

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM  
SPECIAL VISIT**

To Cogswell Polytechnical College

September 19 - 21, 2017

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

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## SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

### A. Description of the Institution and its Accreditation History

To describe the institution and its accreditation history, the team extracts the following, which appears in the Cogswell Special Visit Report (2017), after occurring in substantially the same form in the previous accreditation visit team report (2015):

Cogswell Polytechnical College was founded in San Francisco in 1887 as a co-educational vocational high school. Cogswell became a two-year college in 1931, approved to grant degrees at the associate-level from 1951, and a four-year institution in 1971. The College moved to Silicon Valley in 1985 and located in Sunnyvale, California in 1994. In 2015 the College relocated to its present address in San Jose.

Cogswell College's mission is to be a leader in providing practical education in the combined disciplines of technology and entrepreneurship with an emphasis on leadership, and a strong focus on new technologies and business models to prepare graduates for careers in the global economy (<http://www.cogswell.edu/about/about.php>).

*[Note: An update to this web page at the referenced URL has occurred since 2015, and the mission and vision of the institution was presented at the time of the visit as follows:*

#### *MISSION AND VISION*

*Cogswell College uses project-based learning to educate students in technology, digital art and entrepreneurship to prepare them for careers in the creative arts industry.*

*We provide a safe learning environment for challenging the status quo and fostering creative collaboration across disciplines. Our faculty have extensive experience in their given industries to provide relevant and vital counsel to students.*

*Upon graduation, alumni will be armed with a high-quality portfolio and effective communication skills to impress hiring managers and make a difference on future professional teams.]*

In Fall 2010, following a number of years of declining enrollment and negative financial performance that threatened its ability to continue operation, Cogswell College was purchased by Palm Ventures LLC and experienced a change of control. The College transitioned from non-profit to for-profit status. In concert with this change, the governing board for the College was reconstituted and changes were made to the executive administration. Since these changes, the College has added academic programs, including a master's degree, and phased out the online

program in Fire Science. In the years leading up to the purchase of the College, enrollment had dropped to 130 students for three consecutive years and the institution was in a deficit position. Since the change of control Cogswell has experienced a marked turnaround in enrollment and its financial position is significantly improved.

Cogswell currently offers Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in Digital Arts and Animation, Digital Audio Technology, Game Development and Design, Computer Science and Business Administration. On September 30, 2010, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) approved Cogswell to award Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in Entrepreneurship and Innovation with an optional Specialization in Digital Media.

This bachelor degree transitioned to a Bachelor of Science in Digital Media Management and the College continues to offer the Master of Arts degree. The College is authorized to provide instructional delivery both onsite and online.

#### Recent Accreditation History

As reported from the institution's institutional report:

- The WASC Senior Commission approved Cogswell's independence from the Foundation for Educational Achievement in June 2008 and the College was scheduled for a Special Visit in spring 2010 to evaluate the following issues: a) a change in governance related to the structural change, b) financial sustainability, c) strategic planning, and d) an assessment of student learning and program review.
- In concert with an application for Change of Ownership, the spring 2010 Special Visit was rescheduled to fall 2010 when the ownership change was formally considered, and in November 2010, WSCUC approved the new ownership of Cogswell by Palm Ventures, LLC.
- In November 2010, WSCUC conducted a Special Visit of Cogswell College. Based on this visit, the Commission issued an action letter which stated, "Some of the necessary and important changes still in progress at the time of the visit [would] require some time before progress and improvement [could] be evaluated" and "it [is] too early to observe the implementation of the change of ownership during the visit."
- In concert with all the activity moving the College forward, the Commission received the College's fall 2010 Special Visit Report, removed a formal Notice of Concern on issues identified with the 2010 Team Visit and Report, requested a progress report by May 15, 2011 to provide final documentation related to the change of ownership, and scheduled a Special Visit for spring 2012.

As mentioned previously, the College had struggled financially for the past decade prior to the change of ownership. By 2013, with an infusion of capital and managerial expertise from Palm Ventures, the College had grown to 421 students (341 on-ground and 80 in an online Fire Science Program [which was subsequently discontinued in 2015]), its annual deficit had been halved, and with the combined leadership of faculty and administration executed on a plan projected to financially break even in 2015.

The Commission accepted the fall 2012 Interim Report, and in a March 13, 2013 communication, WSCUC Liaison, Dr. Christopher Oberg, reported that after deliberation, the WSCUC panel acted to:

a) Accept the institution's Interim Report; and b) Request the institution provide a Progress Report to WSCUC staff no later than November 1, 2013. The College was also advised that completion of the activities identified above were expected by the time of the next Off-Site Review, scheduled for spring 2014.

In a communication from WSCUC Liaison, Dr. Christopher Oberg, on March 12, 2013, the College was also charged with providing an update on progress in addressing four outstanding issues:

1. Explain the process for creating a policy governing Board Chair compensation, the research on which it relied in its creation, the timing of its implementation, and the manner by which the amount of compensation was determined. This includes a request that CPC create a process by which the full Board reviews this compensation on a periodic basis and document that process.
2. Document the level of campus engagement of the Board Chair and explain the relation of those duties to the role of the new President/CEO.
3. Report the status of the search for a new President and, if the search is continuing, explain the reasons that it has not concluded successfully.
4. Report the status of the search for a new campus facility.

Subsequent to the 2015 Accreditation Visit the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the team report
2. Reaffirm accreditation for seven years
3. Schedule an Offsite Review in fall 2021
4. Schedule the Accreditation Visit in spring 2022
5. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review in summer 2019.

*[Note: A special visit was also scheduled by the Commission at that time to examine the five issues being reviewed by this team.]*

Cogswell details the following changes since the last visit (2015):

1. The College relocated its physical facility to San Jose, CA. The change in physical facility offered an opportunity to improve the overall quality of the working environment in alignment with the mission and vision of the College.
2. Two key administrative positions, CEO and CAO, were vacated with the departure of [the institution's president] in 2016. As indicated in the report, active searches have been in progress and well-qualified candidates are in various stages of an interview process.
3. A cluster of traditional art courses in the Digital Art & Animation (DAA) program were rebranded with a new set of ART course number prefixes and the DAA Program Director at the time was reassigned to facilitate those classes as a department chair. In her place a new Program Director was hired to lead DAA.

4. The Bachelor of Science in Software Engineering program was rebranded as a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (BSCS). The program director of BSCS is a recent addition to the full-time faculty cohort.
5. The Commission acted in 2016 to approve a substantive change proposal that would reposition the Digital Media Management program as a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. A new program director for BBA has just joined the Cogswell faculty cohort.
6. The Commission acted in 2016 to approve via a substantive change proposal a totally online offering of the Game Design & Development program.
7. As per the recommendations of the 2015 Accreditation Visit team the Faculty Handbook was fully approved.
8. A Director of Online Learning was hired.
9. The College reached in 2016 a point of zero investor investment.

[END EXCERPT]

At Cogswell, there were 599 students enrolled in fall 2017, which represented an 8% decrease in enrollment over the prior year's fall term.

The five issues the team evaluated according to the Standards were:

- The development of specific plans and processes for the provision of human, financial, facility, and information resources necessary to accommodate enrollment growth
- The completion of the revision of the Faculty Handbook to demonstrate that faculty policies, process, and practice are aligned and consistently applied
- The development of systematic practices, governed by policy, for the selection, onboarding, scheduling, training, and evaluation of adjunct faculty members
- The development of online pedagogy, consistent with academic plans for this modality
- The development of expanded career services such that larger numbers of students are reached, academic advising is integrated with the effort, and enhanced data gathering on student placement is achieved

Although the institution has undergone Substantive Change and has been approved to offer fully-online degree programs, none of the approved programs was enrolling students at the time of the visit.

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

The team received and reviewed the Cogswell special visit report and its appendices and accompanying materials, as well as the team report from the 2015 Accreditation Visit. After team members each completed a WSCUC Special Visit worksheet, which prompted for observations regarding the documents provided, the team held a conference call to discuss its responses on the worksheet and to consider what additional materials it needed to review both prior to and during the visit. The team also formulated its request for specific meetings during the visit, including interviews to be conducted with the institution's leadership, faculty, staff, and students. On the afternoon immediately prior to arriving at the Cogswell campus, the team convened to discuss its approach to the visit, to review the materials the team had received since its conference call, and to determine whether any changes to the visit schedule would be necessary.

During the visit, from September 19 through September 21, 2017, the team interviewed the institution's leadership, including the chief executive officer, who was concurrently serving as the chief financial officer; the accreditation liaison officer, who served as acting chief academic officer; the chairman of the board of directors; the dean of the college; the dean of students; the academic program directors; and all staff at a director level or above. The team interviewed the institution's accreditation steering committee, its faculty handbook committee, its assessment committee, and its management team. Each member of the management team was also interviewed individually or in small groups. The team conducted group meetings of full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, faculty instructing online courses, the

faculty senate, students, and staff, in addition to interviewing a separate group of students who had taken online courses at Cogswell. The team received messages sent to a confidential email account hosted by WSCUC. In the team room, which was provided for its deliberations on the institution's campus, the team engaged in debriefing when not otherwise conducting interviews or reviewing documents, and pursued follow-up meetings with interview subjects, as needed.

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

The institution's Special Visit Report described a collaborative authorship of the document among the accreditation steering committee members; however, in its initial interview with the steering committee, the team discovered that the majority of members had not reviewed "Preparing for the WSCUC Special Visit and Hosting an Evaluation Team," which outlines the report and its contents. The team further notes that the Appendix B of the Cogswell College, LLC Policy Manual of the Board of Trustees (the Cogswell College, LLC College Operations Manual, "General Academic Policy" section, 3.1.a) explicitly designates the CEO with responsibility to understand and maintain the institution's WSCUC accreditation. The Cogswell Special Visit Report, as it was submitted initially, contained fewer than the number of sections prescribed by the WSCUC Special Visit Self-Review Report template. Specifically, the report, as it was first supplied to the team, consisted of only section five of the template (Response to Issues Identified by the Commission and the Last Visiting Team). Missing were the following: "Nature of the Institutional Context and Major Changes Since the Last WSCUC Visit," "Statement on Report Preparation," "Identification of Other Changes or Issues Currently Confronting the Institution for the Future," and "Concluding Statement." On August 21, the WSCUC liaison, acting on behalf of the team, requested that Cogswell author more sections of the Special Visit Report to cover

subject matter that was material to the issues to be explored during the visit. Additional requested sections were provided on September 5, 2017, two weeks before the team arrived.

On reviewing the additions, the team noted that the sections lacked key information, such as the CFO serving as the CEO; the recent appointment of an interim CAO/ALO; the sag in the number of new starts; the continuing and deepening financial challenges; the move to greater use of the online modality for existing classes, even for beginning students; the implementation of new ERP and CMO systems; and the change in flat tuition from covering 16 to covering 12 credit hours. The team also noted that among the “Other Changes or Issues” was a plan to modify “the current vision and mission, to create a scaffolding that can support the expansion of the College all of the way up to a national reach,” and to craft a “strategic plan.” The team took particular note of that assertion and its ambition because of the few planning documents the team had received, none pertaining to this planned change.

At the same time as the additional sections of the report were delivered, so were some, but not all, of the materials requested by the team after it reviewed the documents provided with the initial draft of the Special Visit Report. More documents were provided on September 15 and 16, days before the team’s arrival. Other material that had been requested prior to the team’s arrival and requested repeatedly were produced during the visit, including one large volume on the last full day.

As noted above, institutional involvement in preparing the Special Visit Report consisted of the steering committee sharing responsibility by assigning issues covered in the report to pairs of committee members. While the combined Special Visit Report sections that were received by the team were clearly written, they served as a presentation of facts without substantial analysis or evaluation and in three cases without appropriate or sufficient supporting evidence. The discussion of two issues specified by

the Commission for the visit was supported well by presenting documentation of adjunct faculty selection, onboarding, training, and evaluation processes and by providing the institution's faculty handbook; however, as effectively as these materials functioned as direct evidence of the actions Cogswell took to address these issues, no substantial discussion was provided regarding whether these actions had proven effective or whether any assessment of their impact had been performed. The remaining issues would have benefited from additional evidence and a more thoughtful analysis of Cogswell's resources and planning, its implementation of online pedagogy, and its approach to the career services provided to students.

Based on its experience of reviewing the materials, finding them often lacking required sections, appropriate analysis, and appropriate or sufficient evidence, and given the difficulties it encountered in gaining access to crucial information, the team strongly suggests that Cogswell engage more closely with the materials and training provided by WSCUC when the institution prepares for accreditation-related reports or plans team visits, and that this engagement allow Cogswell to better understand how activities related to accreditation may be viewed as opportunities for further institutional learning and improvement.

The team recommends that Cogswell better inform itself about WSCUC's policies, practices, and expectations regarding accreditation as required by WSCUC (CFR 1.8).

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

### **A. Issue: The development of specific plans and processes for the provision of human, financial, facility, and information resources necessary to accommodate enrollment growth**

#### Evidence Examined

- Draft Strategic Plan July 29, 2012
- List of current board members
- Current operational plan
- By-laws of the corporation
- Cogswell Capital, LLC Consolidated Financial Statements
- Cogswell Institution Summary Report
- Enrollment Projections and Actuals 2012-2021
- Breakeven Analysis
- Interviews with Cogswell’s leadership and administration

#### Analysis of the Effectiveness of Institutional Actions

The team notes that Cogswell identified itself, at the time of the visit, as a unique institution with a mission to be a leader in providing practical education in the combined disciplines of technology and entrepreneurship with an emphasis on leadership, committing to a strong focus on new technologies and business models for graduates to enter careers in the global economy. The board of trustees’ biographies described an impressive group of industry leaders with backgrounds well-suited to lead an

institution with such aspirations. The 11-member Board included two members of Palm Ventures and was chaired by a former president of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The team observed that Cogswell has recognized the importance of investing in physical as well as human assets and the necessity to have adequate physical infrastructure with sufficient current and future instructional space for effective teaching to occur. Cogswell also recognized that adequate facilities and resources play an important role as students choose their educational institution (CFRs 3.4, 3.5). At the time of its 2015 Accreditation Visit, Cogswell was planning to vacate its Sunnyvale campus. The institution's report for this Special Visit noted that they completed that relocation, and the current team visited the institution's leased, 46,000-square-foot facility in San Jose. Cogswell projected that this facility would be able to accommodate up to 900 students and fulfill its space requirement for the following three to five years. In addition, the new site provided better accessibility to the campus because of its proximity to roads and light rail. The new facility, as evidenced by the team, was spacious and open, and filled with students. Cogswell is to be commended for its beautiful new home and the energy of its students and their work that fills it.

In addition to physical infrastructure, however, organizational structure, sufficient staffing, and stable leadership are critical indicators of an institution's ability to carry out its mission and serve its students. As noted in the 2015 WSCUC Accreditation Visit Team Report, the CEO position had turned over recently, for the third time since Palm Ventures purchased Cogswell in 2010. The appointment of the president (CEO) in 2014 had been looked upon as bringing much needed stability to the organization. As mentioned in several staff and faculty interviews, her background in higher education and her management style brought strong leadership to the institution. It was also noted that her long career in

higher education provided the expertise required to prepare Cogswell for the 2015 WSCUC visit. The team notes that in 2016, this president left the institution. As highlighted in prior WSCUC visits, leadership instability has posed challenges to this institution in providing consistent governance and effectiveness in implementing strategic direction, especially given Cogswell's challenged economic environment (CFRs 3.6 - 3.9).

Since the former president's departure in 2016, the current CFO has been serving as interim CEO as well as CFO (CFR 3.8). Joining Cogswell in August of 2014, the CEO/CFO had no previous experience in an academic environment; however, in interviews with the team, he described his prior experience at facilities that manufactured highly engineered products, and he suggested that his quality assurance background was appropriate for managing the institution. With the search for a permanent CEO launched in March of 2017, the CEO/CFO noted that, to date, "over 50 potential candidates" have been considered.

With the departure of the previous president in 2016, the chief academic officer (CAO) position became vacant, as the dual roles were held by a single individual. An interim CAO/ALO was appointed from within the faculty ranks to fill the position. The interim appointee had previously served as the institution's ALO from 2007 to 2012 and was appointed to serve as liaison for the 2017 Special Visit. The position posting for a permanent CAO was placed in May of 2017, and at the time of the visit, two candidates were being considered.

It is the norm in higher education that the CAO play a vital role in shaping and executing the strategic plan and leading the design of the academic program. It takes several years to carry out major planning initiatives associated with institutional strategy. Without stable and effective CAO leadership,

developing and making progress towards institutional goals is extremely challenging. Also of note was the institution's organizational structure at the time of the visit. In typical organizational structures in higher education, reporting lines are hierarchical with the CAO serving second to the president and the deans reporting to the CAO. The organizational structure of Cogswell, however, was flat. The CAO role was detached from dean and faculty reports and therefore disconnected from the academic side of the organization, thus not appearing to have a significant place in the hierarchy. The director of community relations, the VP for information technology and campus services, the CFO, the director of admissions, the director of human resources, the VP of marketing, the CAO, the VP for institutional research and quality assurance, and the dean of the college all reported directly to the president. As the positions of CEO and CAO are filled, it would be a good opportunity for the institution to rethink the current organizational structure and determine whether it is practical to have nine direct reports to the CEO. Further, the team suggests that the institution determine the role of the CAO in relation to the dean of the college, the CEO, and the board of trustees. Sound organizational structure with appropriate reporting lines can lead to dynamic and forward-thinking decision making, and can enhance communication within the organization (CFRs 3.7 and 3.10).

While the institution was confident that both leadership positions would be filled by the end of the calendar year, the team recommends that Cogswell recognize the current structure's failure to comply with WSCUC Standards, which mandate a separate and full-time CEO and a separate and full-time CFO or a CFO whose primary responsibilities are dedicated to that role (CFR 3.8). Successful completion of these searches is crucial for the institution to attain compliance.

The team heard in its interview with the chair of the board of trustees that the executive searches were proceeding in a deliberate and thoughtful fashion, thus justifying the large number of candidates being

considered for the CEO position. The team at times struggled to ascertain the extent to which ongoing board decisions had direct impact on the operations of the institution. The team observed: that the board chair, in an interview with the team, demonstrated uncertainty regarding a recent board decision process related to tuition policy change; that narrative gleaned from multiple interviews suggested a strategic plan was being developed at the institution without the board installing new leaders in the vacant executive positions; and that deep accreditation expertise resided on the board of trustees, attesting to involvement in managing an institution, and yet the visiting team received an incomplete Special Visit Report. The team recommends board development, using outside help such as that provided by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), to foster a clear understanding of the board role in a higher education organization and to assist the Cogswell board in understanding the role of accreditation in the effectiveness and sustainability of the institution (CFR 3.9).

The interim CEO/CFO stated that the institution would be implementing new student information, budgeting, payroll, and scheduling systems. In the Cogswell College Special Visit Report, the institution stated that it had received approval to procure a new student information system and that implementation would begin in fall 2017. The institution procured CampusVue, which provides integrated recruiting and admissions, financial aid, and student accounts capabilities for higher education. Implementation of the new student information system, however, was not expected until fall 2018; therefore, it was not possible for the team to analyze efficiencies gained.

The 2015 team report indicated concern about the institution's financial viability. In particular, the 2015 team stated, "being a tuition-supported institution, the concomitant and predictable fall in revenues call into serious question the institution's ability to continue operating" and noted, "the need to see evidence of marked improvement in the institution's financial stability, with a particular focus on

reversing downward enrollment trends and increasing revenues.” Given the strong concerns presented by the 2015 team, the 2017 Special Visit team expected to receive a thorough and complete presentation and analysis of the current and future financial picture of the institution.

Prior to the visit, the team had access to the following evidence regarding Cogswell’s financial viability:

- The initial 2017 Special Visit report submitted July 11, 2017, made one reference to financial stability when it stated that the “college reached profitability in 2016.”
- The Cogswell Capital LLC, Cogswell College LLC, and Cogswell Education LLC audited financials were requested, and were received on August 10, 2017.
- The second institutional report addressing the missing Special Visit sections was received September 5, 2017, and also only made one reference to financial stability by stating that the “college reached in 2016 a point of zero investor investment.”

The team met with the interim CEO/CFO on the first day of the visit. Among the items discussed was a request for breakeven analysis and a copy of the institution’s 2017 budget. The interim CEO/CFO indicated that these documents were readily available and that he would provide them to the team. The team formally asked for the budget documents later that morning via email. The institution responded saying that the documents would be provided sometime the following morning. The team asked about the status of these documents again the following morning, as the day began, and the documents were made available later that morning.

Given the scarcity of financial information provided prior to the site visit and the expressed concern of the prior team’s report, the team had to request data during the site visit in order to more fully

understand the financial situation of the institution. The team did not have timely information and could not engage in a more substantive analysis.

The stability of this institution depends on its ability to acquire and maintain resources to sustain its program effectively. CFR 3.4 requires the institution to be financially stable with unqualified independent financial audits and resources sufficient to assure long-term viability. The institution has not demonstrated a history of financial stability. The 2015 Institutional Report stated that Cogswell was on a path to fiscal balance in 2014-15, recovering from significant annual deficits in the years immediately preceding its change of ownership. It is noted by the team that Cogswell received a cash influx from the owner in 2015 and did show positive net income in 2016.

The 2015 team further noted the institution's long-term sustainability was of concern and expressed the need to see evidence of marked improvement in the institution's financial stability, with a particular focus on reversing downward enrollment trends and increasing revenues.

As noted on the Institution Summary Report and the Audited Financials, the institution made progress in increasing enrollments and revenues while decreasing expenditures. The percentage change in operating income between 2015 and 2016 indicates that revenues increased by 22.3% while expenditures decreased by 8.7%. The increased revenues were attributable to increased tuition revenue of 16.9% and increased other revenue of 304.9%. The decrease in expenditures was a result of decreasing selling and promotion costs by 13.6% and decreasing general and administrative costs by 16.9%. The CEO/CFO considered expenditures to be stable and had no plans to increase staff. The team notes that staffing for the institution was noticeably lean, and many of the employees fulfilled multiple

roles. The institution did not appear to demonstrate backup capacity for many of the key functional areas such as institutional research and online learning.

As an institution dependent on tuition, Cogswell faced a major challenge going forward in its management of enrollment growth. The institution had a stated goal of 5% enrollment growth per year and has historically targeted high school, community college, and non-traditional students in its marketing efforts. The Enrollment Projections and Actuals 2012-2021 spreadsheet provided by Cogswell shows that actual fall 2016 to fall 2017 headcount fell by 8.1%, while spring 2016 to spring 2017 headcount increased by 5.2%. An alarming component of the enrollment data indicated that the number of “new starts” fall 2016 to fall 2017 fell by 33%. With the institution projecting an 8.7% increase in expenditures for 2017, if this decrease in “new starts” continues, Cogswell will have to pursue additional ways of increasing revenues or decrease expenditures sharply, in order to remain solvent. The team expresses concern that it was unable to reconcile the Enrollment Projections and Actuals 2012-2021 spreadsheet with the breakeven analysis provided by the institution.

An institution’s financial performance is evaluated by the vitality of its net assets/fund balance, which is affected by its total revenue and expenses. Considering the evidence provided – the Institution Summary Report, Audited Financials, and the Enrollment Projections and Actuals 2012-2021 – the team conveys uneasiness regarding Cogswell’s financial viability and observes that the fiscal environment for the institution remains challenged. Although the team recognizes the progress made in stabilizing the budget for 2016, continued progress must be a priority to ensure compliance with CFR 3.4, which requires evidence of long-term viability.

In addition to these areas of concern, the team found scant evidence of a formal, evidence-based planning process. For example, as is also mentioned below in this report, the president and his senior staff (his direct reports), who serve as the planning group, were asked about how the decision was made to enroll first-time, first-year students in online courses. The team was told by the group that first-time, first-year students were never enrolled by Cogswell in online courses. When the team informed the group that they heard reports of that practice in meetings with students and staff, the group continued to deny those reports. The team requested the director of institutional research to produce a spreadsheet on fall 2017 enrollment of first-time, first-year students indicating what percentage of them enrolled in online courses. The report delivered described fall 2016 and showed more than two-thirds of first-time, first-year students enrolled in an online or hybrid course, in some cases in multiple courses delivered in these modalities. In this case and in others, the team observed little use of evidence in planning (CFR 4.6).

## Findings and Conclusions

The Special Visit team acknowledges the efforts made by management to contain expenditures and grow revenues; however, the team urges that the institution make a greater effort to document its current and long term financial viability and to use consideration of that evidence in its planning.

The team acknowledges the current efforts to hire both a CEO and a CAO, and recommends as soon as practicable that Cogswell fill both positions in a method that complies with the requirements of WSCUC, which mandates a separate and full-time CEO and a separate CFO (CFRs 3.6, 3.8, 3.10).

The team recommends board development, using outside help such as that provided by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), to foster a clear understanding of the board role in a higher education organization and to assist the Cogswell board in understanding of the role of accreditation in the effectiveness and sustainability of the institution (CFR 3.9).

The team recommends that “the institution periodically engage ... its multiple constituencies, including the governing board, faculty, staff, and others, in institutional reflection and planning processes that are based on the examination of data and evidence. These processes assess the institution’s strategic position, articulate priorities, examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions, and resources, and define the future direction of the institution” (CFR 4.6).

**B. Issue: The completion of the revision of the Faculty Handbook to demonstrate that faculty policies, process, and practice are aligned and consistently applied**

Evidence Examined

The team met with the Faculty Handbook Committee, faculty senate, program directors, and adjunct and full-time faculty. The team also examined the following evidence:

- 2012 Faculty Handbook
- 2017 Faculty Handbook
- Faculty Handbook Committee meeting agenda
- Faculty Handbook Committee minutes
- Faculty Senate minutes

- Performance Evaluation Form for full-time faculty
- Scholarly and Professional Development Summary, 2015-2017
- The Cogswell website

#### Analysis of the Effectiveness of Institutional Actions

The handbook is a significant document, because it serves as a durable, public record of institutional policies that are highly relevant to faculty (CFRs 1.3, 2.8, 2.9, 3.2, 3.3, 3.10, 4.3, 4.4). Furthermore, the handbook is likely to serve as one of the primary means for educating faculty about these policies. The importance of this role is magnified at Cogswell by the high percentage of adjunct and newly hired full-time faculty, all of whom require an accessible means to rapidly familiarize themselves with institutional policy. The Commission's recommendation was made because, at the time of the 2015 visit, the handbook had not been updated since 2012 and was no longer fully aligned with institutional practices.

The 2017 handbook represented a substantial revision to the 2012 handbook. The 2017 handbook was comprehensive, easy to read, and organized in a manner that should facilitate its use by faculty.

Comments made during the visit suggested that many faculty were aware of the document and referred to it as was appropriate, although this awareness and utilization may have been reduced among adjunct faculty.

The 2017 handbook appeared to explicate, and to be aligned with, most of the institutional policies and practices that were relevant to faculty; however, two issues were omitted and should be addressed (CFR 3.2):

- The handbook explicitly described the expected number of office hours per week for full-time faculty, and expectations regarding their availability for student advising (page 7), but similarly explicit expectations were not described for adjunct faculty.
- Faculty who were promoted may falsely assume that promotion would be accompanied by a salary increase. The handbook should include an explicit statement acknowledging that academic rank is not tied to specific salary levels.

Descriptions of policy regarding promotion left some questions unanswered regarding teaching effectiveness, research, scholarship, and creative activity, and how they were recognized by the institution (CFRs 2.8, 2.9). The handbook described the evidence that could be used in support of a promotion application (pages 15-16). The relative importance of these lines of evidence was described, but it was not clear how accurately these rankings reflected institutional priorities. For example, teaching was listed as the most important criterion for promotion, while service to the profession was listed as the least important. Administrators at Cogswell, however, frequently lauded the professional credentials of their faculty, as did the institution's promotional materials for prospective students (which made little or no reference to the faculty's instructional abilities). This suggested that service to the profession was highly valued at the institution – perhaps more than was acknowledged in the evidence rankings. Furthermore, could a candidate with exceptional professional qualifications who was active in professional organizations and recognized by peers as a leader in the industry be promoted even if he or she had only mediocre teaching evaluations? This ambiguity could be resolved by clarifying whether weak performance on a component that ranks highly in importance can be overcome by strong performance on a less important component. It was also not clear whether only successful awards and grants were recognized as evidence of scholarship (page 16), or whether submitted awards and grants were recognized regardless of their outcome.

## Findings and Conclusions

The 2017 Faculty Handbook appeared to be relatively comprehensive, with only a few omissions of important information. It was a largely accurate compilation of institutional policies, process, and practice as they existed at the time of the team’s visit. These policies, processes, and practices, however, are likely to change – in some cases rapidly – during the coming years (CFRs 4.6, 4.7). Thus, the Faculty Handbook should be considered a living document. The team is concerned that the Faculty Handbook Committee has been dissolved. Furthermore, the handbook does not describe a mechanism for updating its contents. Thus, there is a very real danger that the handbook will fall out of alignment with institutional practices again. Cogswell is encouraged to develop and implement a procedure for reviewing the handbook contents on a regular basis and ensuring that the document remains current.

### **C. Issue: The development of systematic practices, governed by policy, for the selection, onboarding, scheduling, training, and evaluation of adjunct faculty members**

#### Evidence Examined

The following documents were reviewed by the team in its examination of this issue:

- “Faculty New Hire Process” document listing details of faculty selection, hiring, and onboarding, with assignment of actions to Human Resources, the Candidate, the Hiring Manager, the Interview Panel, the Program Director, Information Technology, and Payroll

- Cogswell College Teaching Demonstration Best Practices and Guidelines document, describing preparation and teaching demo execution for applicants for adjunct faculty positions
- The Teaching Demonstration Rubric Form for evaluating applicants
- The New Hire File Checklist for Adjuncts (listing the pre-hire checklist, on-boarding checklist, and post on-boarding checklist, as well as maintenance of the employment file which includes application materials, tax documents, as well as acknowledgements of policy)
- Faculty Hiring Projection Tool (by discipline)
- Online modules of Go2Knowledge (Go2K) trainings available (as a list) as well as by way of access to the system itself
- Documentation of FERPA training completion of faculty
- Screenshots of the SharePoint Human Resources page with employee links/documents available and the dashboard available to employees with links to policy and the Faculty Handbook
- The Basic Instructor Training module for CANVAS (learning management system)
- Agendas for the All Faculty Day (2015 and 2016)
- Evaluation for the All Faculty Day (2017)
- Slides from Assessment Training, 2017
- The Student Learning Assessment Template (for adjunct faculty)
- Sample of rubrics used by adjunct faculty for evaluation of PLOs and ILOs
- Sample assessments performed by adjunct faculty
- List of follow-up questions for assessors/evaluators
- Sample performance evaluations of adjunct faculty
- The Flowchart for the “Course Observations and Feedback Dissemination Process”

The team also met with groups of adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, program directors, the vice president of institutional research and quality assurance, the faculty senate, and students.

#### Analysis of the Effectiveness of Institutional Actions

During the visit, the team had the opportunity to meet with adjunct faculty who were not only experienced in their fields — be they related to business, technology, or the arts — but also committed to teaching the students of Cogswell. The team commends the adjunct faculty of Cogswell for their dedication to the institution and its educational endeavors (CFR 3.1). Considering the substantial role adjunct faculty play in the delivery of the academic programs, the 2015 team noted the importance of implementing systematic practices to institutionalize the process of bringing these instructors to the campus, preparing them to fulfill their responsibilities, eliciting their participation in quality assurance processes, and ensuring their performance is evaluated appropriately.

Uniformly, the documents provided to the team as memorialization and description of the processes of selecting, onboarding, training, and evaluating adjunct faculty were verified by the adjunct faculty whom the team interviewed. Their direct account of the processes and policies of Cogswell aligned with the institution's intention for their experience (CFRs 3.2, 3.3).

Recently hired adjunct faculty recounted the process of their being hired, and their narrative included all steps documented in the evidence provided to the team (CFR 3.2). Participants in training exercises had positive experiences and valued the exposure to professional development (CFR 3.3). As further evidence of their systematic participation in the academic life of Cogswell, the team heard details regarding the adjunct faculty's:

- Participation in All Faculty Day, the orientation/re-orientation gathering that both covers policy and serves as a professional development opportunity exploring a variety of topics that vary from year to year, including sessions on Title IX and the use of rubrics in assessment (CFRs 2.4, 3.3, 4.4).
- Contact received from their programs and the institution via informational email messages and announcements about teaching strategies and professional development and training opportunities; when on campus, adjunct faculty reported participating in meetings and events (CFR 3.3).
- Assessment of learning outcomes using rubrics; adjunct faculty reported their participation, with compensation, in the direct assessment of student work. One adjunct faculty member attested to the challenges of participating in the alignment of course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes in an assessment he conducted (CFRs 2.4, 4.4).
- Receiving performance evaluation from the vice president of institutional research and quality assurance and their program directors; they reported seeing the evaluation forms and receiving feedback regarding their performance (CFR 3.2).
- Contribution to the design of courses and curriculum, by way of their regular attendance and input in departmental meetings and their frequent and informal discussions with program directors (CFRs 2.4, 3.1).
- Mentorship of the students seeking professional guidance, academic support, and career advice. “The students demand it,” reported one adjunct faculty member, in corroboration of what team members heard in a meeting of full-time faculty (CFRs 2.11, 2.13, 3.1).

Through interviews during the visit, the team observed that adjunct faculty believe that their opportunities for involvement “are as good or better than at other schools at which they teach” (CFR 3.3).

## Findings and Conclusions

Considering the adjunct faculty’s critical role and dedicated contributions to Cogswell, the team confirms the value of efforts to incorporate them into the institution’s assessment of academic programs and the benefits of connecting these activities to the development of pedagogy and program improvement (CFRs 3.1 – 3.3). The team suggests that feedback gleaned from adjunct faculty regarding their onboarding, training, and evaluation be used to engage in the continuous development of how Cogswell values their participation in the program’s and students’ success (CFRs 4.1, 4.3).

### **D. Issue: The development of online pedagogy, consistent with academic plans for this modality**

The Commission’s 2015 action letter recommended the institution “focus on best practices when designing online content and on implementing course requirements that will produce equivalence in student effort and learning outcomes.”

## Evidence Examined

- Guide for Writing Course Learning Outcomes
- Spring 2017 Online Analytics
- Training courses available in Go2K

- Models for Developing Online Courses
- 2016 substantive change application and appendices for Game Design and Development (BS in Game Design Engineering)
- 2016 Substantive Change WSCUC Action Report
- Draft Online Handbook
- Canvas Learning Management System Business Review
- Canvas Instructor Training Documents
- Demonstration of active courses in the Learning Management System
- 2012-2017 Draft Strategic Plan
- College Trend Reporting
- November 2016 Finance Book
- Report on Fall Cohort of 2016 and class enrollment during students' first year of study

#### Analysis of the Effectiveness of Institutional Actions

At the time of the last WSCUC visit in 2015, “online learning was in its infancy,” according to the Special Visit Report. Since then, the institution received WSCUC approval in 2016 to offer two fully online degrees: BA in Game Design Art and BS in Game Design Engineering. While some efforts have been made toward development of these fully-online programs, during campus interviews the institution acknowledged they were somewhat naïve in their initial understanding of online pedagogy, what is necessary to develop and offer a fully online program, and the services needed to support it. While Cogswell currently offers online and hybrid courses to their on-ground students, moving toward offering 100% online programs would amount to a substantial shift in modality that will require detailed planning, budgeting, and capital investment (CFR 4.6). In interviews with staff and management and

through the review of evidence, it was apparent to the team that tangible planning had yet to take place for the implementation of the new fully online programs.

If the institution were to move forward with the development of fully online programs, the team advises that: the published statement of vision for these programs should include information on the online learning environment; the planning for the expansion of online learning should ensure adequate support for current and future offerings and should demonstrate capacity to ensure quality programs and services; and Cogswell should reflect on how to schedule these courses to provide students with a path for timely completion of their degree program (CFR 2.10). Materials for online learners such as the student handbook, internship policies, and marketing materials must be revised to reflect 100% online learning (CFRs 1.6, 2.3). Proctoring or other identity verification processes as well as online etiquette policies must be developed and provided to all online students. The team suggests that consideration be given to increasing online library services by raising current subscriptions for resources such as EBSCO to meet the needs of online students in support of information literacy. Additionally, attention should be given to how the fully online curriculum will teach core competencies such as oral communication and information literacy as well as provide opportunities for student collaboration in project-based courses (CFR 2.2a).

The team commends Cogswell for hiring a director of online learning with expertise in online pedagogy and curriculum development. In a short time, the new director has implemented faculty training on using the learning management system (LMS), and under his direction, the institution has taken a methodical approach to establishing class shells for both online only and on-ground/hybrid courses. These shells provide consistency across courses and guide faculty in course development. While this is a commendable first step in the curriculum development process, significant financial investment in

technology and staffing will be necessary to offer quality services and to create the courses necessary to provide a full undergraduate degree program using best practices in online content development (CFRs 2.1, 4.1).

Since the last visit, Cogswell has ramped up faculty training in developing course learning outcomes and has provided faculty access to training opportunities provided in Go2K such as Best Practices in College Teaching: Creating an Active Learning Environment and Cheating in an Online Environment: How to Prevent, Detect, & Deter Dishonesty (Special Visit Report appendix: Training Courses Available in Go2K). During campus interviews, however, the team discovered there is currently no available training in online pedagogy specific to Cogswell, especially as it relates to effective teaching within an online environment (CFR 3.3). Furthermore, on campus interviews indicated that faculty with no online teaching experience or training in effective online teaching strategies are among those currently assigned to teach online and hybrid courses. Interviews with students indicated a lack of faculty interaction and effective teaching and learning in existing hybrid courses (CFR 2.1). Students stated that in some cases, no weight is given to the hybrid section of course work, thus indicating a lack of importance of this content. The team notes that the institution would benefit from clearly defined expectations and training for all categories of faculty teaching online and hybrid courses. Focus should also be given to scholarship and continued professional development appropriate to the institution's purposes and goals specific to online learning (CFR 2.8). This will be critical as the online learning programs continue to evolve.

Of particular concern to the team was the lack of awareness regarding the existing online and hybrid courses offered to the on-ground student population, as noted above under the first issue. Evidence indicated that 79% of the fall 2016 freshman class took at least one and as many as four hybrid courses

in their first year, and that 45% of freshmen took at least one and as many as five online courses in their first year. In conversations with students and staff, the team found that due to scheduling issues, students at times found it necessary to take hybrid or online courses in order to enroll in the classes they needed to graduate, in contradiction to the website and marketing materials, which published no mention of the inclusion of online or hybrid modalities in Cogswell on-ground programs. It was not until students signed up for classes that they were informed that they would be taking hybrid or online courses. The team was told that if students or their parents strongly objected to taking online or hybrid classes, students could attempt to take the class at a later date on-ground or at a local community college. If the institution plans to continue to rely on online and hybrid courses to meet scheduling needs and/or to launch fully online programs, the team advises that the mission statement be revised to articulate the role of online learning within Cogswell's programs and services (CFR 1.1). The team further suggests that marketing materials and admissions practices also include information on the potential for on-ground students to take courses in an online or hybrid modality (CFR 1.6).

During this same interview with management, leadership also indicated that remedial courses were never offered using online or hybrid modalities. In contradiction to these statements, and as evidenced by the College Trend Report, both remedial English 050 and Math 003 were being offered as online and hybrid courses at the time of the visit. The institution's policy stated that students must have a GPA of 2.5 to take online or hybrid courses; however, there was no evidence of assessment of student ability to succeed in an online environment. The team suggests that Cogswell assess how this practice impacts student achievement and retention as well as student satisfaction.

Finally, the report indicated that "online classes are assessed in tandem with their on-ground counterparts." The team notes that disaggregating assessment data could prove valuable by allowing

comparison of the learning outcomes attained by online and hybrid students vs. on-ground students.  
(CFRs 4.3, 4.4)

## Findings and Conclusions

The team acknowledges steps taken by the institution to embark on establishing effective online learning structures and processes; however, focused attention is needed regarding institutional investment, planning, decision-making, and resource allocation in this area (CFR 3.4). The institution should identify and articulate long-term and short-term goals and objectives for the implementation and development of 100% online programs including content development, faculty training, marketing strategies, student services, library services, student orientation, career services, financial aid, identity verification, appropriate college policies, state approvals, and assessment of students' ability to succeed online (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3-4.7).

The team concluded that Cogswell has made some progress in standardizing course shells in the LMS and in developing processes for online curriculum development. Regardless, the institution remained nascent in its online content design and implementation of course requirements for producing equivalence in student effort and learning outcomes. The team determined that, while Cogswell has hired a very capable director of online learning, more investment will be required for the institution to move forward with this endeavor.

Finally, the team finds further attention is needed regarding identifying, articulating, and training of full time and adjunct faculty on the institution's online learning pedagogy, not only as it pertains to future 100% online courses, but also to existing online and hybrid courses being offered.

In summary, given the current financial situation and the institution's need to fill academic leadership positions at the time of the visit, the team harbors serious concerns about the institution's capacity to provide quality academic programs using a fully online modality. Meetings with numerous campus constituents and careful review of the evidence convinced the team that the institution would benefit from shifting its focus to hiring leaders with experience in higher education, developing a viable strategic plan, improving campus communication, and ensuring financial capacity before moving any degree programs into a new fully online learning modality (CFRs 3.7, 4.6).

The team recommends that prior to launching any online programs, including those previously approved by WSCUC, the institution develop a detailed operational plan, timeline, and budget, including both capital and pre-launch costs and efforts (following the WSCUC Distance Education Guide), covering at a minimum financial and technological resources (CFRs 3.4, 3.5), faculty and staff qualifications (CFRs 2.1, 3.2), assessment of student ability to succeed online, training and student support services (CFRs 2.10, 2.13), curriculum development, library services, and processes for student identity verification. Careful attention should be given to using the same plan for existing online and hybrid courses.

**E. Issue: The development of expanded career services such that larger numbers of students are reached, academic advising is integrated with the effort, and enhanced data gathering on student placement is achieved**

The report of the previous team in 2015 indicated a need for "support and attention . . . to career services and academic counseling (CFR 2.13)." The team suggested that faculty "continue to mentor and guide students regarding their professional aspirations and program choices" but that course scheduling

and graduation counseling “be situated in student service staff trained specifically for that role.” The institution made a foray into retention and graduation enhancement with the creation of a first-year advisor and first-year experience course. The goal of developing career services and articulating this effort with academic advising was to improve retention and graduation further, as well as to improve and document student placement and success after graduation (CFRs 2.12, 2.13).

#### Evidence Considered

- Data supplied by the institution on career appointments, frequency and types of activities, number of employees and alumni visiting campus, the online services employed by Cogswell, and Key Performance Indicators
- Interviews with students, faculty, and staff regarding career services, its effectiveness, and its current state, including:
  - the dean of students, who heads the professional office of academic advising;
  - the director of career services;
  - the vice president of information technology and campus services, to whom both the director of career services and the dean of students report;
  - the dean of the college, faculty, and students.

#### Analysis of the Effectiveness of Institutional Actions

To improve career services, the institution added a staff member in that area, which at the time of the visit consisted of two FTE, and deployed two online services to support their efforts. Waypoint (<http://www.talentassessment.com/waypoint.html>), among its other student development aspects,

provided service as a talent assessment and job-matching platform to coach students through the transition from college to workforce. Handshake (<https://www.joinhandshake.com/students/>) allowed students to meet alumni and employers. Courses, such as Cogswell XL, and activities, such as lunch-and-learns, were implemented to enhance the focus on career success.

The data dashboard provided showed a marked increase in the number of student visit appointments in career services, ranging from resume review to placement in campus jobs. Waypoint provided data that showed an increase of employment within 12 months of graduation, as well as data that correlated success to students' use of the Waypoint online resource.

While the effort of career services has shown success that was both well-documented and clear, two areas remained open for further improvement: a) There was no evidence of how career services, which reports to the VP of IT and campus services, was integrated with either student services or the academic side of the organization; b) There was no documentation linking career services effort with retention and graduation rates, which remained low and were particularly troubling to the team in light of the institution's decrease in new starts ("New Starts by Major and Cohort 2017") (CFRs 2.10, 2.13).

Conversations with students suggested that their route to employment came through connections with faculty and other students and that career services has primarily served as a resource for developing skills in interviewing and in resume writing. It was clear that effectiveness of career services suffers from its lack of connection with the academic side of the house. Such a connection was exemplified in the strong and successful collaboration between both academic advising and tutoring with program chairs and professors. The team notes that academic advising and tutoring were referenced positively by stakeholders (students, faculty, student services) throughout the visit.

## Findings and Conclusions

The team commends tutoring and advising as a model for effective collaboration between academic programs and student services, particularly in how this collaboration could inform coordination of Cogswell's resources for other initiatives.

The team recommends that Cogswell continue to strengthen collaboration between student services, including career services, and faculty who prepare students for employment and who offer the best link to industry, in order to assure enhancement of the students' experience and to aid in the institution's efforts to improve retention, graduation, and placement rates (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 2.13).

## **SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS**

No other topics are noted by the team.

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

### Commendations

- The team commends Cogswell for its beautiful new home and the energy of its students and their work that fills it.
- The team commends the students for the earnestness that they express in the pursuit of careers through Cogswell's academic preparation and its industry connections.

- The team commends those many dedicated members of the staff who love Cogswell and are committed to see it thrive, especially those who work directly with students and faculty to improve their success.
- The team commends the institutional research and assessment efforts at Cogswell. They offer an important foundation for institutional success based on data, quality assurance, and continuous improvement.
- The team commends Cogswell's tutoring and advising as a model for effective collaboration between academic programs and student services.

#### Recommendations

- The team recommends that Cogswell better inform itself about WSCUC's policies, practices, and expectations regarding accreditation as required by WSCUC (CFR 1.8).
- The team recommends that Cogswell make a greater effort to document its current and long-term financial viability and use consideration of that evidence in its planning processes (CFR 3.4).
- The team recommends that "the institution periodically engage ... its multiple constituencies, including the governing board, faculty, staff, and others, in institutional reflection and planning processes that are based on the examination of data and evidence. These processes assess the

institution's strategic position, articulate priorities, examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions, and resources, and define the future direction of the institution" (CFR 4.6).

- The team recommends as soon as practicable that the institution hire a CEO in a method that complies with the requirements of WSCUC, which mandate a separate and full-time CEO and a separate CFO (CFR 3.8).
- The team recommends as soon as practicable that the institution hire a CAO in a method that complies with the requirements of WSCUC (CFRs 3.6, 3.8, 3.10).
- The team recommends board development, using outside help such as that provided by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), to foster a clear understanding of the board role in a higher education organization and to assist the Cogswell board in understanding the role of accreditation in the effectiveness and sustainability of the institution (CFR 3.9).
- The team recommends that Cogswell continue to strengthen collaboration between student services, including career services, and faculty who prepare students for employment and who offer the best link to industry, in order to assure enhancement of the students' experience and to aid in the institution's efforts to improve retention, graduation, and placement rates (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 2.13).
- The team recommends that prior to launching any online programs, including those previously approved by WSCUC, the institution develop a detailed operational plan, timeline, and budget, including both capital and pre-launch costs and efforts (following the WSCUC Distance Education

Guide), covering at a minimum financial and technological resources (CFRs 3.4, 3.5), faculty and staff qualifications (CFRs 2.1, 3.2), assessment of student ability to succeed online, training and student support services (CFRs 2.10, 2.13), curriculum development, library services, and processes for student verification. Careful attention should be given to using the same plan for existing online and hybrid courses.

- The team recommends that all degrees offered in the Game Design and Development program – both the BA in Game Design Art and the BS in Game Design Engineering – as well as the MA in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, which remains in the WSCUC directory listed as a distance education program, be resubmitted to the WSCUC Substantive Change Committee prior to offering (CFRs 2.1, 2.10, 2.13, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5).