

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

Seeking Accreditation Visit 4 (SAV4)

To Meridian University

November 16 - 19, 2016

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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.

Contents

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT.....	4
A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, and Visit.....	4
Accreditation History.....	5
Summary of Special Report Issues	6
B. Description of Team’s Review Process	7
Institution’s Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of Report and Evidence.....	7
SECTION II – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS 9	
A. Issue #1: Diversity.....	9
Team Recommendation:	9
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	9
Conclusions about Progress:	9
Evidence Reviewed:.....	10
B. Issue #2: External Review, Consultation, and Environmental Scanning.....	10
Team Recommendation:	10
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	10
Evidence Reviewed:.....	11
C. Issue #3: Culture of Scholarship	12
Team Recommendation:	12
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	12
Evidence Reviewed:.....	13
D. Issue #4: Faculty Resource Ratios	13
Team Recommendation:	13
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	13
Conclusions about Progress:	14
Evidence Reviewed:.....	15
E. Issue #5: Core Administrative Function Sustainability.....	15
Team Recommendation:	15
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	15
Conclusions about Progress:	16
Evidence Reviewed:.....	17

F. Issue #6: Collaborative Implementation of Prioritized & Resourced Plans	17
Team Recommendation:	17
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	17
Conclusions about Progress:	18
Evidence Reviewed:.....	18
G. Issue #7: Evidence Based Decision Making	18
Team Recommendation:	18
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	19
Conclusions about Progress:	21
Evidence Reviewed:.....	21
H. Issue #8: Shared Governance	22
Team Recommendation:	22
Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:.....	22
Conclusions about Progress:	22
Evidence Reviewed:.....	23
SECTION III – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF STANDARDS.....	23
Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives.....	23
Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions	23
Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to	24
Ensure Quality and Sustainability.....	24
Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement	25
SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	26

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, and Visit

Meridian University (Meridian) began offering psychology programs in October 1993, after obtaining the State of California’s Council for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (CPPVE) approval. Meridian currently offers three doctoral level programs: PsyD Clinical Psychology (Implemented in 2003 on-site and 2011 blended), PhD Psychology (Implemented 1993 on-site and 2011 blended), and EdD Education in Organizational Leadership (Implemented in 2014). Four masters level programs are offered: MA Psychology, MA Counseling Psychology (Implemented in 1993), MEd Educational Leadership (Implemented in 2014 on-site and blended), and MBA Creative Enterprise (implemented in 2014 on-site and blended). A variety of concentration options are offered at both the masters and doctoral levels.

Located 30 miles north of San Francisco, the university’s Petaluma location houses the administrative offices. Four of the seven degree programs, M.A. in Psychology, M.A. in Counseling Psychology, Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology, and Ph.D. in Psychology are offered at the Petaluma Center and also at nearby retreat centers. Two education programs, M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership are offered exclusively at the nearby retreat centers. The Integral MBA in Creative Enterprise is offered at the Oakland Center and nearby retreat centers. The Oakland Center is located in uptown Oakland at a facility known as the Impact Oakland Hub, which is a member-based co-working space and event venue, and is considered significant for its diversity outreach potential. Nearby retreat centers include the Angela Center in Santa Rosa (21 miles from the Petaluma campus), utilized twice per year for week long residencies, and the Santa Sabina Center in San Rafael (22 miles from the Petaluma campus). Although classes have been held in the past at the Marconi Center in Marshall, California (26 miles from the Petaluma campus), no classes are scheduled there at the time of the visit.

The guiding mission and vision statement indicates that Meridian “seeks to educate leaders with the capacities, skills, and knowledge essential for transforming the professions of Psychology, Business, and Education. The leadership capacities of courage, compassion, clarity, conscience, and embodied self-awareness, together constitute the *wisdom and integrity* required for transforming the professions and the wider culture.” Transformative learning is central to these intentions, characterized by Meridian as intrapersonal perceptual shifts in areas such core beliefs, schemas, and mindsets.

Courses are delivered in either ‘monthly’ or ‘blended’ formats, utilizing cohort structures to support transformative experiences. While both formats employ online learning elements, the monthly format offers more frequent face-to-face hours than the blended format’s two week-long residential sessions per academic year. All online coursework is primarily asynchronous; synchronous online work is not required. Faculty turnaround time for student work is reported at two to thirty working days (2016-17 Academic Catalog, p. 6), a periodicity confirmed by student report.

Except for two education degrees, which are delivered exclusively in the blended modality, all programs are delivered in two modalities, face-to-face (monthly) and blended. There are currently no 100% online programs offered at Meridian.

According to website postings on student success, the MFT program boasts higher than average licensure pass rates for written (82% compared to the State-wide average of 60%) and oral (92% compared to the State-wide average of 80%) exams. Likewise, Board of Psychology licensure pass rates are reported at 63% compared to the State-wide rate of 60% (Examination for the Professional Practice of Psychology) and 90% compared to the State-wide rate of 84% (California Psychology Supplemental Examination).

Meridian reports a current enrollment, as of November 2, 2016, of 107 students with 72.5 FTE. Enrollment has fluctuated over the past ten years, with a high headcount for coursework students at 64 in 2006 to a low of 27 in 2012. Headcounts for both coursework and continuation students in those same years varied between 160 in 2006 and 79 in 2012.

Student retention, graduation, and completion rates are available online. A more detailed ‘fact sheet’ is also available online, which reports first and second year retention rates ranging between 80 and 100% for Psychology, 79 and 100% for Education, and 50 and 100% for Business in 2013-2014.

Completion and placement rates, salary ranges, and licensing pass rates as applicable are posted for: Masters in Psychology (100% in 2013 and 2014), Masters in Counseling Psychology (69% in 2013 and 91% in 2014), Psy.D. in Psychology (50% in 2013 and 2014), and Ph.D. in Psychology (60% in 2013 and 50% in 2014). Low rates are attributed to small student populations and the institution’s current unaccredited status. The MBA program is expected to yield its first graduate by the end of December, 2016, with the first Ed.D students completing during the 2017 academic year. Although completion rates are updated annually at the end of each academic year, additional entries will be updated for the newer programs as follows: M.Ed in November 2016, MBA in December 2016, and Ed.D in November 2017.

In January 2015, Meridian converted from a privately held for-profit corporation to a for-profit public benefit corporation. Meridian’s owners, faculty, and staff have expressed an interest and intention toward becoming an employee owned entity as its enrollments increase and it achieves greater financial success.

Accreditation History

An initial application for WASC eligibility was submitted in 2009, deferred pending additional information until early 2010, with 4 years of eligibility was granted later that same year. In September 2011, eligibility to apply for candidacy was restored. The first Capacity and Preparatory Review visit was held in 2012, which resulted in an extension on the EER visit pending responses to various recommendations. Following the 2014 EER visit, action was deferred until after a spring 2015 Special Visit to focus on CFR compliance. The new MBA

degree program was approved by an Eligibility Review Committee in 2014. After a 2015 combined Special Visit and Seeking Accreditation Visit 3, Candidacy was granted for 5 years. Early in 2016, the Seeking Accreditation Visit 4 was moved up from spring 2017 to fall 2016.

Meridian, along with other non-accredited degree granting institutions, is currently under notice from the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education that it must achieve regional accreditation candidacy or pre-accreditation by July 1, 2017, and full accreditation by July 1, 2020, or begin teaching out and closing its degree programs.

Summary of Special Report Issues

According to Meridian's July 15, 2015 Commission report, and in accordance with WSCUC review protocols, the current review and visit focused only on "...those issues identified under each Standard... deemed to require additional development." This team report, therefore, is organized first around the recommendations, followed by Standard specific summaries.

The '2015 Special Visit/Seeking Accreditation Visit 3' recommendations included:

1. Establish and implement clear, specific and robust strategies for achieving diversity targets at all levels, from students to Board members (CFR 1.4).
2. Move beyond self-reference and expanding evaluation of institutional performance by building external peer review, consultation and environmental scanning into all evaluation and planning (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7).
3. Create a clear and substantial culture of scholarship reflective of masters and doctoral level studies, including clearly articulated expectations of and support for faculty research and publication in their recruitment, evaluation and retention (CFRs 2.2b, 2.8, 2.9).
4. Meridian's educational model is highly resource intensive and difficult to expand without compromising the integrity of their programs. The institution must increase the number of qualified, diverse faculty, consistent with student enrollment growth, to sustain the personal intensity that characterizes the Meridian student experience (CFR 3.1).
5. Build capacity in core functions of university administration to ensure effectiveness and sustainability as the university expands (CFRs 3.1, 3.8).
6. Ensure that the implementation of existing plans is integrated and coherent; includes a regular process for selecting action items among competing priorities; explicitly informs budget, facilities and human resource allocations; is regularly evaluated; and engages Meridian constituents (CFRs 3.4, 4.5, 4.6).
7. Continue to build capacity in and the practice of decision making that is demonstrably informed by sound evidence.
 - This capacity will be particularly critical in evaluating assumptions that guide and strategies for sustainable enrollment growth (CFRs 3.4, 3.7).

- Evidence-based, institutional decision making will also depend, in part, on investing in technology and institutional research to support aggregate and consolidated data management and analysis (CFRs 3.1, 3.5, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2).
8. Continue to develop meaningful and systematic faculty participation in shared governance, moving beyond consultation to collective responsibility for curriculum (CFRs 2.4, 3.10).

B. Description of Team's Review Process

As a means to verify and assess the institution's analysis and conclusions about progress with Commission recommendations, the team thoroughly reviewed the June 2015 SAV 3 Team Report and the June 2015 SAV 3 Commission letter; Meridian's Fall 2016 Institutional SAV 4 report; documents provided by Meridian as well as additional documents requested for review; and conducted interviews with faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni, and Board of Trustees' members. In addition to institutional evidence, the evaluation team referred to WASC guidelines and reviewed the confidential email account, which had been made available to Meridian's communities on October 27, 2016.

Institution's Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of Report and Evidence

Meridian's 2016 SAV4 report was well organized around the 2013 Standards and Criteria for Review as well as the Commission's 2015 recommendations, and was accompanied by approximately 155 evidentiary documents.

The report organization demonstrated Meridian's awareness of the Standards and responsiveness to prior evaluation team recommendations. Its officers report understanding how to scale operations across institutional functions, and Meridian contracts professionals for services, as needed, to augment its lean staff. The infrastructure and institutional capacity was evidenced by timely reports, on-site updates, and the demonstration of processes and procedures in compliance with the Standards (CFR 3.4, 3.5).

Meridian's SAV 4 report, which accurately reflected the institution's current status, emphasized the difference between 'assessment as learning' and 'assessment of learning', indicating that the assessment process itself is experienced as an important form of learning. In that fashion, the report conveyed a sense that Meridian is on a self-reflective path, encouraged by the accreditation process to integrate new tools and processes, ultimately facilitating institutional reflections toward sustainable growth. During the site visit, Meridian faculty and staff expressed interest in further professionalizing their assessment strategies and indicated that they were not only open toward feedback, but welcomed suggestions for new efficiencies (CFR 4.3).

In some cases, Meridian faculty and staff revealed a stronger grasp of effective assessment practices than what was revealed in their SAV 4 report. For example, faculty confirmed their interest in and capacity to disaggregate student learning outcomes by

demographic categories in order to determine whether educational practices were serving all student groups equally. It is expected that this capacity will enable Meridian to better understand and support specific student groups' learning needs as enrollment increases.

Meridian's SAV 4 report appended a "LiveText Dashboard" for PSY 752, which indicated that approximately 33% of the scored students did not meet or exceed two course learning outcome standards: 1) apply the collaborative nature of inquiry to the learnings that result from data collection and analysis and 2) generate learnings that align with a study's data, and that offer possibilities for new insight. That outcome provides an excellent opportunity for the institution to drill down into demographic details in order to further assess educational effectiveness (CFR 4.1).

Approximately 22 faculty and staff members out of 69 participated in the SAV 4 report preparation process, which was also reviewed by 8 Board of Trustees' members. Report preparation is described as beginning in Sept. 2015, engaging staff, faculty, students, alumni, and board representatives in creative inquiry, a qualitative research process, and supported by surveys, interviews, dialogues, and data analytic processes (CFR 4.5, 4.6).

Overall, the institution did a thorough job of responding to their efforts around diversity and governance issues. There are remaining issues related to capacity and financial sustainability that tie directly to the current and planned enrollments. Conversations with administration, particularly the President/CEO, provided a clearer understanding of the institution's trajectory and the challenges ahead.

Each of the SAV 3 recommendations were addressed methodically, with attention to environmental scanning and best practices, fit with mission and institutional values, and sustainability. With the exception of a few elements, the SAV 3 recommendations received thorough, effective attention, and were well reported.

Meridian's approach to the analysis of evidence appeared to be effectively grounded in thoughtful collaboration with faithful attention to institutional mission and vision. Distribution of decision making among faculty and staff has significantly improved Meridian's effectiveness and place in the academy. In some cases, subjective experiences had not yet received support from direct evidence. A link between the two is growing in institutional assessment practices and will further increase institutional effectiveness.

Meridian's SAV 4 report mentioned a variety of future actions, sometimes referred to as 'going to the next level,' which revealed their efforts in service of future thinking. By verbalizing these aspirations, Meridian indicated the development of a dynamic self-concept. During the site visit, Meridian representatives noted that the institution's developmental path had evolved and began paralleling student development, including a long and somewhat difficult period of self-reflection, followed by deconstruction of ineffective patterns, and finally by reconstruction wherein new, more effective practices and procedures were integrated.

SECTION II – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Issue #1: Diversity

Team Recommendation:

The 2015 evaluation team’s first recommendation – Establish and implement clear, specific and robust strategies for achieving diversity targets at all levels, from students to Board members (CFR 1.4).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

The University crafted a series of diversity plans, the most recent being published in 2016. In the document the university notes that while diversity plays an important role in the classroom, the “racial and ethnic diversity of Meridian’s constituencies is below [the University’s] aspirations of what the Meridian community needs to reflect.” The University’s use of blended format has increased racial diversity, but additional efforts have been identified and begun to increase achievement of the University’s aspirations.

The University set goals to increase diversity within the ranks of students, faculty, and board members. In its Diversity Plan, the University notes that it has recruited three people of color within its psychology program and have interviewed additional candidates for faculty positions. The Board’s work toward greater diversity did not yield any racial diversity, but the University notes an equal composition of men and women. For staff, the University notes several new staff additions that have added to the racial and sexual orientation diversity of the institution.

In its Diversity Plan, the University noted that the University has identified curricular diversity, economic diversity, and programmatic diversity as important to the institution. They noted that additions in multicultural psychology, social transformation within its education programs, global diversity in its business programs, and a social justice and diversity PLO by the Graduate Council have been added in response to prior Commission actions, and identified strategies for ongoing curricular diversity that involve engagement from faculty and staff to track and close the gap on diversity issues within the curriculum.

Conclusions about Progress:

While Meridian has identified opportunities for continued progress, and while there has been an institutional response to the need for diversity statements and the creation of multiple efforts, the results in recruiting greater diversity in its student body and Board have not yet achieved results in accord with the University’s own stated intentions. The institution will need to assess the sufficiency and effectiveness of current diversity plans and efforts to achieve their stated goals.

Evidence Reviewed:

2015-16 Fieldwork Annual Program Review; Diversity Category on Course Outline Samples; Curricular Diversity Chart; Diversity Grant Public Information; Diversity Texts Chart; Fieldwork Program Review Handbook; Financial Aid Application; IMDiversity Faculty Recruitment Ad; Uptima Third Wave Business blog; Uptima/Meridian Public Events; Writing Tutorial Diversity Data; Meridian's Website.

B. Issue #2: External Review, Consultation, and Environmental Scanning

Team Recommendation:

Move beyond self-reference and expanding evaluation of institutional performance by building external peer review, consultation and environmental scanning into all evaluation and planning (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

Plans for an external review component of the program review process have been implemented for the psychology program, and the institution plans to continue this practice going forward. Going forward the program review process will regularly include processes for ensuring inter-rater reliability and a peer review process for the validation of learning outcomes. As noted in other sections of this report, the somewhat vague and tentative language used to craft the expected learning outcomes statements makes it difficult for faculty to assess student learning in terms of being able to identify and determine levels of proficiency for each learning outcome.

Psychology engaged a transformative education leader as the external reviewer for their first three-year program review report, resulting in a detailed set of commendations and recommendations. Recommendations focused on expanding diverse faculty; systematic reviews of practicum and internship sites; supportive resources and budgeting for faculty; program leadership structures; and community webinars to address cultural leadership topics. The tracking process for those recommendations has not been identified (CFR 4.1).

Meridian is currently exploring the use of a proprietary tool, which provides both standardized assessments and external benchmarks for leadership skills, outcomes which are traditionally difficult to measure. Based upon a life-span developmental scale, this tool identifies students' degrees of sophistication, which have been developed in both leadership and managerial decision making and reflect the level to which students can simultaneously entertain a disparate set of abstract variables. The resulting outcomes are aligned around Meridian's PLOs such as collaborativity and empathy (CFR 4.1, 4.6).

Environmental scanning, even though challenged by the absence of directly correlated "sister" institutions, has been integrated in Meridian's culture of assessment as evidenced by their frequent references to the process throughout their SAV 4 report. Approximately 15 references to environmental scanning and 7 references to best practices pepper the report's

narrative across topic areas. Because one reference indicated that “...Meridian established its own best practices...”, it’s worth acknowledging the significance of external consultation to inform institutional decision making, with the assumption that final decisions will incorporate both external and internal factors. Meridian mentioned the long-time practice of assessing best practices, and it is anticipated that the process will remain both integral to and explicit within administrative and academic decision-making events (CFR 4.1, 4.6).

External consultation was referenced in association with library services, academic degree requirements, IT resources, data collection systems, and administrative planning. The transition from consultation to institutional ownership was characterized by thorough faculty or staff training, as indicated. One particular consultation service, Grove Consultants International, is intended to facilitate a new initiative, the Global Exchange Learning Network (CFR 4.5, 4.6).

In addition to acknowledging best practices as an important assessment form, Meridian also values a concept described as “next practices” (p. 92, SAV 4), and includes related “going forward” references to institutional visions of innovation. Their interest in future directions informs their facility with higher education’s dynamic nature. The “next practices” references, if not already integrated into or arising out of the strategic plan, may benefit from that alignment and related budget proposals to ensure attention and funding prioritization (CFR 4.7).

In their SAV 4 report, page 111, Meridian stated that significant issues or changes were not anticipated for the upcoming five years, while also acknowledging that the higher education landscape is experiencing an unprecedented change climate. The tension between those two perspectives includes an obligation to develop simultaneously scalable and flexible resources, and to maintain a finger on higher education’s dynamic pulse along with an eye toward adjusting institutional practices accordingly (CFR 4.6, 4.7).

In response to shifting higher education values and its own mission, Meridian registered in January 2015 as a Benefit Corporation with the California Secretary of State. In addition to mission alignment, Meridian’s employee ownership goals are served through this action, which emphasizes the institution’s impact on social and environmental communities alike (CFR 4.7).

Conclusions about Progress:

Meridian has made significant progress in moving beyond self-reference and expanding evaluation of educational and institutional effectiveness by beginning to build in external peer review, consultation, and environmental scanning into its more formalized evaluation and planning processes. Meridian’s program review process is beginning to include the assessment and analysis of SLOs, retention/graduation data, and external evidence and evaluators. The institution is putting quality-assurance processes in place to collect, analyze, and interpret data; track results over time; use comparative data; and make improvements.

Evidence Reviewed:

Model for Improving Institutional Effectiveness; Institutional Research Assessment Data and Timeline; Institutional Planning Implementation Tracking Chart; Process Improvement

Initiative; Workflow Tool; Integrated Database Comparison; Primary Status Report; External Program Review Guide; Fieldwork Annual Program Review 2015-16; Integrated Planning Framework; Psychology /Education/Business Program Reviews (2014-15); Quarterly Program Review Process Map; New Program Development Process; Process Improvement Initiative; Student Development Committee Notes; Doctoral Project Committee Notes, Lecitical Assessment Report.

C. Issue #3: Culture of Scholarship

Team Recommendation:

Create a clear and substantial culture of scholarship reflective of masters and doctoral level studies, including clearly articulated expectations of and support for faculty research and publication in their recruitment, evaluation and retention (CFRs 2.2b, 2.8, 2.9).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

Graduate degree requirements have been established that are aligned with the mission and vision of the university (CFR 2.2b). These requirements include expectations for student research. Meridian actively values and promotes scholarship, creative activity, and innovation, as appropriate to the institution's purposes and character.

Meridian's graduate programs are built on the notion of students and graduates venturing out into communities, where they aspire to make positive and impactful differences and bring about meaningful social change (CFR 2.8). Current students' dissertation topics reflect a range and variety of interests—from changing perceptions and interactions in the world of law enforcement to bringing the arts into the therapy room.

Meridian faculty include distinguished scholars and practitioners in fields such as transformative learning, clinical and transpersonal psychology, marriage and family therapy, social justice, transformative leadership, and organizational change. Scholarship is an expectation of faculty, such that 20% of faculty time is reserved for scholarship, creative activity, and community service engagement and activity. Institutional support for faculty research includes a allotment of time that faculty can use at their discretion for research and scholarly activity, as well as designated funding for each core and adjunct faculty member (CFR 2.9).

The institution has recently created an IRB to review proposals involving human subject research. While human subject protection has been ensured by the university via the work of a well-functioning dissertation committee, this newly formed IRB allows for the formalization of processes including the training of faculty (and community) reviewers and student researchers and the verification of exemption categories, etc.

Conclusions about Progress:

Meridian has made significant progress in response to the need to clarify expectations for student and faculty research and to describe processes and resources needed for students' meaningful engagement in research. Meridian clarified the link between scholarship, teaching, student learning and service, as reflected in faculty practices, scheduling, institutional expectations, and evaluations (CFR 2.9).

Evidence Reviewed:

Admissions Inventory Checklist; Faculty Evaluation and Development Plan; Faculty Handbook; Faculty Recruitment Plan; Faculty Scholarship website page; Faculty Workflow Template; Format and Style Video Tutorial; Institutional Repository Webpage; IRB Benchmarking Report; Library Plan; Recorded video conference from Encouraging Student Publication meeting; Rubric on Differentiating Expectations for Student Performance; Student Handbook.

D. Issue #4: Faculty Resource Ratios

Team Recommendation:

Meridian's educational model is highly resource intensive and difficult to expand without compromising the integrity of their programs. The institution must increase the number of qualified, diverse faculty, consistent with student enrollment growth, to sustain the personal intensity that characterizes the Meridian student experience (CFR 3.1).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

In its August 2016 Academic Plan, the University references its March 2015 Faculty Recruitment Plan, in which it notes five full-time faculty. There are 17 core faculty, who are supported by additional adjunct faculty in the programs. In its SAV 4 report, the institution notes that it has hired an additional 11 new faculty since SAV 3, including seven diverse faculty, and one full-time faculty member in the psychology program. The majority of faculty members hold terminal degrees from a regionally accredited institution and, as referenced in prior team reports, several of the faculty's terminal degrees are from Meridian. (CFR 3.1)

All programs have designated full-time faculty and student and faculty support mechanisms to support current enrollments (CFR 3.1, 2.1). Full-time faculty Program Chairs lead academic programs, and faculty evaluation now takes place in an annual process involving multiple levels of the institution based upon guidance from the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) to institute formal, written annual performance evaluations of faculty. The 2015 evaluation team found that the process had not been established as a regularized process, although faculty members who had participated found the process helpful (CFR 3.2).

Training and development of faculty and staff is provided in a number of ways. Core and adjunct faculty may receive modest stipends to support participation in professional development and presentations at professional meetings. Free public programs provide a cross-sectional venue for professional development of faculty, staff, and community members. The evaluation team reviewed the Staff Evaluation and Development Plan; schedules of public programs, faculty, and staff training conducted in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Public programs have been offered several times a month online, in Petaluma, and the Oakland Hub. The online programs allow participation of faculty at a distance as well as members of Meridian's distant public. A robust collection of faculty-focused professional development workshops and webinars has been presented almost monthly between 2013 and 2015; however, the evaluation team has not learned how many faculty have participated or how participating faculty has evaluated the professional development program. Staff training and development has been largely focused on enrollment services and training in the programs and applications being used for daily operations in the electronic environment at Meridian. (CFR 3.3)

Meridian has a student-faculty ratio of 6:1 and plans to recruit and hire additional faculty as the student enrollment grows, aiming ultimately at a 15:1 ratio for both faculty and staff. In response to previous team recommendations, Meridian developed the Faculty Workload Summary and the Faculty Recruitment Plan. The Workload Summary reflects approximately 66% of faculty time dedicated to teaching related activities, 16% to service (academic advising and committee work), and 17% to research related activities. The Recruitment Plan includes assumptions about ratios of faculty to "coursework students" and post-coursework "continuation students". Three scenarios for hiring align with the three scenarios presented in the Enrollment Management Plan. The Recruitment Plan recognizes two variables: the size of entering cohorts and the length of the dissertation process. Descriptions of faculty search committee operations and commitments to recruiting for mission and diversity are presented in the Recruitment Plan; however, Meridian has not yet successfully attracted diverse faculty (CFRs 3.1, 1.4).

The institution has developed both an enrollment development plan and a faculty recruitment plan. What remains to be accomplished is for these plans to be enacted and for the sufficiency of resources to later be assessed in holistic approaches that provide the institution with multiple ways of knowing that needs are being met to maximize student learning.

Conclusions about Progress:

Meridian directly addressed the recommendations of prior teams by adding additional part-time and full-time faculty to support and maintain the integrity of their programs. The institution has set a reasonable target of student to faculty ratio, and these ratios are tied to Meridian's strategic plan, enrollment plan, and institutional benchmarking with comparable institutions in peer-by-size and peer-by-mission. While the diversity of the faculty remains an issue addressed here and in other portions of this report, the addition of additional part-time faculty of diverse backgrounds was an additional positive step toward the institution's own stated goals and of compliance with the Standards (CFR 3.1).

Evidence Reviewed:

Academic Catalog; Benchmarking Report; Business Faculty CVs; Education Faculty CVs; Faculty Recruitment Plan; Psychology Faculty CVs; Recruitment Plan; Workload Summary, Staff Evaluation and Development Plan; Student Development Monthly Report.

E. Issue #5: Core Administrative Function Sustainability

Team Recommendation:

Build capacity in core functions of university administration to ensure effectiveness and sustainability as the university expands (CFR 3.1, 3.8).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

In response to their strategic plan and prior Commission Recommendations, Meridian developed a graphic inventory of institutional administrative processes that promote collaboration across University functions (CFR 3.1). In its most Report for Special Visit #4, the University notes that in addition to organizing its framework for technology and human resources, it has hired and implemented the positions of Director of Graduate Programs, Director of Field Placement, and Director of Online Learning. Each of the additions support the addition of student emails, faculty & staff portals, CRM & database integration, benefits management, and other web based services.

Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources

Meridian provided independent audits for years ending in August 2012, 2013, and 2014, and provided at the time of the visit the unaudited financials for August 2015. The university is operating with a balanced budget and maintains reserves equivalent to one year's annual budget. The reserves were made possible by a \$1,000,000 capital infusion by the founder and are invested in short-term investments (CFR 3.4). The institution is currently in transition to a public benefit corporation, and the transition from Meridian's proprietary structure to that of an employee-owned enterprise is complete.

The long-term viability of the institution has been an issue revisited in each team visit. Meridian has developed multiple systems and plans to bring together long-term planning and resource allocation. The Enrollment Management Plan projects the significant enrollment growth needed to establish a sustainable university. The plan anticipates growth from the current student population of 72.5 FTE and 107 head-count to 300-500 FTE by 2020. While many of the elements of the plan been implemented, student enrollment has yet to align with the projections of the institution.

One unique feature of the University is its tuition and funding model. Tuition is not collected in full at the time of the student's coursework completion due to an institutional loan program. In this program, students may borrow up to \$14,000 of their \$15,300 education fees.

Meridian joined two library consortia in order to provide access to needed resources for graduate education by faculty and students. These are the Northern California Library Consortium and the Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium. The Library Assessment Plan, reviewed by the evaluation team, outlines the plans for the 2015-2016 year. The plan does not adequately address the role of the library in the development of a graduate research culture and acquisition and management of information resources for doctoral research and the research of faculty.

Meridian's planning and decision-making processes are collaborative, and Creative Inquiry Groups (CIGs) have explored many aspects of Meridian's development as an institution. Its leadership is stable, decision-making process is centralized, and university leaders expressly support the development and implementation of shared governance structures (CFR 3.6, 3.7).

Meridian has considerable continuity of leadership. Aftab Omer is the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Meridian and Rob Gall is the Administrative Director and Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Melissa Schwartz is the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer (CAO). The Administrative Director carries many primary responsibilities—for human resources (including recruitment, hiring, workload analysis, performance evaluation, and staff development) as well as leading the university's administrative and finance functions.

Meridian does not currently assess its CFO duties as needing full-time attention; however, its Operational Plan indicates assumptions for when this will be necessary. The evaluation team explored the role of Administrative Director/CFO as it is currently configured. It is unclear that university administrative capacity is developing as needed (CFR 3.8).

The institution added to its administrative staff to create an educational leadership team. In time, the sufficiency of this organizational structure should be assessed from multiple perspectives so that meaningful and impactful changes can be made to strengthen support for programs and ensure sustainability.

Conclusions about Progress:

Meridian has made significant progress in building capacity in the core functions of online learning, information management, and assessment technology. However, significant progress is required in the area of financial management and reporting. And, should the University receive accreditation, access Title IV Federal Student Aid Funding, and achieve its enrollment goals, questions remain about its capacity to maintain Meridian's

Evidence Reviewed:

2016-17 IT Plan; Assessment Management System Benchmarking; Benchmarking Report; Centralization Function File Plan; CRM Proposal; Eprints; Institutional Knowledge Base Benchmarking Chart; Integrated Database Plan; Student and Faculty Portal; Zenefits Dashboard; Organization Chart; Operations Plan; Intranet Dashboard; Institutional Repository Benchmarking; Process Improvement Initiative; Operational Plan, Enrollment Plan, IT Plan, the 2015-2018 Finance Plan, Meridian's Projected Four Year Budget, the 2015 proposed budget as it was presented to the Finance Committee of the Board, and an alignment of budget allocations with strategic priorities..

F. Issue #6: Collaborative Implementation of Prioritized & Resourced Plans

Team Recommendation:

Ensure that the implementation of existing plans is integrated and coherent; includes a regular process for selecting action items among competing priorities; explicitly informs budget, facilities and human resource allocations; is regularly evaluated; and engages Meridian constituents (CFRs 3.4, 4.5, 4.6).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

Meridian utilizes a number of planning documents to select among competing priorities and to inform budget, facilities, and human resource allocations. The overarching principles are laid out in its Integrated Planning Framework, which references the Strategic Plan, Academic Plan, Finance Plan, Operational Plan, and others. Meridian's strategic plan was developed through collaboration between students, faculty, staff, board, and alumni. Under each of six strategic initiatives, a sub-set of from four to six strategic goals provide specific implementation guidelines. The strategic plan is implemented through a set of plans that also feed into sub-plans. For example:

- The Academic Plan shapes goals for:
 - Assessment Plan
 - Faculty Evaluation and Development Plan
 - Faculty Recruitment Plan
 - Library Assessment Plan
- The Operations Plan contains plans and guides the goals for:
 - Facilities and Administrative Staffing
 - Information Technology (IT) Plan
- Other plans as represented in the Institutional Planning & Implementation Tracking Chart

Meridian uses an Institutional Planning Implementation Tracking Chart to record priorities and monitor strategic plan projects from start to completion, including responsible parties and action revisions if indicated. Approximately eight of the 14 pages indicate 'completed' tasks, ranging from 'A' to 'D' in priority.

In discussions with the Board of Trustees, it was clear that the Board has exercised significant authority in the creation of the plans and the empowerment of the staff to accomplish the goals and objectives outlined throughout each of those plans.

The process of feedback at Meridian involves gathering information from multiple sources (students, faculty, staff, administration, and Board members), and has culminated most recently with the 2015-2016 Supplemental Background Analysis, which was utilized by the Board in its February 2016 retreat to allocate resources and identify priorities. Each year's operational plan brings together the related plans, and appears to be driven by current data on capacity and opportunities. In the team's discussions with Board members, the members clearly demonstrated their engagement and leadership in the process, as well as their access to information and willingness to monitor and revise priorities and directions as required to achieve the institution's long-term objectives, vision, and mission.

Strategic plan implementation is reportedly monitored primarily by the President, and its goals are also recorded on Meridian's Institutional Planning Implementation Tracking Chart, which falls under quarterly review and updates by staff. Plans are underway to transfer this chart to a new software system in order to streamline tracking as well as prioritize budgetary implementation (CFR 4.6).

Conclusions about Progress:

Meridian has demonstrated consistent ability to create plan documents in prior team visits, and in SAV 4 demonstrated both the integration and coherence of planning, but a more collaborative and inclusive approach to selecting actions among competing priorities in the budgeting, planning, and operational activities. The Board's engagement was noted as a critical and improved element in the team's conclusions about Meridian's progress, and the team's belief in Meridian's ability to continue to meet the Standards (CFRs 3.4, 4.5, 4.6).

Evidence Reviewed:

Academic Plan; 2015-16 Assessment Plan and Supplemental Background Analysis; 2016-17 Assessment Plan; Process Improvement Initiative; Doctoral Project Committee Notes Example; Enrollment Management Plan; Faculty Recruitment Plan; Faculty Workflow Template; Finance Plan; Process Improvement Initiative; Graduate Council Notes Example; Institutional Planning Implementation Tracking Chart; Operations Plan; Staff Workflow Template; Strategic Plan; Student Development Committee Notes; Integrated Database Plan; Integrated Planning Framework.

G. Issue #7: Evidence Based Decision Making

Team Recommendation:

Continue to build capacity in and the practice of decision making that is demonstrably informed by sound evidence.

- This capacity will be particularly critical in evaluating assumptions that guide and strategies for sustainable enrollment growth (CFR 3.4, 3.7).
- Evidence-based, institutional decision making will also depend, in part, on investing in technology and institutional research to support aggregate and consolidated data management and analysis (CFR 3.1, 3.5, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

Organizational Structure and Decision Making

Meridian's decision-making process relies heavily upon collaborative discourse among constituent groups with a primary focus on indirect evidence. Although apparently less familiar, reliance upon direct evidence, strategic plan alignment, and budgetary prioritization guidelines are emerging as important resources to inform decision-making and are expected to grow in importance as new technological systems and support staff demonstrate how these resources contribute to educational effectiveness (CFR 3.7).

Quality Assurance in Data Collection and Analysis

To its credit, Meridian holistically conceptualizes assessment AS learning, rather than the assessment OF learning, signifying assessment's essential place within sustainable institutional life. The team found ongoing inquiry into teaching and learning to improve curricula, pedagogy, and assessment to be essentially effective. The core concepts are understood and articulated, confirmed in site visit meetings with faculty and the Director of Assessment and Student Development, who is charged with student service oversight. Meridian demonstrates early quality assurance process development and recognizes the need to further integrate evidence-based planning, budgeting, and institutional research (CFR 4.1).

The evidence presented in policies, guidelines, and the strategic plan indicates appropriate guiding principles to support data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Likewise, the reports appear to capture useful data to inform institutional planning. The abundance of descriptive evidence paints a qualitative culture of inquiry picture, and should be continually supported and balanced by quantitative data outcomes and analysis. Survey and student success data are still somewhat hampered by the institution's relative youth and small sample sizes (CFR 4.1).

Commitment to quality assurance at top levels is clear and emerging. Assessment plans and measures were readily available and provided a glimpse into quality assurance. More importantly, there is evidence that data use in decision making is improving and will continue to do so with additional experience, modeling, and leadership, thus increasing the uniform application of comprehensive direct and indirect evidence (CFR 4.2).

The policies and planning documents reviewed by the team provided evidence of the institution's mission, spirit, and aspirations. Detailed implementation guidelines, including

benchmarks, metrics, costs, and regular monitoring, are emerging along with links to evidence-based planning, budgeting, and institutional research (CFR 4.2).

The team reviewed Meridian's assessment plans, peer faculty evaluations, and three program reviews. It is clear from these examples that data collection, data analysis, and subsequent action processes are understood and implemented. Curriculum maps reflected a general alignment of program level student learning outcomes to institution level student learning outcomes with some exceptions. Many of the institution level learning outcome verbs (skillful and embodied, depthful understanding, capacity to associate with others, competencies for, practices and perspectives, competencies to conceive, cultivate, and acquire) are vague enough to challenge measurability and comprehension. In addition to creating difficulties for students who strive to first understand and subsequently fulfill learning outcome expectations, the potential application of outcomes data to improve program quality is difficult due in part to ambiguous learning outcomes language (CFR 4.4).

The best examples of well-defined, measurable program learning outcomes were found in the Psychology program under ILO #3, Professional Skills, revealing the institution's grasp of student learning assessment. Many of those outcomes rely primarily upon 'knowledge' skills and the program may benefit from including higher level cognitive skills to more accurately represent the graduate level status (CFR 2.2b).

Psychology's program review noted that learning results for one of nine PLOs fell below acceptable levels. In response, the review indicated a mediating action, which was, "The cohort advisor has been encouraged to increase the opportunity for praxis that engages the capacity for pluralizing..." and reported an intention to continue to monitor outcomes. While the assessment and subsequent action demonstrate capacity and process, both the remedy and any subsequent tracking would benefit from further definition (CFR 4.1).

Additionally, a quarterly program review schedule was implemented to allow frequent program modifications as indicated by the resulting data. While this close attention to data outcomes and subsequent action may be constructive and timely, it may also exceed scalable limits and result in small data chunks which are not individually actionable. Additional consideration is encouraged toward a more scalable periodicity such as annual program reviews, which generates the additional benefit of collecting larger sets of representative data from which to draw conclusions and decisions (CFR 4.1).

Institution level learning outcomes include: 1) Leadership Capacities – Students will cultivate leadership capacities aligned with the specific profession that is the focus of the degree program; 2) Creative Inquiry Skills – Students will develop creative inquiry skills aligned with the specific profession that is the focus of the degree program; and 3) Professional Knowledge – Students will acquire professional knowledge specific to the focus of the degree program. Creative Inquiry Skills, ILO #2, is aligned with program level outcomes which are similar for both the Education and Business programs. (CFR 4.1).

Institutional distinctions between the collaboration and collaborativity learning outcomes are subtle and may confound data results. While collaborativity is explicitly noted as falling within the Business program's "REC" (Reflection, Empathy, and Collaboration) triad under ILO #1, collaboration is also listed as a PLO under ILO #2, with a similar overlap noted in Education's curriculum map (CFR 4.1).

Two courses each in the Education and Business programs' curriculum maps appear to be missing links to any program or institutional outcomes. Likewise, five Psych courses are not linked to program or institutional outcomes. The implication is that these courses are not aligned with either the programs' or the institution's intended learning outcomes, bringing contributions to their respective degree programs into question. Each curriculum map would also benefit from outcome designations for 'introductory,' 'reinforced,' or 'summatively assessed,' status in order to facilitate action as needed from learning outcome results (CFR 4.1).

Curriculum maps revealed a subset of courses in each program which were not linked to PLOs or ILOs, and there appeared to be either redundant or inaccurate links from certain PLOs to ILOs, which may be a function of language choices. For instance, while Meridian distinguishes between collaborativity and collaboration in institutional learning outcomes, the basis of that distinction was neither clear in curriculum maps (CFR 4.1).

Beyond every intended course and program level learning outcome, Meridian acknowledges the importance of 'emergent' outcomes. Catalyzed by the intensity of depth practices, emergent outcomes arise from students' reflective practices and contribute to intended outcomes, are not specifically measurable, but contribute to personalized holistic educational experiences. Further exploration of students' emergent outcomes could open the door to additional institutional reflection beyond the limitations of expected results (CFR 4.1).

Conclusions about Progress:

Meridian's assessment practices, literacy, and commitment to industry standards for scalability show significant progress. Survey data was impressive and portends well for progress when aligned with direct evidence. It was noted that data and analyses, such as for student success and retention, were often limited by small sample sizes. The institution is well poised, however, to scale data analysis up with enrollment growth. While the institution has established mechanisms to capture and compile effective evidence for decision making, results need to be analyzed and action plans for improvements implemented and tracked. Additionally, these institutional research and assessment practices and processes need time to sufficiently mature (CFR 4.2).

Evidence Reviewed:

2014-15/15-16 Institutional Assessment Data and Timeline; 2015-16 Supplemental Background Analysis; Assessment Management System Comparison Matrix; Annual Institutional Research Process Map; Business Annual Program Review 2014-15; Business Program Review Handbook; CRM Proposal; Doctoral Project Committee Meeting Notes; Education Annual Program Review 2014-15; Education Program Review Handbook; Enrollment

Management Plan; Faculty Workflow Template; Graduate Council Meeting Notes; Institutional Planning Implementation Tracking Chart; Institutional Repository Benchmarking; Integrated Database Plan; 2016-17 IT Plan; LiveText Dashboard; Operations Plan; Psychology Annual Program Review 2014-15; Psychology Program Review Handbook; Service Tracking System Dashboard; Staff Workflow Template; Strategic Plan; Student Development Committee Meeting Notes.

H. Issue #8: Shared Governance

Team Recommendation:

Continue to develop meaningful and systematic faculty participation in shared governance, moving beyond consultation to collective responsibility for curriculum (CFRs 2.4, 3.10).

Effectiveness of Responsive Actions:

Meridian has a governing Board with nine members exercising legal responsibility for the institution. It functions in alignment with Board bylaws and a handbook detailing its responsibilities, its relationship to the CEO, and the functioning of its committees. The Board annually evaluates the CEO, its own performance, and the performance of individual Board members. Prior teams have remarked on Meridian's dependence on its CEO and the need for succession planning for sustained growth. The Board members had clearly spent a great deal of time evaluating their role and the needs of the institution, and through dialogue with Board members, shared with the team plans for expanding the Board, adding expertise in accounting, finance, higher education, and/or law.

Meridian's faculty has an evolving and important role at the university. In addition to faculty serving on the Doctoral Project Committee and the Student Development Committee, Meridian's Faculty Council is composed of members representing each of the major disciplinary areas—Psychology, Education, and Business. The work of Faculty Council has included reviewing assessment plans, receiving annual program reviews, and considering academic policies. Faculty's engagement with the Faculty Council and the program directors of each program represents an emerging aspect of shared governance at Meridian. In interviews, faculty seemed to appreciate the opportunities offered by the Council for interaction and collaboration. In discussions with the Faculty Council, the team found that the understanding of faculty governance and the formal responsibilities of a faculty governance body were evolving, but that their role was an important one in the governance of the institution (CFR 3.10).

Conclusions about Progress:

Through work with consultants and within its own governance processes, Meridian has begun to develop systems for evaluating and planning. Continuing to tie these systems to the overarching strategic plan appears to be occurring through newly created processes, and ongoing

evaluation of the institution's alignment between governance, planning, strategy, and decision-making were noted by faculty, staff, and administration as important next steps for Meridian.

Evidence Reviewed:

2015-16/16-17 Assessment Plan; Academic Catalog; Assessment Management System Benchmarking; Doctoral Project Committee Notes; Education Dissertation Handbook; Eprints; Faculty Council Meeting Minutes; Institutional Repository Benchmarking; Utilizing the Lecrical Assessment System at Meridian; LiveText Dashboard; New Program Development Process; Psychology Dissertation Handbook; Psychology Three-Year Program Review; Quarterly Program Review Procedure; Quarterly Program Review Process Map; Student Development Committee Notes

SECTION III – TEAM'S EVALUATION OF STANDARDS

Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with those purposes. The institution has a clear and explicit sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in both the higher education community and society, and its contribution to the public good. It functions with integrity, transparency, and autonomy.

Meridian has identified multidimensional educational objectives and indicators of satisfactory student achievement at the course, program, and institutional levels (CFR 1.2).

The WSCUC team finds that Meridian University meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, understanding that only the Commission is authorized to make the final determination as to whether or not an institution is in compliance with the Standards.

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

The institution achieves its purposes and attains its educational objectives at the institutional and program level through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning and success. The institution demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively by evaluating valid and reliable evidence of learning and by supporting the success of every student.

The institution's faculty, staff, and Board demonstrated a passion for the institution's mission and vision of providing transformative learning experiences that, through transforming students ways of thinking and being in the world, transform the professions of Psychology, Business, and Education. The institution further demonstrates a commitment to the achievement of educational objectives at the institutional and programmatic levels through effective teaching and learning, student and faculty scholarship and creativity, and support for student learning and success.

Meridian has identified multidimensional educational objectives and indicators of satisfactory student achievement at the course, program, and institutional levels (CFR 1.2). Graduate degree requirements have been established that are aligned with the mission and vision

of the university (CFR 2.2b). Meridian's faculty take responsibility for establishing expected Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) at each level of assessment (course, programmatic, and institutional) as well for assessing student learning (CFR 2.4).

Meridian's program review process is currently beginning to develop into a more mature process; an external review component was added in late 2013 for the psychology program. The program review process is beginning to incorporate student learning outcomes' results, yet these results are not yet disaggregated in ways that are meaningful to the institution. For instance, for an overarching ILO such as Leadership capacity, there are dimensions of the ILO, such as reflexivity, that are very meaningful; having these dimensions of the ILO teased out, reported, and captured as data in the Program Review Process would allow faculty to make meaningful changes in curriculum, pedagogy, assignments, and assessments. Statistical data summaries that reflect data points that are meaningful to the institution are in the process of being added; for instance, the university's systems and data collection processes will allow for the disaggregation of student achievement results. The addition of more meaningful data points, such as disaggregated student success data and workload analyses, will provide specific information needed to effectively evaluate the sufficiency and quality of resources. This team encourages the use of long-range planning to ensure that all dimensions of ILOs and PLOs are appropriately developed across the curriculum, mapped, assessed, and validated (CFR 2.7).

The institution demonstrates a commitment to assessing student learning at all levels and to creating effective processes for validating learning outcomes and to ensuring inter-rater reliability in assessment processes. The institution has developed a set of expected Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) as well as sets of expected Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs).

The WSCUC team finds that Meridian University meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, understanding that only the Commission is authorized to make the final determination as to whether or not an institution is in compliance with the Standards.

Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through investments in human, physical, fiscal, technological, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high-quality environment for learning.

Meridian has made significant investments to ensure the achievement of its educational objectives since the last SAV, and continues to operate with a net surplus from operations which it uses to continually invest in the human, physical, technological, and information resources identified as key investments for institutional growth through its decision-making structures. Among the investments Meridian has made since the last SAV include additional library resources through library consortia, additional staffing in clinical externships for its students, additional software to support assessment of student learning, additional resources for faculty scholarship, additional funds for faculty scholarship, and the addition of additional core faculty for program growth and expansion.

Meridian's Board and CEO identified the development of a culture of collaborative decision making led by the Creative Inquiry Groups (CIGs), as well as the primary role of the Board in the strategic leadership of the organization. Faculty, staff, students, administrators, and the Board appear to be engaged in critical decision making, and the University's transition to a public benefit corporation was completed on December 31, 2014, and the transition from Meridian's proprietary structure to that of an employee-owned enterprise is underway.

The University's audited financials show continued net operating surpluses, supported by tuition and proceeds from investments. Meridian does not currently assess its CFO duties as needing full-time attention; however, its Operational Plan indicates assumptions for when this will be necessary. The evaluation team explored the role of Administrative Director/CFO as it is currently configured and it is unclear that university administrative capacity is developing as needed (CFR 3.8).

The long-term viability of the institution has been an issue revisited in each team visit and through Commission Actions. Meridian has developed multiple systems and plans to bring together long-term planning and resource allocation. The Enrollment Management Plan projects the significant enrollment growth needed to establish a sustainable university, and while many of the elements of the plan have been implemented, student enrollment has yet to align with the projections of the institution. Special attention should be paid to achievement of Meridian's enrollment goals in order to continue continued compliance with Standard 3.

In summary, the WSCUC team finds that Meridian University meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, understanding that only the Commission is authorized to make the final determination as to whether or not an institution is in compliance with the Standards.

Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

The institution engages in sustained, evidence-based, and participatory self-reflection about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. The institution considers the changing environment of higher education in envisioning its future. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities, to plan, and to improve quality and effectiveness.

Meridian aggressively explored and adopted a variety of administrative software systems to streamline institutional processes and generate accountability for complex departmental functions. The application and maintenance of these systems is recorded in a document entitled Process Improvement Initiative. Ultimately, their efforts resulted in the implementation of a wide set of new systems, including Infusionsoft, a new CRM database for admissions; Asana, a task

management system for faculty and staff; Live Text, a database for student learning outcomes; and Zendesk, used for customer service and helpdesk tracking (CFR 4.1, 4.2).

The recent adoption of these administrative tracking systems provides new opportunities to improve data accessibility, analysis, and generate actions as needed. At the same time, the adoptions require a new level of accountability to review and analyze not only the resulting data, but the systems themselves, followed by any necessary decisions to act upon those results (CFR 4.2, 4.6).

The WSCUC team finds that Meridian University meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, understanding that only the Commission is authorized to make the final determination as to whether or not an institution is in compliance with the Standards.

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to WASC's 2013 Handbook of Accreditation, member institutions are characterized by a culture of evidence and the commitment to institutional improvement. Institutional integrity and direct feedback links are obvious, leading toward improvement of the accreditation process itself.

Engagement with a culture of evidence extends beyond institutional walls for accreditation purposes and requires a common language, which serves to represent each member among many and allow them to learn from higher education inter-relationships. When institutions become insular, idiosyncratic language can comfortably replace mainstream language, limiting understandable and reciprocal conversations with others from outside the institution. In these cases, it's important to translate educational processes, outcomes, goals, and procedures into common higher education language while simultaneously safe-guarding mission, vision, and values. Such a translation is both an art and a science.

Meridian's passions for transformative experiences, emerging capacities, and embodied self-awareness are all essential to its institutional integrity and success. In addition, when Meridian made the decision to move into a culture of evidence by becoming accredited, it agreed to learn and adopt the language of that culture without sacrificing any of its essence. Impressive strides have been made in that direction and there is work yet to be done. This report highlights Meridian's many significant gains and points the way toward further developing a shared culture of evidence.

The WSCUC site visit team was treated with collegiality, generosity, and hospitality during its two and one-half day site visit to Meridian University. The team met with various campus constituents and community stakeholders and found them to be passionate, collegial, and deeply committed to advancing the educational vision and mission of the institution.

The WSCUC evaluation team acknowledges the significant expertise, concerted efforts, and institutional changes implemented in response to previous team recommendations. In particular, the VPAA, Director of Institutional Research, Director of Graduate Programs, and Director of Assessment and Student Development mobilized Meridian toward professionalized higher education standards.

Since its last Seeking Accreditation Visit, the University has developed sufficient capacity in assessment, organizational structures, processes, and policies to ensure the educational quality and improvement of the degree programs and campus environment, and to promote and sustain institutional learning and improvement. Because the majority of CFRs were found to be at a sufficient level of for initial accreditation, the Team recommends that Meridian be granted Initial Accreditation. This recommendation remains, as all team recommendations remain, only a recommendation and subject to the decision and authority of the Commission.

In framing its commendations and recommendations, the team desires to support and encourage Meridian's ongoing efforts as it moves towards the realization of its mission and vision.

Commendations:

1. Strong sense of mission and commitment to encouraging students' personal transformative experiences.
2. Commitment to exploring and adopting a range of supportive administrative and academic resources toward developing a culture of evidence.
3. Deep engagement with the process of accreditation and the institutional transformation required to meet the Standards of Accreditation.
4. Thorough integration of strategic planning, operational plans, and feedback from key constituents.
5. Excellent post-graduation licensure pass rates.
6. Redistribution of administrative responsibilities to faculty and staff.

Recommendations:

1. Clarify learning outcomes with attention to measurability, specificity, rigor, and accurate alignment within curriculum maps to generate meaningful and actionable data (CFR 2.2b, 2.4, and 4.1).
2. Advance program review process to include long-range planning and expand the collection and use of internal and external evidence (CFR 2.7).
3. Support ongoing efforts to achieve institutional goals around diversity in faculty, staff, and student populations (CFR 1.4).
4. Build capacity in financial management to safeguard institutional resources during the period of planned growth ahead (CFR 3.4).