

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM  
SPECIAL VISIT

To Humboldt State University

April 21-23, 2021

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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

### **A. Description of Institution and Accreditation History**

Founded in 1913, Humboldt State University (HSU) is the fourth smallest university and most remote campus in the California State University System (CSU). It is located in a rural setting on the Pacific coast in Arcata, California, 275 miles north of San Francisco and currently serves 6,431 undergraduate and graduate students. Through its academic colleges, the university offers 52 undergraduate majors, 72 minors, 12 graduate degrees, and 14 credentials (2020-21 catalog). In 2019-20, Humboldt awarded 1800 bachelor's degrees and 214 master's degrees, and 70 credentials issued by the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing.

The university is both a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). In fall 2020, the university enrolled 6,431 students, 91% of whom were undergraduates. Most students attended full-time (87%). In keeping with its HSI designations, 33% of enrolled students were Hispanic/Latinx, 45% White, 3.4 Black, 1.4% Native American, 6.4 two or more races, 1.4% nonresident alien, 2.9% Asian American, 0.3% Pacific Islander and 6% unknown.

Humboldt State University's student demographics have changed rapidly over the last decade. Enrollment of racially minoritized first-time freshmen in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) majors increased by 39% from 2009-2019. The majority of these students arrive from distant urban centers (Los Angeles, San Diego, and the Bay Area). This growth and change in demographics presents challenges for HSU to achieve inclusive success, particularly for racially minoritized and first-generation students.

HSU has numerous opportunities for undergraduate student engagement in the arts, humanities, sciences, and applied sciences in real-world research experiences and hands-on learning with professors engaged in research and community service. Examples include The Coral Sea, an oceangoing vessel, where students study with leading experts in oceanography, marine biology, and wildlife programs; the study of properties of forest fires, and lab experiences bringing sustainable lighting to the developing world.

HSU students participate in out of class activities in more than 140 campus clubs, at the state-of-the-art recreational center, and as members of HSU's 11 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) II athletic teams. Students also broaden their horizons via the nationally recognized performers and speakers that the university brings to campus each year.

As of fall 2020, HSU had 356.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) instructional faculty (500 headcount). Of these, 215.2 FTE (218 headcount) are tenured/tenure-track faculty and 141.3 FTE (282 headcount) are contracted lecturers.

WASC first accredited Humboldt State University in 1949. The university's recent accreditation history included a Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit in March 2008, followed by a June 2008 commission action to receive the CPR team report and schedule an Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) for fall 2009. The review team conducted an EER visit in February 2010, followed by a June 2010 Commission action to receive the EER report and reaffirm accreditation. In an Commission Action Letter (CAL) dated July 14, 2010, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) requested a fall 2013 Interim Report to address: a) progress on assessment of student learning at multiple levels, b) continued development of inclusive excellence initiatives, c) progress in embracing institutional change and making critical choices; and d) progress in realignment of resources and institutional structures to educational objectives and student learning outcomes, and e) sustaining current efforts.

On November 15, 2013, a panel of the Interim Report Committee (IRC) commended the university for its hard work and important steps taken to address these issues and acted to receive the Interim Report. They also requested that progress on these topics, including the sustainability of these efforts over time, be included in the institutional report as part of the fall 2017 Offsite Review and spring 2018 Accreditation Visit.

From spring 2011 to spring 2014, there were five substantive change actions for distance education programming – Master of Arts in Social Work, Bachelor of Arts in Social Work, Master of Arts (MA) in Education, Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, and MA in Applied Anthropology. The Commission approved all substantive changes.

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

On February 12, 2021, Humboldt State University submitted its institutional report and supplemental materials. The team reviewed the materials and completed worksheets in preparation for the initial review. On March 16, 2021, the team chair led a conference call during which the team discussed the consolidated worksheets and identified issues it wished to

pursue during the Special Visit. They also discussed lines of inquiry and noted documents to request from HSU prior to the visit. The HSU Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) shared the Special Visit schedule and also provided requested documents. The team met virtually via the RingCentral Meetings platform.

The spring 2018 Accreditation Visit resulted in reaffirmation of accreditation for 8 years with a Special Visit scheduled for spring 2021. The Commission action required that HSU respond to six recommendations by the time of their next comprehensive review for reaffirmation of accreditation. Of those six recommendations, this Special Visit addressed three of the six recommendations in Section II including:

- Recommendation 3: Improve the university leadership's communication strategies and efforts across the campus, including continued transparency about HSU's budget challenges. Change-management training will assist HSU in making critical choices among the myriad campus initiatives. (CFR 1.7)
- Recommendation 4: Implement a comprehensive university assessment plan developed by faculty so that effective assessment is consistent across the institution and widely shared among faculty, staff, and students. Improving the assessment of GEAR (General Education and All-University Requirements) and consistently embedding the expectations for student learning in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work are components of effective assessment. (CFR 2.4, 2.6); and
- Recommendation 6: Engage in realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and diversification of revenue sources. Strengthening fundraising and private partnerships will help alleviate the stress on the budget in the upcoming years. More detail in the 2017 Environmental Scan Visualization Plan will clarify how HSU will counter current trends and reach its enrollment, graduation, retention, and achievement gap targets (CFR 3.4).

According to the Special Visit team report table of contents, section II covers three issues: 1) Budget & Diversification; 2) University-Wide Assessment Program; and 3) Enrollment Management. Recommendation 3 about communication strategies, transparency about HSU's budget challenges and change management are covered under issue # 1.

While not required for the Special Visit, HSU provided an update on the other three recommendations from the July 20, 2018 CAL:

- Recommendation 1: Implement and sustain appropriate responses to the increased diversity of HSU's students. The evaluation of HSU's academic and student support services, including tutoring, housing, students with disabilities programs, financial aid counseling, career counseling and placement, and multicultural centers, and the adaptation of services based on evaluation results will better meet the needs of different students. Evidence-based decisions would ensure that curricular and co-curricular programs are aligned, and, are sufficiently funded and staffed by qualified faculty and staff. (CFR 1.4, 2.13)
- Recommendation 2: Continue and advance efforts to orient prospective students from large, urban areas to HSU's rural, small city context. As HSU incorporates a more diverse student body, intensifying efforts on student grievances and complaints, safety, and life in the local community will help students to feel supported and avoid feelings of alienation and isolation. (CFR 1.6)
- Recommendation 6: Prioritize diversification of faculty and staff demographics, including the use of new hires, to align with the diversity of the student body. Engaging faculty and staff in cultural competency professional development will further the academic achievement of students and contribute to the achievement of the institution's educational objectives. (CFR 1.4, 3.1, 3.3)

The team covers these three issues in Section III – Other Topics, As Appropriate under Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

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

Following its review of the institutional report, the team concluded that Humboldt State had demonstrated a clear focus on improvement and noted the recent implementation of new initiatives under the HSU president. The team felt that the report was well written and highlighted the points of concern from the 2018 Accreditation Visit (AV) ; the institutional report was open and honest about the university's challenges.

The report preparation had included broad representation from the campus community. It also conveyed a strong campus-wide commitment to community engagement, as well as a dedication to place students at the center of the institution's educational and organizational initiatives. Contributors to the report include members of the Divisions of Enrollment

Management, Administrative Affairs, Academic Affairs, and University Advancement; the Office of the Vice Provost (graduate and undergraduate programs); the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Academic Personnel Services; the Office of Institutional Effectiveness; the Integrated Curriculum Committee; the Department of Mathematics; place-based learning community support teams; and the first-year writing and writing-across-the-curriculum programs.

The team agreed that Humboldt State had provided sufficient evidence of its claims about decision-making and actions taken, while also recognizing the need to improve data gather and analysis. It was clear that the new leadership team had catalyzed efforts to improve in every area of the institution.

While the report clearly and seriously addressed the issues presented in the 2018 CAL, as well as concerns from previous reviews and internal processes, specific information on the campus's plans for continued development of internal processes, such as assessment and program review, appeared to be emerging.

## **SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS**

### **BUDGET & DIVERSIFICATION**

The 2018 Commission Action Letter (CAL), required HSU to improve the university leadership's communication strategies and efforts across the campus, including continued transparency about HSU's budget challenges. The CAL proposed that change-management training would assist HSU in making critical choices among the myriad campus initiatives (CFR 1.7).

A recommendation included in the March 2018 team report and a requirement in the July 2018 CAL focused on the need for Humboldt State University to demonstrate that it had engaged in realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and diversification of revenue sources. Strengthening fundraising and private partnerships were cited as important in order to help alleviate the stress on the budget in the upcoming years. The report further asked for more detail regarding how HSU planned to counter current trends in reaching its enrollment, graduation, retention, and achievement gap targets (CFR 3.4). HSU's operating fund budget in fiscal year (FY) 21 was \$128.7 million, with 26.7% from student tuition and fees, 66.5 % from state appropriations, and 7.8% from other revenue sources. The university's Special Visit report described its progress toward strengthening its financial position resulting from a 30% enrollment decline over the past five years coupled with nearly \$5.5 million in COVID related state allocations reductions in FY21.

The team found that the university's processes in responding to the financial issues noted in the CAL were thoughtful and thorough. HSU had made significant progress since the 2018 visit to strengthen communication across the university and enhance transparency regarding existing and anticipated budget challenges and opportunities.

An educational-focused communication strategy led by the University Resources and Planning Committee (URPC), a representative standing committee of the University Senate co-chaired by the provost and a senior member of the faculty, included hosting open forums and presentations to various

university groups, posting all URPC meetings materials on its budget website and working collaboratively with the budget office to provide publicly available interactive dashboards and regular reports from the president's staff. These efforts had established a critical and important framework for an open and transparent shared-governance process for budget discussions (CFR 3.7).

In addition, the university budget office continued to enhance the utility of the dashboards to facilitate access to information to all members of the HSU community. Enhancements to the dashboards, including details on units within the university, were in progress in collaboration with requests for data from the of the University Resources and Planning Committee. The budget office worked collaboratively with institutional effectiveness and enrollment management to provide budget and financial data, including state, California State University (CSU), and university considerations; multi-year analyses and trends; and quarterly financial reviews detailing university performance and projected year-end balances.

HSU had also increased the frequency of general communication with campus stakeholders, which included regular reports and updates from the president and the provost. There were examples that suggested this collaborative process had resulted in resource allocation decisions that were more aligned with institutional priorities and annual budgets that took into account multi-year projected scenarios of different enrollment and state support levels, available reserves, and new and continuing private funding. There was also evidence that HSU's current planning efforts were focused on expenditure reductions to ensure the current year budgets were balanced allowing for targeted investments seeding growth opportunities (CFR 3.4).

An Integrated Assessment Planning and Budget (IAPB) framework supported these efforts by more clearly identifying and communicating university priorities for investments and reflecting transparency with resource allocation and reallocation decisions (CFRs 3.7, 3.8).

The Special Visit report highlighted examples of this integrated strategic planning framework in resource requests and allocation processes, including disbursements of HSU's FY20 and FY21 CSU Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI 2025) resources, facilities and technology investments, and accountability for unit expenditures in annual program assessment reports.

With the hire of a new president, HSU is embarking on a new strategic planning effort. As described in the report, the new strategic plan, once complete, will inform the budget process and prioritization efforts and leverage the integrated strategic-planning framework to expand alignment of communications and planning across the campus.

The work done to date at the institutional level is noteworthy, as is the progress in divisional and college level operational planning with the goal of integrating continuous assessment, improvement, and annual and multi-year institutional budget and planning efforts going forward.

Of note, HSU has adopted ADKAR change-management processes in all major decisions and planning efforts, including the current strategic planning and the polytechnic feasibility study. The ADKAR Model of Change Management is an outcome-oriented method to facilitate organizational change. The acronym stands for "awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement." Awareness and desire aim to move an organization out of the current state, where change is needed but has not yet begun. Knowledge and ability are essential for change to occur, and reinforcement ensures sustainability of change into the future.

HSU has made substantial progress in identifying and implementing strategies to diversify its revenue sources and strengthening private partnerships has seen early success in bringing additional funds to campus. Noteworthy was the hire of a consultant in spring 2019 to explore private-partnership

opportunities, a refocus on the importance of fundraising and private support, and the president significantly enhanced community engagement activities. (CFRs 3.4, 3.6).

There were positive steps in expanding resources and processes. Because sustainability or growth of these multiple sources is not fully apparent, an integrated all-source budget aligning various projections with various scenarios could be shared. An example would be like those used for enrollment and state funding in fiscal planning. This is especially important as the institution is launching its first comprehensive fundraising campaign.

Evidence of the positive impact of these efforts on HSU's financial position were seen in university reserve balances and year-end financial statements. Over the past five years, HSU's designated balances and reserves have steadily increased even as the university has implemented significant reductions. The university's efforts to balance the budget and align spending with available revenue instead of relying on one-time reserves to ineffectively address ongoing structural deficits must continue to ensure future sustainability and opportunities for growth.

The university's FY19 audited financial statements also demonstrated an improving financial position, with HSU's net position increasing by \$13 million over the prior year. As of February 2021, revised enrollment and budget charts are being finalized to guide current budget planning. It was noteworthy that the university outperformed the enrollment declines anticipated for spring 2020, so new projections under development depict a slightly improved enrollment picture.

## **UNIVERSITY-WIDE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

Based on the CAL, HSU was asked to implement a comprehensive university assessment plan developed by faculty so that effective assessment was consistent across the institution and widely shared among faculty, staff, and students. They were also asked to improve the assessment of GEAR and consistently embed the expectations for student learning in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work as components of effective assessment. (CFR 2.4, 2.6)

Both the March 2018 team report and the July 2018 CAL noted concerns and articulated recommendations regarding Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions; specifically, CFR 2.4 (Faculty’s collective responsibility for setting student learning outcomes (SLOs) and standards assessing student learning and demonstrating achievement of standards”) and CFR 2.6 (Graduates achieve stated levels of attainment; SLOs embedded in faculty standards for assessing student work). These issues were principally addressed in pages 37 – 52 of the HSU Special Visit Report.

In the team report it was determined that while HSU academic “programs are appropriate in content, standards and degree level [and] the degrees are defined sufficiently in regard to admissions requirements and levels of achievement for graduation on both the undergraduate and graduate level,” there were still some issues to address. Namely, outcomes had been set but often the assessment of those outcomes still needed to be addressed and “there is a lack of integration and alignment of program level outcomes to university-level outcomes.” Additionally, many assessment plans (the Core Competency Assessment Plan and the Graduate Program Assessment Plan) demonstrated viable assessment structures, but “there is no evidence that data has been gathered in a comprehensive and meaningful way.” And finally, “The program review process [...] is still uneven in terms of the number of programs actually assessed according to the assessment calendar. The university lacks an overall assessment plan – while the hiring of an assessment coordinator is encouraging, much work has yet to

be done to link and align all assessment activities.” The CAL then recommended that HSU “Implement a comprehensive university assessment plan developed by faculty so that effective assessment is consistent across the institution, and widely shared among faculty, staff, and students.” The institution should also work toward “improving the assessment of GEAR and consistently embedding the expectations for student learning in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work are components of effective assessment. (CFR 2.4, 2.6)”

It is obvious that a great deal of progress has been made, and a significant effort has been collectively put into improving assessment methods on many different levels. An initial refreshing response was an honest acknowledgement of weaknesses in some previous institutional practices. The recognition that certain assessment practices were in need of structural revision is always a necessary first step toward improvement. Clearly, a great deal of institutional learning has taken place in the past thirty-two months.

There were new positions devoted exclusively to assessment oversight, and the personnel in these positions were graduates of the WSCUC Assessment Leadership Academy (ALA), which demonstrated a commitment to assessment principles and practices. HSU made an investment in a vice provost with extensive experience in assessment and accreditation as well their hiring of an associate director of academic assessment and an associate director of institutional assessment. The appointment and engagement of “faculty assessment fellows” in order to help peers refine their outcomes and assessment practices was also a very positive means by which to gain investment by practitioners, and helped to dispel perceptions that assessment decision-making emanated from a purely administrative position.

Additionally, there was a more explicit relationship between the quality, meaning, and integrity of the degree and the campus mechanism by which this was defined and evaluated – the Quality

Assurance Team (QAT). And not only did QAT provide oversight over new academic assessment structures, but this was wedded to the CSU Program Planning Resource Guide, which itself was offered up as a model to help CSU campuses with their internal and external program review processes that should be aligned with WSCUC Standards and Criteria for Review. The referencing of HSU's Critical Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Bachelor of Arts (BA) program provided a concrete example of how student learning outcomes were mapped from the institutional level to the program level as well as to the student learning outcome level. The alignment of institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) to program learning outcomes (PLOs) to SLOs was a significant undertaking, and to see that such mapping had been done in 46 of the 48 undergraduate programs was commendable.

To shepherd new ILOs through the Academic Senate and to establish new general education (GE) learning objectives (through GEAR) was no small feat and the commitment of GE-level assessment and Institution-wide outcomes showed a deeper understanding of the connectivity of these structures. Indeed, the Core Competencies Pilot Assessment showed promise of a very robust system – one that included the application of rubrics to previously designed assignments. As noted in the report, however, such an exercise often has different levels of success, so it was valuable to hear that the rubrics would be part of norming sessions and that differently-designed rubrics could be used to assess key competencies at the capstone level. There was a specific attention there to intentional design and a more deliberate application of quality control systems that were not present during the past visit.

The challenge that faced HSU is twofold. First, HSU must recognize that these assessment structures must be sustained through the data-gathering phases, and second, the assessment plans must be executed and carried through to the point where obtaining and analyzing tangible results will ultimately improve educational quality. That is, the structures are now in place, but the results have yet to be seen.

(And to be clear, there was an uneven development at work there: certainly some academic programs were more advanced than others – this section is not meant to infer that all programs were in the emergent stage in their assessment processes, but rather that comprehensive, overarching plan was lacking.) Now, plainly, effort and attention have been devoted to the architecture of these assessment plans but as was often noted in the report (and to cite one specific example on page 45): “in an effort to refocus and clarify, academic program review was placed on hold in 2018-2019 while the Integrated Curriculum Committee revised the process and template for reporting.” As the new Canvas Assessment Management System was still in a pilot phase, it will be important to see how subsequent findings will be looped back for programmatic enhancement. Nonetheless, there was early evidence that HSU was on the right track with establishing a nuanced and comprehensive university-wide assessment program. Following through on the execution of the program -- especially in the face of COVID-19 challenges and post-pandemic considerations -- will be essential.

## **ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT**

Based on the 2018 CAL, HSU was asked to engage in realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and diversification of revenue sources. Strengthening fundraising and private partnerships will help alleviate the stress on the budget in the upcoming years. More detail in the 2017 Environmental Scan Visualization Plan will clarify how HSU will counter current trends and reach its enrollment, graduation, retention, and achievement gap targets. (CFR 3.4)

HSU demonstrated various institutional changes specifically aimed at achieving enrollment growth and stability, including hiring an experienced vice president of enrollment management, developing a strong multi-year enrollment management plan, establishing annual enrollment-related goals and priorities, and delivering regularized enrollment updates and data (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 4.3, 4.6). In addition, there was demonstrable evidence that the vice president of enrollment management was nurturing and systemizing a strategic enrollment management culture, with the goal of ensuring durable

and persistent structures, systems, processes and analytics (CFR 3.7). The team gleaned a strong sense of shared accountability by the HSU senior leadership team for mission-centric enrollment outcomes that can more effectively sustain the institution and ultimately enable it to thrive (CFR 3.6).

HSU developed a comprehensive multi-year enrollment management plan that reciprocally depended on and informed the institutional budget, in terms of establishing enrollment targets, determining necessary levels of academic resources, and ensuring sufficient student support services (CFR 2.13, 3.4). The plan was augmented by a clear articulation of annual enrollment priorities, which were categorized under five (5) enrollment goals: 1) increase recruitment of targeted populations, 2) demonstrate commitment to a culture of student completion, 3) invest in Humboldt county, 4) establish student communication life cycle and 5) enhance student experience. The 2019-2020 Enrollment Management Annual Report and associated 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 priority plans were publically available on the HSU website (CFR 3.4).

A few exemplars of enrollment-related priorities and outcomes in the 2019 – 2020 recruitment cycle and academic year included:

- 1) Revising the campus tour process and continuing to refine its model by improving prospective student visit experiences (increase recruitment of targeted populations)
- 2) Developing a mentoring hub (physical and virtual) to support the onboarding and retention of new transfer students (demonstrate commitment to a culture of student completion)
- 3) Providing academic support services and advising to more than 1,000 students in local middle and high schools via GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a discretionary grant program from the US Department of Education designed to increase the number of low income students in postsecondary education, and TRIO Talent Search and TRIO Upward Bound, two of three federal TRIO programs that provide outreach and

services to help identify and support prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds  
(invest in Humboldt county)

4) Introducing multiple channels to the communication planning, including 1:1 text messaging, mobile application push, and messaging (e.g., Fall Preview), and HumBot for new students  
(establish student communication life cycle)

5) Expanding early alert support to all first-year students and first-semester transfer students, with protocol designs informed by best practices in intervention for low-income, first-generation, underrepresented students, and/or those underprepared for college (enhance student experience)

The priorities and outcomes listed, and others reported in the enrollment management (EM) Annual Report, reflected collaborations within and beyond the EM division. The EM division was comprised of units across enrollment services, academic services and student affairs. The EM division leadership team provided periodic EM updates to university constituents, highlighting a broad range of recruitment and student success initiatives (CFR 3.6). For example, the August 2020 EM update for the University Senate noted positive outcomes with respect to increasing (by 33% in the fall 2020 term) the number of recruited high school graduates in Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, and Trinity counties. Those local graduates received the \$4000 Humboldt First Scholarship, which is renewable for up to four years. This was an example of how HSU is simultaneously expanding its “presence and saturation” with respect to high school visits and college fairs—and implementing focused yield strategies.

Noteworthy, in May 2020, HSU entered a 3-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) with California Polytechnic State University - San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). Establishing an enrollment-related collaboration between the two institutions, the MOU provisioned for HSU to receive Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (SLO) admissions application data for prospective students that “will not be offered admissions

by Cal Poly due to impactation criteria.” For the 2020-2021 application cycle, Cal Poly electronically transmitted approximately 20,000 applicant files to HSU. At that time of the team visit, the vice president of enrollment management reported that 345 denied Cal Poly applicants expressed interest in enrolling at HSU. This particular partnership has significant utility, particularly in terms of creating a strong pipeline of highly qualified students who may enroll in HSU. A critical mass of those students could yield a positive impact on HSU’s overall future retention, time-to-completion and graduation rates (CFR 2.10).

In sum, it is the team’s assessment that HSU had a clear and strong presence of comprehensive strategic enrollment management structure and operationalization, under the skillful senior leadership of the extant vice president for enrollment management. Furthermore, HSU leaders were making concerted efforts toward best ensuring HSU develops an enrollment management culture that will persist beyond any one or few particular leaders. The associated institutional changes and initiatives seem well aligned with achieving HSU’s goals for new and sustained enrollment. Last, but critically important, HSU demonstrated a necessary sophistication in recruitment and retention reporting to reveal enrollment trends and support detailed scenario planning in case targeted enrollment goals are not met (CFR 4.7).

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

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

The Commission recommended that HSU implement and sustain appropriate responses to its increasingly diverse student body, and emphasized an institutional need to maintain sufficient funding, qualified faculty and staff, and evidence-based decision-making. To that end, an alignment of HSU academic and student support services was essential to meet the differential curricular and co-curricular needs of its students. In response to the Commission’s recommendations, HSU created, developed, reinforced, implemented and leveraged various Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)-related initiatives across and within various domains of the university. (CFR 1.4, 2.13)

The 26-member Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council (DEIC) served as an advisory working group—with subcommittees—of the President’s Cabinet. The DEIC partnered with the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) to provide counsel and expertise to advance institutional and systemic change. HSU elevated the director of diversity, equity, and inclusion position to an associate vice president/campus diversity officer (CDO), reporting to the provost. HSU conducted a national search, resulting in the hire of an experienced CDO in January 2021. The CDO leads institutional efforts toward inclusive excellence, delineated within six (6) pillars: 1) a safe and welcoming community, 2) equitable opportunities and outcomes, 3) strategic partnerships, 4) intercultural-competency development, 5) institutional resources and 6) collaborative leadership, with shared accountability.

Accomplishments included:

HSU reinforced its commitment to Equity Arcata. Created in 2017, Equity Arcata is a partnership between HSU, the city of Arcata, local business owners, and community members. The purpose of the initiative is “to create a welcoming, safe, and racially equitable community by focusing on systems of

change that yield equitable opportunities and outcomes in education, employment, health, and housing” (CFRs 2.10, 2.13).

HSU committed resources to diversity grants. Since 2018, ODEI awarded 24 diversity grants to faculty (\$5,000) and students (\$1,000). The grants “support programs that raise awareness, deepen understanding, and engage the campus community in dialogue about the multiple dimensions of diversity, including ability, culture, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.” (CFRs 1.4, 2.10, 2.13, 2.14)

HSU repositioned the Multicultural Center. In 2020, HSU renamed the Multicultural Center as the Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Center (SJEIC). The name change aligned the SJEIC with equity and social justice institutional learning outcomes. Moreover, it repositioned the center and made clear its role in advocating for a more just, equitable and inclusive environment for all underrepresented and marginalized HSU students. (CFRs 2.10, 2.13, 2.14)

HSU continued its strong implementation and support of learning communities. Student and place-based learning communities were facilitating greater student success for black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) students. (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 2.13). For example, the oldest learning community showed that LatinX students had:

- stronger sense of belonging (composite Mapworks survey score: 5.49 vs. 5.31);
- more units earned in first year (27.8 vs. 24.3);
- higher first-year GPAs (2.85 vs. 2.65);
- higher rates of gateway course completion;
- higher first-year retention at HSU (81 percent vs. 73 percent) and in STEM specifically (78 percent vs. 65 percent); and
- elimination of gap in STEM retention between Latinx students and their non-Latinx counterparts in the program

The Commission recommended that HSU continue to orient prospective students from large, urban areas to HSU’s rural, small-city context. To that end, HSU securing an increasingly diverse student body necessitated intensifying efforts to facilitate student feelings of welcome and support, as opposed

to alienation and isolation. In response to the Commission's recommendations, HSU created, developed, reinforced, implemented and leveraged various DEI-related initiatives across and within various domains of the university (CFR 1.6).

HSU strengthened its capacity for ODEI ed trainings and mediation support. Institutional leaders encouraged refining prospective student communications, improving campus visits experiences, streamlining new student orientation, and mentoring the "whole student." HSU improved the handling of student complaints and grievances, including focused professional development for faculty and staff who managed the resolution process. HSU's commitment to a safe teaching and learning environment resulted in the establishment of a multi-constituent committee charged with reviewing and recommending solutions for issues that affect the safety and quality of life for HSU students, faculty and staff. (CFRs 1.4, 2.12, 2.13, 3.1, 3.5).

The Commission recommended that HSU prioritize diversifying faculty and staff to align with the diversity of the student body. To that end, HSU engaged faculty and staff in diversity, equity and inclusion related professional development was to bolster educational effectiveness, student success and institutional mission attainment. In response to the Commission's recommendations, HSU created, developed, reinforced, implemented and leveraged various DEI-related initiatives across and within various domains of the university (CFRs 1.4, 3.1, 3.3).

HSU noted that staff diversity was more evident and achieved in senior-level positions. Entry-level and staff line positions reflected the low diversity in local demographics. HSU faculty were disproportionately white (45.7 percent), even more so in terms of white tenure-track faculty (68.3 percent). There was, however, evidence that university leadership was attempting to diversify its faculty, with respect to recruitment and retention. Members of search committees took implicit bias training, and all search committees had an equity advocate. According to HSU, equity advocates observed the process and "are critical in helping the search committee draft interview questions with an

equity lens.” HSU obtained a CSU faculty retention grant fall 2020 to fund the creation of an affinity group for racially minoritized faculty. ODEI, the Center for Teaching and Learning and academic personnel services were collaborating to deliver a conference focused on *Structural Barriers to Faculty of Color Success at HSU*. (CFR 3.1, 3.2)

Noteworthy, “HSU’s environmental engineering resources program is a national leader in diversity. “While only 28 percent of engineering faculty in the US are women, 67 percent of HSU’s engineering faculty were women, tied with Smith College for highest female representation in the US. Thirty-three percent of the engineering faculty identified as racially minoritized (22 percent Latinx, 11 percent Black), which made the program the sixth most diverse engineering program in the US.”

HSU had demonstrable commitment to advancing and enhancing diversity training, education, and outreach. Specific trainings included: 1) avoiding unconscious bias in the hiring process; and, 2) cultural humility, whiteness and microaggressions. Additional evidence included, *partnerships* (e.g. TK-12 Humboldt–Del Norte Equity Partnership), *initiatives* (e.g., Moving Beyond Bias Initiative), *incentives* (e.g., Diversity Grant Awards) and *programs* (e.g., Equity Fellows Program). Finally, HSU academic leaders and faculty were deeply engaged in expanding the inclusivity in the curriculum, course design and academic delivery. The DEIC Subcommittee on Inclusive Teaching Strategies and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was prominent in this work. In addition, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) provided strong support for faculty in these pedagogical and curricular endeavors (CFRs 3.1, 4.3, 4.4).

## **SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Commendations**

The team commends HSU for the following:

1. Securing senior leadership that approached the transition with a sense of urgency and empowered faculty and staff.
2. Developing multiple, aligned assessment structures, ratifying new ILOs through shared governance practices, and demonstrating an administrative and faculty-driven commitment to assessment and program review.
3. Hiring a chief enrollment officer with notable experience in strategic enrollment management and student affairs, who is skillfully leading nuanced enrollment strategies and effectively implementing a well-developed strategic enrollment plan.
4. Increasing overall student success and decreasing the equity gap between URM and non-URM students, particularly as a result of the learning communities.
5. Developing and implementing structures and processes that reflect transparency and regular communication to facilitate institution-wide awareness, understanding, and a sense of shared responsibility for budgeting, resourcing, and revenue diversification.
6. Eliminating long-standing structural deficits by 2022 and building back reserves over the longer term through a combination of efficiencies, new academic programs, and innovative new revenue streams.
7. Differentiating HSU's identity by highlighting its strengths in research, experiential learning, and community partnerships.

### **Recommendations**

The team recommends that the institution responds to the following issues:

1. Consistently employ HSU's assessment structures and processes including the collection, analysis and interpretation of data to track learning over time. (CFR 4.1, 4.2)
2. Engage faculty and staff to collaboratively examine, interpret, and make recommendations for program improvements. (CFR 2.4, 2.6)
3. Identify and explore the systemic impacts of becoming a polytechnic university on enrollment, budget, revenue diversification and assessment. (CFR 1.1, 3.4)

4. Review, evaluate, and align institutional structures, resources, and practices to best ensure it achieves the six pillars of inclusive excellence. (CFR 1.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.7)