdown includes: (1) 32 full-time faculty members assigned to the School of Traditional Undergraduate Studies (2) two full-time faculty members assigned to the School of Education,

(3) one full-time faculty member (MA in Counseling Psychology program) assigned to the School of Adult and Professional Studies, and (4) zero full-time faculty assigned to the A.W. Tozer Theological Seminary. To balance the budget for 2019-2020, Simpson plans to identify another four faculty lines by spring 2019 to cut for the following year.

The 2016, 2017 and 2018 reductions in personnel appear to compromise Simpson's capacity. While many more staff than faculty appear to have been let go, the loss of any faculty makes strategic faculty hiring imperative to foster a balance of faculty credentials appropriate for the various degree levels within the institution (CFR 3.1).

### **Conclusions about Simpson's Progress Concerning Educational Effectiveness**

#### **Program Review**

The team recommends (1) the hiring or redeployment of full-time faculty to ensure that ASPIRE and all graduate programs are staffed with sufficient numbers of faculty qualified for programs that are offered. (CFR 2.1; CFR 2.2b); and (2) Develop and implement a systematic program review process for all programs using the WSCUC program review resource guidelines; and complete the program review on a select number of undergraduate and graduate programs within two years. In addition, the assessment committee should be expanded to include full-time faculty that are appropriately trained. (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5)

#### **D. Recommendation: Commitment to Diversity through recruitment and retention of students, faculty and staff**

The April 13, 2017 Commission Action Letter includes the following recommendation.

“Simpson University is urged to make a stronger commitment to diversity through recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff. (CFR 1.4)”

#### **Review of Evidence**

The team reviewed a variety of documents uploaded to the shared space (Box.com) and noted that a lack of enrollment of diverse students was not the issue for the recommendation by the previous Special Visit team back in 2016. When comparing diversity statistics, for traditional undergraduate students, Simpson actually had better diversity statistics for enrollment when compared to their city, their county, CA State, and U.S., (see Appendix B, table 2, comparing diversity statistics for Simpson). What the previous Special Visit team concluded was “there is a general lack of vision or direction on defining goals, developing strategies, and determining how to measure success...and no student representatives on the Diversity Committee” (p. 10).

## **Findings**

There is clear direction from leadership regarding recruitment of diverse students, faculty, and staff. To help achieve these goals, the Diversity Committee partnered with Retention Committee to address concerns of the 2016 visiting team and the WSCUC Commission Action letter, and strategized how to improve in these areas. The institution has responded quickly to the 2017 Commission Action Letter and has made significant strides to include a diversity initiative in their strategic plan. The institution placed priority designation and added a statement of inclusion in their strategic plan, “We affirm that everyone – regardless of race, gender, physical ability or socioeconomic status – is fearfully and wonderfully made by God. Our changing social and cultural environment necessitates that we are environmentally engaged through the lens of our Christian faith.” A first strategy was to contract with Ruffalo Noel Levitz to help create a plan to increase **enrollment of diverse students**. Enrollments began to improve slightly, but stalled when sudden personnel changes in admission leadership occurred. The projected five-year enrollment forecast was 496 (5 year Forecast in Appendices).

The institution has actually superseded the forecasted enrollment, as on the official 10<sup>th</sup> day census for fall 2018, the TUG was 540 (see 2018 Census Reports). Total Graduate Programs enrollment is lower than previous years.

The University has created a complete enrollment dashboard for each program, disaggregated by enrollments, retention, graduation, and transfers in. They are now analyzing annual data in aggregated dashboard for each of the schools as well as disaggregated form within each school. Results document retention in years 4, 5, and 6 improved steadily over a five-year period while 1<sup>st</sup> year retention decreased for many ethnicities while blacks, multiple ethnicity, and unknown race categories, showed significantly higher retention rates (see Dashboard 2018\_TRA Retention). President Hall happily reported that they just calculated the fall 2018 total enrollment of 834, and that they beat their target enrollment for Traditional UG, which is an improvement over past years. This trend is significant since they have not had the benefit of a full year cycle under the new leadership and yet the enrollment has improved with the new recruitment activities and strategic plan.

The institution has begun training staff to help with marketing, establishing benchmarks, following up leads, and recruiting students of diverse students (Institutional report, p. 29, 44). The institution has also developed a plan to recruit international students and has established relationships with seven firms (Institutional Report, p. 30). Recruitment of international students is in full swing, and has already provided a positive return on investment. During onsite interviews the team discovered Simpson has established a relationship with three additional contracts for international recruiting, making the total now stand at 10 firms. Coaches are now also able to recruit internationally, which should also impact diversity of the student body. An additional action of the recruitment plan was to increase visibility of available scholarships on

the University index page and this has been accomplished. The Dean of Student Development and Dean of Admissions work in tandem to create additional strategies to increase admission and retention and they are responsible for conducting training sessions for staff. Their focus has shifted from smaller events (i.e., facilitating strike-teams in the community) to larger events.

The Office of Admissions has measurable goals featured in the strategic plan, and they are meeting those goals (i.e., decreasing review of applications from three weeks to three days, and increasing enrollments). Their marketing strategy is clearer and the office personnel have recently articulated one of the reasons students come to Simpson is for the outdoor experience and natural beauty Shasta County has to offer. They are communicating this outdoor experience more clearly during recruitment strategies. Another strategy to increase enrollment of diverse individuals learned through our interviews is to move towards “open enrollment,” where students of a different faith are also considered for admission based on other institutional fit parameters.

According to the Dean of Students, Student Development reduced staffing in the Wellness Center during the recent downsizing from two wellness counselors to one counselor. In order to compensate for the loss of service, the Wellness Center is working to establish partnerships in the community and are developing a referral network for additional student support. They recognize as the institution admits more diverse populations with different needs, the load for counseling services will increase and will need to be addressed internally.

To address **retention** of diverse students, the institution created a five-year retention plan which included augmentation of co-curricular activities to increase student participation, increase contentment, and generate revenue (Institutional report, p. 31) (CFRs 3.4, 3.6, 4.6, 4.7). They continue to conduct and analyze results from student satisfaction inventories, and follow Ruffalo Noel Levitz suggestions from the consultation visits made earlier this year. A newly

reestablished “Retention Committee” is in charge of coordinating retention activities on campus. This committee, in conjunction with the Diversity Committee, is working synergistically to increase the efforts and identify strategies that they can collaboratively implement. They see the Retention/Diversity combined Committee as a natural relationship and they seem to be encouraged working with each other. During interviews, the combined committee reported that previously they had ideas but never had resources to implement them whereas now they have been given resources stemming from the strategic plan and are empowered to enact ideas.

Creative strategies to increase retention include engaging students to use social media to encourage their friends to come to registration events and during their first year on campus, the institution now has students write out a four-year plan that helps them think of themselves being at Simpson for all four years. Additionally, the institution has spent significant attention to augmenting or developing programs or initiatives such as: 1) ASPIRE program for working adults, 2) not requiring a deposit for continuing student registration (p. 33, 34), and 3) creating a loyalty scholarship for returning students. These actions have resulted in ameliorating the impact of tuition increase and improving retention of returning students. To encourage students to return, the institution made infrastructure upgrades on campus such as placing advanced Wi-Fi in student halls and upgrading technology in the Music department classrooms (CFR 3.5). The 2018 Special Visit team verified these activities and the significant improvements in strategic planning for diversity that has occurred. (CFRs 1.7, 3.4, 4.1)

Regarding a **diversity initiative for faculty**, the institution also has created a custom dashboard on faculty. The dashboard is disaggregated by rank, gender, diversity, degree earned and status (see BOT Academic Dashboard in exhibits). The institutional report indicated they had hired three new faculty from diverse backgrounds since the last visit, however during

interviews, the Special Visit team learned they had added an additional two more faculty from diverse backgrounds, making a total five new diverse hires in a short amount of time, especially in a time when faculty positions are being closed.

## **SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE**

### **A. Standard 3**

The 2017 WSCUC Commission Action Letter stated Simpson was out of compliance with Standard 3. More specifically, CFR 3.4 which states

“The institution is financially stable and has unqualified independent financial audits and resources sufficient to ensure long-term viability. Resource planning and development include realistic budgeting, enrollment management and diversification of revenue sources. Resource planning is integrated with all other institutional planning. Resources are aligned with educational purposes and objectives.”

Simpson University has indicated they have made progress of turning around their financial situation even though they have had operating deficits for the past three years (FY 2016, 2017 and 2018). However, in the current year, through budget reductions and some increases in enrollment, Simpson has forecasted a nominal operating surplus by year-end. Simpson does have a plan for working their way out of the past few years of deficit spending, which is well documented within their Simpson Rising strategic plan. The plan includes investing in new mission centric revenue generating programs (both academic and co-curricular), while at the same time reducing expenses in those areas that are no longer showing positive cash flow (CFR 3.4). Additionally, Simpson is thinking creatively on how to use existing resources to maximize return (i.e. housing scholarships) and discussing beneficial partnerships with the city of Redding and other local college campuses. They are balancing both the reduction of expenses

and resources that are not generating a positive return, while at the same time investing in what they hope to be the drivers of future revenue growth.

It does not appear, based on their independently audited and unqualified financial statements, that Simpson could sustain financial losses much longer. It is therefore imperative that they achieve their current plans to grow out of their financial situation. The WSCUC Special Visit team has confidence in the ability of the management and leadership of Simpson to do so. The team would like every opportunity for Simpson to demonstrate that the changes made will yield sustainable results.

## **B. Standard 4**

The 2017 WSCUC Commission Action Letter stated Simpson was non-compliant in regards to Standard 4. The specific Standard 4 CFRs cited in the non-compliance section of the Commission letter were CFRs 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7 with the major theme of non-compliance in “strategic planning” and “financial strength and sustainability.” Two additional Standard 4 CFRs, CFR 4.1 and CFR 4.3, were mentioned in the commission letter under “Further Recommendations” which were primarily concerned about developing capacity around the use of assessment of student learning to ensure educational quality.

Through the Institutional report and the onsite visit, the Special Visit team evaluated the Simpson’s progress in the areas of broad and regular involvement of stakeholders in assessment of academic programs (CFR 4.5). The team also evaluated their strategic planning, looking for broad stakeholder involvement in institutional reflection and planning decisions based on data and evidence (CFR4.6). Additionally, the team verified institutional alignment of mission, resources, and planning based on the internal and external higher education contexts (CFR4.7). It was clear to the Special Visit team that Simpson had implemented a process that involved

comprehensive participation in setting up the foundations for an ongoing assessment culture. They have spent significant time identifying institutional learning outcomes (ILOs), program learning outcomes (PLOs) and course learning outcomes (CLOs) and framing these within a developing multi-year assessment plan. Each program has annual assessment plans with signature assignments to assess course and program learning outcomes. The Special Visit team also met with an active Assessment Committee. While they do undergo annual program evaluations, they have not yet developed an actual program review process, though they have indicated intentions to complete this by AY19-20. There is clearly still significant room for development with their processes and systems, especially in the area of program review, however, they have built enough of a foundation for this growth and a culture that is committed to using data for continuous improvement that the Special Visit team agreed that significant progress had been made in this area (CFR4.5).

Likewise, as detailed in the section of the Special Visit team report on strategic planning, there was sufficient and significant evidence that Simpson had seriously addressed the expectations of Standard 4 contained in CFR4.6 and 4.7. Simpson has shifted its planning culture to a commitment to evidence based learning and data informed decision-making. They have employed the services of several external consultants to help them in this process including strategic enrollment planning with Ruffalo Noel Levitz, academic prioritization using the Dickeson model, and international recruiting firms to name a few. They have centralized their strategic planning process and put cascading communication systems in place so that all areas of the university are kept informed and working together towards their common goals. They have moved to a five-year forecast model for revenues and expenses that is annually adjusted and transparently available for all units of the university to access.

Finally, the other Standard 4 CFRs that were mentioned in the “Further Recommendations” section of the Commission letter were also evaluated by the Special Visit Team. These areas are concerned with comprehensive participation in quality assurance efforts of the institution and its commitment to using assessment and data to improve the institution and student learning (CFRs 4.1, 4.3). The Special Visit Team read and witnessed ample evidence to support their impression that a major transformation had taken place in the institutional commitment to collaboratively collect, analyze and use data to inform their strategic decision making efforts as well as improvement of academic programs and student learning. There are still some areas that need improvement and are addressed in other sections of this report, but taken together, the Special Visit team was convinced that Simpson has made significant progress on the Standard 4 issues that were present at the time of the 2016 Special Visit.

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

At the close of the visit, the 2018 Special Visit team met to agree on commendations and recommendations. The team chair, Dr Kerry Fulcher, met privately with President Hall and communicated the findings, highlighted areas where the institution is doing extremely well, and provided areas for growth as reflected in the recommendations area. Following this private meeting, the team chair, surrounded by the Special Visit team members and WSCUC Liaison Mark Goor, reported the commendations and recommendations to the faculty, staff, cabinet, President, and Board of Trustees. At the conclusion of the report, the Special Visit team and WSCUC liaison left the campus.

From our visit, it was apparent that all decisions emanating from strategic plan are centered on the sustainability and viability of Simpson University’s long-term enrollment and

financial picture. It appeared that all members of the leadership team, as well as the Board, had a desire to ensure the sustainability of the institution and a commitment to the long lasting mission of the school. This is a time of dramatic change and challenge for Simpson, and the committed leaders and other community members are facing those challenges with well thought out plans, and are working hard to implement them. While the proper foundations seem to have been put in place, Simpson needs time to fully implement the plans and strategies outlined in the strategic plan in order to see if they will be successful.

## **COMMENDATIONS**

The team commended Simpson University for the following:

1. Developing a strategic plan that is universally understood throughout the organization and which is becoming embedded in all functions and for all decisions.
2. Demonstrating an institution wide, serious engagement with issues contained in the commission action letter.
3. Nurturing a dedicated and sacrificial community committed to the success and well-being of the institution.
4. Creating a transparent, effective, and efficient communication system that cascades throughout the entire institution that informs all stakeholders.
5. Installing a visionary and creative leader by the board of trustees; rapidly articulating a vision for evidence based decision making and mobilization of the leadership team by the president; for embracing this new direction to achieve the mission of Simpson University by the leadership team, faculty and staff.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The team identified the following three recommendations for on-going and future efforts:

1. Continue to implement the existing strategic plan to monitor and strengthen the financial position of the institution, with a special emphasis on growing enrollment in net revenue producing programs and increasing revenue from non-tuition dependent sources. Prioritize the use of limited resources to areas that strengthen the mission of the

institution. Continue to use financial and non-financial metrics to monitor progress. (CFR 3.4, CFR 4.6)

2. Develop and implement a systematic program review process for all programs using the WSCUC program review resource guidelines; and complete the program review on a select number of undergraduate and graduate programs within two years. In addition, the assessment committee should be expanded to include full-time faculty that are appropriately trained. (CFR 2.7, CFR 4.1, CFR 4.3, CFR 4.5)
3. Ensure sufficient number and appropriately trained FT faculty are in place to cover all active programs, particularly adult and graduate programs (CFR 2.2b, CFR 3.1)

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

**Table 1. Summary of Simpson University Financial Statements**

\$'s in 000's	April 2018	April 2017	April 2016
Net Tuition and Fees	\$12,382	\$13,558	\$14,811
Total Revenue	\$18,218	\$19,585	\$20,245
Total Expenses	\$19,756	\$19,829	\$21,515
Change in Net Assets	\$(1,538)	\$(244)	\$(1,270)
Total Net Assets – BOY	\$12,377	\$12,617	\$13,887
Total Net Assets - EOY	\$10,835	\$12,373	\$12,617
Total Cash + Investments	\$9,842	\$11,062	\$10,771
Total Long Term Debt	\$21,020	\$21,512	\$22,430

## Appendix B

Table 2. Traditional Undergraduate Diversity Statistics by Institution, City, County, State, and U.S.

	Whites	Hispanics	Black/AA	Asians
Simpson 2014	61%	14%	3%	5%
Simpson 2017	57%	18%	4%	6%
Simpson 2018	51%	20.9%	4%	6%
Redding	79%	9.4%	1.4%	4.8%
County	79%	10.1%	1.1%	3.1%
California	37.2%	39.1%	6.5%	15.2%
U.S.	60.7%	18.1%	13.4%	5.8%

Simpson University stats: Dashboard 2018\_UG Percents.pdf found in box.com

Redding City stats: US Census Bureau 2017 for Redding

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/reddingcitycalifornia,shastacountycalifornia,ca,US/PST045217>

County stats: US Census Bureau 2017 for Shasta County

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/shastacountycalifornia,ca,US/PST045217>

California stats: US Census Bureau 2017 for California

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ca,US/PST045217>

U.S. stats: US Census Bureau 2017 for the U.S.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217>