

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC VISITING TEAM**

**SEEKING ACCREDITATION VISIT 2**

For Institutions Seeking Initial Accreditation

To University of West Los Angeles

March 27-29, 2018

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The team evaluated the institution under the WSCUC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective judgment for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission. The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. Once an institution achieves either candidacy or initial accreditation, the team report and Commission Action Letter associated with the review that resulted in the granting of either candidacy or initial accreditation and the team reports and Commission Action Letters of any subsequent reviews will be made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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## TEAM REPORT

### SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

#### A. Description of Institution and Visit

The University of West Los Angeles (UWLA) was founded in 1966 as a private, non-profit school of law dedicated to serving underrepresented communities with the aim of democratizing the legal profession. UWLA was accredited by the State Bar of California Committee of Bar Examiners in 1978. In 2002, the university acquired the San Fernando Valley College of Law, which became a second UWLA campus and in 2007 was relocated to Chatsworth, its current location. In 2012, UWLA added the School of Graduate Studies, renamed as the School of Business in 2015.

The principal campus is located in West Los Angeles near the Los Angeles International Airport; the Chatsworth location is approximately 35 miles away. The team found both campuses to offer modern, well-maintained and well-appointed facilities, including technology-ready classrooms and study spaces, computer stations, WIFI, libraries, offices, and meeting and break rooms.<sup>1</sup>

UWLA offers three degree programs, of which the School of Law's juris doctor is the most established and robust. The JD program has an 85-unit requirement, comprised of 55 units in course work mandated by the State Bar of California to meet the content of the California Bar Examination, 18 units in required professional practice-based courses, and the remaining 12 units in electives; these courses are also largely practice oriented. The JD program is offered at both campuses.

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<sup>1</sup> The SAV2 visit focused on the main campus; a team member had visited the Chatsworth campus during the 2016 SAV1 visit with no findings of concern

The School of Business offers both the MS in Organizational Leadership and Business Innovation and the BS in Business Administration. These programs are delivered through a hybrid educational model, with residential instruction taking place at the Los Angeles campus exclusively. The MS degree requires 36 units (12 courses) for graduation and can be completed full time over 14 months. The BS program is a degree completion program requiring the transfer in of 54-60 lower-division units, including General Education, and the completion of the remaining 60-66 units at UWLA in lower-division (24) and upper-division (18) business courses, and 18 units in one of five available concentrations (Organizational Leadership and Management, Marketing, Finance, International Business, Entertainment). The BS can be completed in 24 months.

At the time of the SAV2 visit, total enrollment numbered 207 students, the majority of whom (198) are enrolled in the School of Law; the School of Business currently enrolls nine students, seven in the MS program and two in the BS program, the first undergraduates to be enrolled in this school.

UWLA is governed by a board of managers, the majority of whom have no familial or financial interest in the institution. The university employs over 50 faculty, six full-time and 33 adjunct in the School of Law, as well as one full-time and 12 active adjunct faculty in the School of Business. Administration and staff members number 25. UWLA President Robert W. Brown has served in his role since 1998; his executive team (direct reports) consists of the legal counsel, the CFO, the School of Law dean, the School of Business dean, and the director of recruitment, enrollment, and marketing. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that three of President Brown's five direct reports are family members. This makes shared governance and board oversight particularly important to support and sustain.

UWLA began pursuing WASC accreditation in 1976, which it received in 1983. As the result of concerns with the school's financial viability, WASC issued a Show Cause order in 1999, imposed a warning in 2003, and withdrew accreditation in 2006. In 2009, UWLA reapplied for Eligibility, which WASC granted in 2011. In the meantime, UWLA became a for-profit institution when it was acquired by Sapere Aude, LLC in 2010. In August 2013, UWLA submitted its letter of intent to pursue WSCUC candidacy. The school's stated purpose for seeking accreditation is "to improve its programs for the benefit of its students in achieving their learning goals and to fulfill its mission of providing '...opportunities that empower students of great diversity...'"

A CPR visit for candidacy took place in April 2014, with a finding that the institution was not yet ready for the EER. After the university provided WASC with updates on financial viability, institutional reporting, assessment and program review, and board development, its Eligibility was extended to June 30, 2017. The first Seeking Accreditation Visit (SAV1) took place December 6-8, 2016, leading to the March 9, 2017 Commission Action Letter granting UWLA Candidacy for five years with an SAV2 required in spring 2018. The same visiting team returned to UWLA March 27 to 29, 2018 to conduct the SAV2, which is the subject of the present report.

## **B. The Institution's Seeking Accreditation Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report**

While the team found the self-study report to be well organized and appendices clearly labeled, it did not convincingly present UWLA's case for meeting accreditation Standards. Rather than focus on the specific Standards under review for this visit, the self-study report went through each CFR. This alone was not a problem; it was more the lack of analysis and self-

reflection that caused difficulty in determining whether UWLA provided the data and evidence to address whether the institution was in compliance with the identified Standards and CFRs.

In terms of involvement in the report preparation, it became clear during the visit that the process was very inclusive, involving many faculty and staff along with administrators. The WASC Steering Committee provided updates and asked for input from faculty during meetings and a faculty retreat. In addition, the board was also briefed regularly and was very familiar with the work the institution was doing to prepare the report.

Generally speaking, the team did see evidence in the report that UWLA approached the review rigorously, with searching questions, appropriate methodology, and effective use of evidence. However, it was during the visit that the team was able to see that the institution's self-review led to a greater understanding of its effectiveness, systems of quality improvement, and student learning.

### **C. Response to Issues Raised in Past Commission Letters**

The March 9, 2017 Commission letter granting UWLA candidacy stipulated the following areas of focus:

1. The development and implementation of a clear plan to achieve financial stability and a sustainable financial model
2. The appointment of a permanent CFO who will work closely with the President and the Board of Managers to continue to develop, refine, and implement a sustainable financial model and balanced budgets. Relatedly, that UWLA take steps to ensure that the Board has the knowledge and tools to be effectively engaged in the budget process. The development and formalization of organizational structures and decision-making

processes that are clear and consistent with the institution's purposes and that support effective decision-making.

*UWLA's Responses:* As discussed below regarding Standard 3, the team found that UWLA has made significant progress with respect to these three recommendations. The formerly interim CFO is now the permanent CFO. In addition, since the last visit UWLA raised \$500,000 from an investor and generated an operating profit and positive cash flow in 2017. UWLA also engaged in a strategic planning process that included involvement across the institution and resulted in a plan that includes focus on financial sustainability. The strategic plan sets specific goals and metrics and provides a clearer plan for the institution to achieve financial stability and sustainability. As discussed in more detail below, the team found the board is better equipped with consistent and detailed information about the institution and is thus empowered to be engaged more fully. The team's recommendations, set out below, are that UWLA continue to build realistic budgets and enrollment plans as guided by the strategic plan to ensure long-term financial stability and build sufficient reserves for unplanned expenses or declines in enrollment.

The team also found that UWLA has made significant progress in developing and formalizing institutional structures and decision-making process. The team's discussions with the institution's WASC Steering Committee, board of managers, finance managers, staff and faculty led to the conclusion that the strategic planning process and the resulting strategic plan have given these stakeholders sharper focus on institutional priorities and have empowered them to ask for the information and resources needed to achieve the goals set out in the strategic plan. This has also resulted in greater and richer communication among these stakeholders and constituents.

3. In an effort to ensure the Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degree, increased attention to the improvement of: a) Student Services to nurture student community and learning needs (e.g., ADA trained staff, tutoring and co-curricular opportunities); b) Curriculum Development and Academics including Program Learning Outcome alignment to professional standards for the undergraduate business degree as well as alignment to the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (or similar framework) to ensure adequate and appropriate degree rigor; c) Institutional Research as a central focus and the use of data for strategic planning and decision-making.

*UWLA's Responses:* As discussed below regarding both Standards 2 and 4, the team found that UWLA has made significant progress in these areas. Some specific examples include expansion of the institutional research position to full time and creation of a 5-year strategic plan that includes academic and co-curricular programs. Based on the team's meetings with faculty, staff, the president and the board of managers, it is clear that systems are well established, understood, and poised to be further developed by the institution as it grows. The team has detailed recommendations set out below, specifically regarding the more recently created undergraduate business program, both in terms of curriculum and student support. The team also recommends that UWLA plan and implement a comprehensive program review process beyond its annual assessments.

As described below regarding Standard 4, the team found that IR is able to provide the information necessary to assess progress toward goals set out in the strategic plan and data driven decision making. In addition, the team observed rich collaboration between IR and other departments across the institution.

## **SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH WSCUC’S STANDARDS**

### **Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions**

Review of the SAV2 self-study and supporting documentation as well as interviews of key personnel during the visit demonstrated that UWLA has made significant progress since the previous visit toward achieving its educational objectives at the program and institutional levels. The institution has put infrastructure and processes in place to assess the effectiveness of its academic programs and student support services. UWLA’s self-study addressed Standard 2 comprehensively, and relevant evidence reviewed by the team included academic catalog and handbooks, the institution’s website, syllabi, assessment manuals, plans, and trainings, curriculum maps, assessment results, and the strategic plan.

The team saw evidence of progress towards operationalizing a culture of assessment and data-driven decision-making since the last visit. Examples of this include:

- Expansion of the Institutional Research (IR) position to full time
- Creation of a 5-year strategic plan that includes academic as well as student support programs
- Benchmark study of UWLA School of Law faculty size against six local, comparable law schools

Onsite, the team witnessed improved communication among, and collaboration across, the various units and constituencies of the university by means of formal committee charging documents and a newly developed communication plan. While there was evidence of minutes for some committee meetings, the team found that more documentation, done regularly and comprehensively, is needed to support institutional practice and memory.

As mentioned in Section 1B, the self-study *per se* at times provided less thorough evidence than desired, such as single sets of committee or faculty agendas and minutes, committee charging documents, or survey and assessment results. However, additional information delivered to the team before and during the visit, as well as the interviews conducted onsite confirmed that structures and processes are well established, increasingly understood and used by faculty and support staff, and poised to be further developed as the institution grows. In sum, the team was satisfied by the overall effectiveness of the evidence and methods used to undertake the self-study, although more reflection would have been helpful in demonstrating how the institution is systematically learning and implementing change at the program and institution level. This sort of capacity for reflective habits will be of increasing import as the institution progresses from course-level and single survey-based assessment to overarching program review.

#### **CFR 2.1**

The School of Business is significantly younger and smaller than the School of Law, and the BS in Business Administration has only recently enrolled its first two students. While the institution provided general evidence to demonstrate the business school's ability to deliver its curricula and support services and to assess the educational effectiveness thereof, the team would have liked to see more comprehensive and concrete evidence that undergraduate business coursework is appropriate for a degree completion program. There are concerns, for example, about the quality of the student experience in a degree program serving two students. Further, the coherence of the curriculum given the number of lower-division units required in an upper-division degree completion program arose as a question. External review by faculty from peer institutions would be an efficacious way of examining this question, much like UWLA's current

inclusion of local business practitioners on the business school's Program Advisory Council is a good practice to ensure the program's professional orientation (as recommended after the previous visit). Since the curriculum was developed in 2016 and enrollment growth is currently slow, the team recommends that UWLA safeguard the relevance of the curriculum as the program matures.

### **CFR 2.2a**

The institution has made progress since the last visit by setting outcome standards and evaluation criteria for the School of Business programs, which include the adoption of the Lumina Degree Qualification Profile (DQP). However, for the BS program in particular, concerns remain about the integration of a well-rounded program of general education that is more than a collection of courses and about the development of general education core competencies at the upper-division level. There is also little evidence that the DQP has been fully integrated in providing guidelines that differentiate the undergraduate from the graduate business coursework.

The team reviewed evidence showing that GE core competencies are included in the business degree PLOs and that they have been mapped to individual courses. The self-study also expresses the intent to assess them via Lumina DQP metrics. At the same time, the evidence provided did not establish how these competencies are further developed at the upper-division level. In this context, while the transfer-in process includes the review and documentation of lower-division core competencies, the team questions – given the program's nonselective admission criteria as well as the plan to recruit international students and students reentering higher education – whether a formal point-of-entry assessment of students' foundational skills might be desirable in order to set them on a path to success and ensure appropriate academic

rigor. Finally, it would be interesting to see more clearly articulated how the UWLA mission and ethos inform the general education curriculum and learning outcomes and how the program intends to assess and improve student learning in these areas.

### **CFR 2.3**

UWLA has a coherent mission-driven philosophy that guides the meaning of its degrees. The institutional self-study and onsite review provided evidence that UWLA learning outcomes are articulated at all levels, reflected in the School of Law and School of Business programs, curricula, and policies, and generally aligned with support services. The team saw evidence that learning outcomes are differentiated according to the level of development (introductory, developing, with each outcome culminating in an expected level of mastery by the end of the degree). Since the last visit, the academic programs have engaged faculty and other constituents in developing meaning of degree statements. The School of Business statement, for example, includes the purpose to “enable students, many from underserved communities, to obtain the professional skills necessary to achieve their dreams” through “practical experience, foundational theory, and forward-thinking methodology...underlined by ethics and integrity.” UWLA mission, objectives, and meaning of degree are clearly articulated and published online, in catalogs, handbooks, and syllabi, and posted on the walls of the school. Another good practice is the implementation of regular meetings between the deans and faculty to discuss and review the attainment and assessment of PLOs in their courses. The team appreciates that since the last visit, the School of Law has acted on the recommendation to include the Legal Externship Program in program assessment. To that end, the school now collects feedback from the external supervisors on the students’ performance on the job according to the individual PLOs. Finally, student support services have continued to develop and implement tools and programs that align

with the academic outcomes and standards, notably in the areas of career services, disability services, financial services, and academic support.

#### **CFR 2.4**

UWLA has demonstrated progress since the last visit towards more comprehensively involving faculty in learning outcome assessment and some programmatic review. Syllabi include SLOs that are embedded in faculty standards for assessing student work. The self-study, as well as onsite interviews with a large group of faculty, confirmed that they understand how to develop outcomes and use data in the consideration of curricular changes. A culture of data-driven assessment is apparent throughout the institution. As previously noted, it is unfortunate that the self-study offered little in the way of reflection or analysis of the learning outcome assessment undertaken at the course level and linked to programmatic review. This aspect of faculty involvement with assessment is discussed under Standard 4 below.

#### **CFR 2.8**

At the last visit, the team observed nascent expectations and structures for faculty scholarship and professional development although it was not clear whether these achievements were assessed as part of faculty evaluation. Moreover, the lack of faculty promotion or tenure provisions made it difficult to tie scholarship to faculty performance review. Since then, the administration has included faculty development into their strategic plan, the faculty have adopted academic titles, e.g. full-time professor, senior adjunct professor, etc. with criteria differentiating various levels of professorship, and the institution has created more formal processes to encourage and promote scholarship and faculty enrichment. For example, notably, the Faculty Development Policy added a requirement that faculty update the institution annually on their outside contributions and professional accomplishments. Similarly, the Faculty

Development Plan now includes expectations related to research requirements, instructional innovation, and scholarship. The team concludes that, at this time, UWLA's provisions for faculty scholarship are suited to its mission and purposes, especially the practice orientation of its faculty and programs. The self-study did not elaborate on the institution's expectations of scholarship for its graduate students, which remains an area for future growth, specifically nurturing graduate culture in the School of Business.

### **CFR 2.9**

The team was once again impressed by faculty efforts on behalf of students who are frequently not ready for graduate-level research and writing, a commitment which is also reflective of the faculty's commendable support for UWLA's opportunity mission. As the institutional self-study makes clear, UWLA is "a practice-focused institution where professors are also practitioners. Practitioner faculty members link their real world business and law skills to faculty-created program and course level outcomes as part of the curriculum" (page 56). Since the last visit, the institution has also begun implementing, through online faculty development support and face-to-face meetings, training to enhance their curricular and pedagogical methods. The team also saw evidence that faculty evaluation is linked with scholarship and development in the form of an evaluation template used at annual meetings with the dean of the respective school. The template includes discussion and notation of the professor's completion of professional development, service, and scholarly contributions.

### **CFR 2.11 and 2.13**

As evidenced at SAV1, UWLA continues to offer a wide array of co-curricular programming that reflects the diversity of UWLA's student population as well as their academic needs and professional interests. Last year, School of Law students earned significant recognition

for UWLA by winning best oral argument at the 2017 Moot Court competition. The institution will also be hosting the 2018 competition later this year.

The team had previously recommended that UWLA align its co-curricular programming with its academic goals and carry out regular co-curricular assessment. Since then, student support services have articulated mission statements aligned with the ILOs and collaborated with institutional research and assessment to develop assessment plans for each area, i.e. student services, career services, financial services, and career services. Moreover, support services are included in one of the goals of the strategic plan, specifically the assessment of disability services delivery and career services. This is all evidence of progress; however, as described below in Standard 4, a more comprehensive co-curricular program review is needed as services mature.

To nurture student community and meet the high needs for support, the team had also previously recommended staff development in the area of academic support (e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)). In the meantime, the student services director has been designated as the school's ADA Compliance Officer and has undergone related training. New students are informed of disability rights and services during orientation and the appropriate forms and processes have been created for them to request such services. In the interest of transparency, it would be desirable to make these disability policies as well as the process for requesting accommodations easily accessible in print and online, especially as some students may be reluctant to inquire about them in person.

In sum, the team finds that co-curricular programming and support services are responsive to the academic and professional needs of the graduate students and that plans are in place to assess these programs through surveys and other measurements. As a result, some

preliminary improvements have been made, such as offering more legal writing workshops and tutoring. Not enough time has elapsed since the last visit, however, for the institution to complete and reflect upon a full cycle of co-curricular review. Importantly, given the standards of admission, the targeted growth, and the plan to recruit international students, the School of Business will need to assess the academic and co-curricular needs of this new population of students transferring in from community colleges and international universities as well as those returning to higher education after a significant break. These needs, in turn, must be supported by appropriately resourced services as the school creates an undergraduate learning community.

### **Conclusion**

The team finds that UWLA meets Standard 2 at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, with the 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. The team finds three areas for improvement under this standard pertaining to the viability and sustainability of the School of Business. Specifically, the team recommends that UWLA demonstrate evidence of progress towards:

- Ensuring that the undergraduate business coursework is appropriate for a degree completion program. (CFR 2.1)
- Integrating general education curriculum into the undergraduate business program that develops and is aligned to the WSCUC core competencies at the upper division level. (CFR 2.2a)
- Aligning student support with the needs of an undergraduate student population and assessing the effectiveness of those efforts. (CFR 2.11, 2.13)

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

In reviewing Standard 3, the recent visit focused on financial sustainability (CFR 3.4), organizational structures and decision making (CFR 3.7), appointment of a permanent CFO (CFR 3.8), and the board having the tools to be effective.

The team received and reviewed the self-study report and subsequent supplemental information to address these CFRs. The team also conducted interviews with various groups including a meeting with the president, a meeting with the CFO and the vice president/director of the business office, a meeting with the board of managers, and a meeting with the board finance sub-committee to discuss resource and sustainability issues. The team also reviewed selected minutes from the board meetings related to financial matters.

As stated in section 1B, overall, the self-study report did not do justice to what UWLA has accomplished since the last visit. The report provided somewhat limited information about the progress made and included little reflection or analysis of the significant changes made by the institution. The team subsequently requested supplemental information including updated financial statements, multi-year budgets, multi-year cash flow forecasts, multi-year enrollment projections, new capital infusion information, and presidential evaluation to augment the self-study report. The supplemental information provided much more in-depth figures and details about the progress made since the last visit. The in-person interviews, especially the separate meetings with the WASC Steering Committee, board of managers, finance managers, faculty, and students were most informative and effective.

It is evident from discussions with the executive team, board of managers and faculty that UWLA has embraced the recommendations made by the team from the last visit and has done a

fair amount of self-reflection and analysis on how to ensure quality of the education and long-term sustainability of the institution.

### **CFR 3.4**

UWLA addressed the financial sustainability issues identified in the Eligibility action letter by making progress in the following areas:

- Created a strategic plan to provide a plan to achieve financial stability
- Generated an operating profit and positive cash flow in 2017
- Raised \$500,000 new capital
- Expanded into undergraduate business education
- Hired a permanent CFO
- Increased level of financial oversight by the board of managers.

In reviewing the strategic plan, financial stability is one of the major goals. It is commendable that under the financial stability goal, UWLA set specific and measurable objectives and metrics such as “to increase student enrollment and retention by at least 10% a year” and “bi-weekly report to CFO on outstanding student accounts and collection efforts.” The strategic plan has provided a clearer and actionable plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability.

The institution is currently undergoing an external audit of 2017 financial statements, so the audited financial statement for 2017 was not available at the time of SAV2. According to the unaudited financial statements, UWLA generated an income before tax of \$167,000 in 2017.

UWLA has a plan to raise \$1 million to \$1.5 million. In 2017, it raised \$500,000 from an investor, of which \$300,000 has been drawn down. However, the new capital is interest bearing at 10%, which is expensive and therefore only used by the institution when needed. When asked

whether there was a plan to raise more capital and what the next steps were, President Brown reflected that while UWLA will continue to raise new capital, it has no immediate needs for more funding. He also emphasized that he wanted to raise only the right kind of capital that would not change the educational mission and objectives of the institution. The board of managers also supports this thoughtful and purposive approach.

The profit in 2017, stronger management of student receivables, and additional capital infusion have stabilized the finances and strengthened the cash flow in the short run. However, the balance sheet needs to be further bolstered. The institution's total liabilities exceed total assets when excluding goodwill. Sufficient reserves should be established and used for unplanned events such as unexpected declines in enrollment or onetime expenses.

One of the UWLA strategies to achieve long-term financial sustainability is to grow School of Law enrollment modestly after obtaining accreditation, and to diversify the revenue stream from expansion into undergraduate business education. The enrollment target for future years is ambitious, especially for the School of Business. For example, the School of Business enrollment in fall 2017 was 2, and projected to be 26 in fall 2018, 76 in 2019, 107 in 2020 and 130 in 2021. The growth is expected to be from undergraduate education, more specifically from a degree completion program targeted at community college transfer students and international students. The market for undergraduate business programs in Southern California is crowded and competitive. For example, the California State University system has several campuses in the Los Angeles area offering relatively low cost undergraduate business degree programs. The ambitious enrollment plan needs to be supported by a detailed marketing plan and sufficient resources to invest in instructional infrastructure. In addition, as discussed below in Standard 4, while UWLA has established strong student support services for the law students, the

undergraduate student and international student populations may require different kinds of student support services. Thus, sufficient resources should be invested to meet such new student support needs. (CFR3.4)

### **CFR 3.8 and 3.9**

During the last visit, UWLA had an interim CFO, who has since become the permanent CFO. He is experienced and knowledgeable and has incorporated data from institutional research into his financial modeling and enrollment projection. The CFO also presented financial reports and projections to the board and the Finance Committee regularly as evidenced by a review of minutes and emails. At the meeting with the team, it was evident that the board of managers are engaged, devoted, and better equipped to provide appropriate level of financial oversight.

### **3.7 and 3.10**

UWLA has improved its organizational structure and decision-making processes by strengthening the shared governance structure. It has clearly defined roles and responsibilities of full-time and part-time faculty in the charging documents of all university committees. It was evident in the meeting with faculty members that they felt empowered to exercise academic leadership, allowing them to ensure and sustain both the academic quality and the institution's educational mission.

### **Conclusion**

After considering CFRs for Standard 3, the team recognizes that UWLA has made significant progress towards meeting Standard 3. UWLA has stabilized and strengthened its finances in the short term. The team noted that the current strategy is to grow School of Law enrollment after obtaining accreditation and to diversify the institution's revenue stream by expanding undergraduate business education, and that there are ambitious enrollment targets planned for

future years. Thus, the team finds that UWLA meets Standard 3 at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, with the 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. The team recommends that UWLA continue to build:

- Realistic budgets and enrollment plans as guided by the strategic plan to ensure long-term financial sustainability. Enrollment growth for the School of Business needs to be supported by detailed recruitment plans and sufficient resources to invest in instructional infrastructure and student support services. (CFR 3.4)
- Sufficient reserves to be used for unplanned events such as unexpected declines in enrollment or one-time expenses. (CFR 3.4)

#### **Standard 4: Creating An Organization Committed To Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement**

In reviewing Standard 4, the recent team visit focused on the quality assurance process (CFR 4.1), evidence of sufficient institutional research capacity (CFR 4.2), and indication that a strategic plan is used to determine the direction of the institution (CFR 4.6). While the institution's level of reflection within the self-study was limited, it was evident that the UWLA faculty, staff, and leadership invested time reflecting upon items related to Standard 4. Moreover, while there are yet developing or new systems, overall the team observed focus on data-driven, evidence-based, and self-reflective decision making that considers the sustainability and viability of the institution through stringent planning as well as resource and strategy prioritization. A collaboration of constituencies supports the budding practice of assessment of the institution's mission, function, and allocation of resources to attain its future goals.

## **CFR 4.1**

UWLA continues to progress in its establishment of a culture and system of learning outcomes assessment. One area of growth, for example, is UWLA's curriculum development process that per the Assessment Handbook encourages faculty to "blueprint" (i.e., begin with assessment outcomes when designing a course). The institution also readily provided binders of syllabi of courses offered this year, and each syllabus surveyed listed course and program level outcomes. Likewise, curriculum maps depicting alignment between program and institutional outcomes were also made available.

One program learning outcome is assessed per year in each program. In addition, the Faculty Senate, Program Advisory Council, and board of managers approved the adoption of the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) into the School of Business curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

In speaking with faculty, staff, leadership and the board members, it was evident that assessment (as one of the main strategic goals) is effectively and quickly becoming a part of the UWLA culture. Both the director of assessment and the director of institutional research, working collaboratively, showed a maturing grasp of data-driven assessment practices. During the visit, these leaders provided a few examples of how data had helped to close the loop, such as a faculty re-assignment to teaching higher-level courses based on student survey results.

As assessment structures continue to be built, this team encourages UWLA to seize opportunities that move systematic efforts even further forward. UWLA should remain vigilant in utilizing data to understand student learning and success. When the team inquired about the institution's plans to implement necessary and more advanced assessment practices, the

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<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that the School of Business engages a Program Advisory Council tasked with providing outside perspective on curriculum, especially as one of the team's concerns is that given the School of Business' low enrollment and anticipated growth, UWLA will have to keep a close watch on the relevance of the curriculum.

assessment and institutional research directors both indicated that faculty were at this point just becoming used to the centrality of course learning outcomes in course development and overall workflow. The sentiment was that faculty must understand the basics of assessment before moving onto the next levels. It was clear to the team that UWLA realizes that more pervasive and systematic analysis practices need to be introduced and that sophistication will be added to its assessment practices in a manner that ensures the process is faculty driven.

The team suggests that UWLA consider future practices to support continuous improvement. First, there is an outstanding need to review UWLA's co-curricular offerings. A review of this nature is key especially as feedback regarding co-curricular offerings has been limited to surveys measuring user satisfaction. Given UWLA's mission to serve non-traditional learners, co-curricular support (e.g., accommodations, tutoring, writing help) may be cornerstones to retention and persistence.

The team continues to recommend that UWLA establish a formalized, regular, and reflective program-level self-study. Currently, UWLA's School of Business and School of Law engage in "periodic informal program review" which entails faculty discussion of "issues of the program curriculum" at the end of each term. In addition, while the School of Law is beholden to the State Bar of California Committee of Bar Examiners (CBE) annual review, the law school should develop program review in addition to the CBE accreditation processes. Implementation of a thorough 5-year program review cycle should be faculty driven and supported by the offices of assessment and institutional research. This self-reflective review would involve an analysis of quality measures and input from external reviewers leading to action items prioritized and aligned according to the UWLA mission, vision, and strategic plan.

Additional opportunities to fortify assessment efforts present themselves. For example, the current practice of “periodic informal program review” could be developed into a more robust annual program assessment plan. Such a plan could outline an annual focus on specific courses and assignments within a program. Identification of “signature assignments” that are evidence of student learning within a course could facilitate an understanding of how well the program is meeting its outcome goals.

#### **CFR 4.2**

Since the SAV1, UWLA has made some of its greatest improvements within the institutional research realm. In response to WASC team recommendations, UWLA hired a full-time director of institutional research. Both the self-study and comments during the visit indicate that institutional research meets the expected responsibility of disseminating data to both inform and support the strategic plan with timely, accurate, and meaningful information. Data for learning outcomes, student support, student success, graduation, marketing, and enrollment hinge upon the collection, tracking, and analysis of data housed in institutional research. Also, because milestones within the institution’s strategic plan are tied in part to satisfaction data, institutional research is responsive to UWLA’s institutional needs to facilitate survey research. The team correspondingly observed rich collaboration between institutional research and other departments (e.g., library, career services, deans, registrar, and finance).

Institutional research is also mindful of the need to harness data external to UWLA. While deans provide institutional research with student data, the director of institutional research equips academic leadership with comparison reports. These reports include data from comparable schools garnered from sources such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data

System (IPEDS) and/or attained through communication with peer institutions. A new statistical software system serves to support needs for data reporting and disaggregation.

The institutional research capacity at this point appears to be appropriate for the size of the university. There may, however, be a need for additional resources dedicated to assessment and institutional research if UWLA's projections for growth come to fruition.

#### **CFR 4.6**

Information gained from both UWLA's self-study and through the SAV2 visit indicated that the institution has an understanding of the core principles related to Standard 4, and that these principles are operationalized into the institution's everyday work. Specifically, as previously noted, UWLA developed and is implementing a 5-year mission-centric strategic plan.

The plan was thoughtfully written via collaboration with the board of managers, UWLA president, and the WASC Steering Committee. The strategic plan identifies four key areas of focus, largely in response to feedback from the SAV1. These areas are listed below and are detailed in other portions of the report:

- University departmental and program assessment. The scope of this goal includes departmental assessment of all areas including financial services, admissions, student services, career services, and faculty development. Metrics for student services, career services, and faculty development departments are tied to student satisfaction or use of services. Marketing looks at lead generation conversions, and the Financial Department's goal is to process students within 10 days of their academic clearance.
- Financial stability. This goal is focused on ensuring financial stability (e.g., increased enrollment and retention by 10% per year; balanced budget) as well as increasing financial stability (e.g., through balanced budget, capital investments). The first

objective of increased retention is stated with a data-driven approach that depends upon analysis by institutional research of 5-year graduation cohorts.

- Faculty shared governance. UWLA has taken a very inclusive approach in response to the team's previous recommendation to engage faculty in a shared governance model. In addition to outlining objectives that include faculty voice in the development of courses and programs, UWLA has plans to include students and alumni as well as staff in improvement plans for learning and departmental goals, respectively. This strategic area of focus also includes objectives that empower the board of managers to weigh in on important operational issues such as learning outcomes, budgets, finances and the president's annual review.
- Accreditation. The fourth and final area of focus detailed in the UWLA strategic plan is specific to the achievement of accreditation. Objectives include evaluation of areas of opportunity identified by SAVI, such as data-driven processes (i.e., improvement of institutional research and assessment capacities) and evidence of board independence (i.e., budget approval and review of strategic plan).

Conversations with the board members, president, and key leadership including the CFO and director of institutional research, interviewed independently, indicated that the strategic plan, tempered with financial resources and institutional data, had become a guidepost for UWLA decision making. Full- and part-time faculty as well as students recognized a positive and "more organized and thoughtful" shift in the administration of policy and decisions. And while UWLA's strategic plan has only been put into recent use, trends toward financial stability, development of assessment practices, and movement toward strong faculty governance indicate

that UWLA will continue to engage in sustained, data-driven decision making to help accomplish its mission.

## **Conclusion**

In considering CFRs 4.1, 4.2, and 4.6, the team recognizes that UWLA made significant progress toward meeting Standard 4 at a level sufficient for initial accreditation, with the 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. The team recommends that UWLA focus continuing efforts to improve the quality of the degree by further developing its culture of data-driven decisions, assessment, and continuous improvement by:

- Planning and implementing a comprehensive program review process beyond annual assessment which includes a reflective program-level self-study. This would involve an analysis of quality measures and an external review visit beyond reviews associated with state accreditation processes. (CFR 4.1)
- Creating a 5-year curricular and co-curricular assessment plan to ensure that current data collection and analysis processes are used to close the loop in a meaningful and strategic way. (CFR 4.1)

## **SECTION III. FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Findings**

*Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives.*

At the first Seeking Accreditation Visit, the team recommended, and the Commission supported, that UWLA met Standard 1 at the Initial accreditation level. Therefore, the team did not review the institution under that Standard during this visit.

*Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions.*

The team finds that UWLA meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation. This reports sets out recommendations below. 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 team finds that UWLA meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation. This reports sets out recommendations below. 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 and Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement.*

The team finds that UWLA meets this Standard at a level sufficient for initial accreditation. This reports sets out recommendations below. Only the Commission is authorized to make the final determination as to whether or not an institution is in compliance with the Standards.

**B. Commendations**

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

- The life-transforming mission that is fully embraced by the faculty, staff, students and board of managers.

- Board of managers commitment, involvement and depth of knowledge. The team commends how the board has expanded to include additional members, enhancing its diversity, energy and independence.
- The significant progress in the integration of financial information and institutional research into board and committee decision making.
- The significant progress toward maturing as an institution, in particular the breadth and depth of the strategic planning process, which included involvement across the institution.

### **C. Recommendations**

#### *Standard 2*

After considering CFRs for Standard 2, the team recognizes that UWLA has made significant progress toward meeting Standard 2. The team recommends UWLA continue to evaluate the viability and sustainability of the School of Business. Specifically, the team would like to see evidence of progress towards:

- Ensuring that the undergraduate business coursework is appropriate for a degree completion program. (CFR 2.1)
- Integrating general education curriculum into the undergraduate business program that develops and is aligned to the WSCUC core competencies at the upper division level. (CFR 2.2a)
- Aligning student support with the needs of an undergraduate student population and assessing the effectiveness of those efforts. (CFR 2.11, 2.13)

### *Standard 3*

After considering CFRs for Standard 3, the team recognizes that UWLA has made significant progress towards meeting Standard 3. UWLA has stabilized and strengthened its finances in the short term. The team noted that the current strategy is to grow School of Law enrollment after obtaining accreditation and to diversify the institution's revenue stream by expanding undergraduate business education, and that there are ambitious enrollment targets planned for future years. Thus, the team recommends that UWLA continue to build:

- Realistic budgets and enrollment plans as guided by the strategic plan to ensure long term financial sustainability. Enrollment growth for the School of Business needs to be supported by detailed recruitment plans and sufficient resources to invest in instructional infrastructure and student support services. (CFR 3.4)
- Sufficient reserves to be used for unplanned events such as unexpected declines in enrollment or one time expenses. (CFR 3.4)

### *Standard 4*

After considering CFRs for Standard 4, the team recognizes that UWLA has made significant progress toward meeting Standard 4. The team recommends that UWLA focus continuing efforts to improve the quality of the degree by further developing its culture of data-driven decisions, assessment, and continuous improvement by:

- Planning and implementing a comprehensive program review process beyond annual assessment which includes a reflective program-level self-study. This would involve an analysis of quality measures and an external review visit beyond reviews associated with state accreditation processes. (CFR 4.1)

- Creating a 5-year curricular and co-curricular assessment plan to assure that current data collection and analysis processes are used to close the loop in a meaningful and strategic way. (CFR 4.1)