

REPORT OF THE WSCUC VISITING TEAM

SPECIAL VISIT

To Life Pacific College

September 16-19, 2014

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 WASC Senior College and University Commission 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.

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 Visit

Life Pacific College (LPC) is a private, non-profit academic and denominational institution located in San Dimas, California. Founded in 1923 as L.I.F.E. Bible College, its original mission was to prepare men and women “to become evangelists, missionaries, pastors and teachers.” Its current mission describes Life Pacific College as an institution of “biblical higher education existing for the transformational development of students into leaders prepared to serve God in the Church, the workplace, and the world.” Life Pacific College is sponsored by, and serves as, the leading educational institution of the Foursquare Church.

Life Pacific College offers two Associate of Arts (AA) degree programs (Biblical Studies, General Studies), four traditional Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree programs (Biblical Studies, Business Administration, Human Development & Psychology, Transformational Leadership), one online BA degree completion program (Ministry & Leadership) and one online Master of Arts (MA) degree program (Strategic Leadership with an emphasis in Ministry). Life Pacific College was accredited by the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) in 1980 and reaffirmed in 2010.

In June 2004, Life Pacific College earned Initial Accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Commission, which was followed by the Capacity Preparatory Review (CPR) in October 2008 and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) in September 2010. The Commission requested that Life Pacific College incorporate into its EER report its responses to the major recommendations made in the CPR, especially those related to financial sustainability and enrollment management. In

February 2011, the Commission reaffirmed accreditation, issued a formal Notice of Concern, scheduled a fall 2012 Special Visit, a fall 2017 CPR, and a spring 2019 EER.

The purpose of the fall 2012 Special Visit was to evaluate the progress made by Life Pacific College with respect to the issues identified from the 2010 EER: financial sustainability and stability (Standard 3); strategic plan implementation (Standards 1 and 4); enrollment management and retention and graduation rates (Standard 3 and 4); faculty workload and policies and student-faculty ratio (Standards 2 and 3); and the implementation of assessment-related practices (Standard 2 and 4).

In February 2013, the Commission reaffirmed accreditation, imposed probation, and scheduled a fall 2014 Special Visit to address the concerns identified in the Commission Action Letter related to strengthening senior leadership and the governing board (Standard 3), achieving financial sustainability and enrollment sustainability (Standard 3), improving retention and graduation rates (Standards 1, 2, and 4), and developing strategic planning processes and institutional research capacity (Standard 4).

In line with the Commission's new accreditation process and requirements, Life Pacific College's Mid-Cycle Review is scheduled for spring 2015, the Offsite review for spring 2018, and the Accreditation Visit for fall 2018.

B. Quality of the Special Visit Report and Supporting Evidence

The Life Pacific College Special Visit Report (the report) was clearly written and organized around the four main issues identified in the 2013 Commission Action Letter: strengthening senior leadership and the governing board (Standard 3), achieving financial sustainability and enrollment sustainability (Standard 3), improving retention and graduation rates (Standards 1, 2, and 4), and developing strategic planning processes and

institutional research capacity (Standard 4). Although not required, the report also included a brief section on ensuring educational effectiveness.

The team reviewed the report and the supporting documents prior to the visit, and during the team conference call developed a number of questions and lines of inquiry to extend the review further. While the report provided the foundation for the campus visit, the onsite interviews and discussions provided the necessary information to answer questions and shape the team's findings.

In addition to the proprietary financial reports, audits, and management letters made available onsite, the team requested documents be made available in the team room that included the most current enrollment numbers, retention and graduation rates, student-faculty ratio, and the institutional assessment plan.

The team found that Life Pacific College addressed the issues and concerns raised by the Commission and its request for a Special Visit through a campus-wide culture that demonstrated the institution grasped the urgency and importance of this Special Visit. However, due to the small timeframe between the 2013 Commission Action Letter and the fall 2014 Special Visit, the report focused on processes and actions that had been taken to address structural and policy concerns. As such, Life Pacific College has only been able to begin its data analyses and align its findings to goals and outcomes.

C. Description of the Team Review Process

During the team conference call, team members divided the responsibilities for the writing and inquiry that would be conducted, enabling the members to explore questions, prepare lines of inquiry, and draft preliminary documents to guide the visit.

The team had the opportunity to more precisely plan its inquiry during a preliminary meeting held on September 16, 2014, before the onsite visit began.

During the visit, the team had adequate time to discuss various findings and to shape the conclusions, commendations and recommendations in the team report. The site visit provided the opportunity to further understand the personal and organizational commitments to Life Pacific College's mission in a more coherent whole that extended beyond the initial findings presented in the report and supporting documents.

The team chair presented the six commendations and four recommendations to the president prior to presenting those statements to an assembled group of university faculty, staff, administration, and student representatives of Life Pacific College's campus community.

SECTION II – TEAM ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

A. Strengthening Senior Leadership and the Governing Board (Standard 3)

1. Senior Leadership

After concluding a national search, Life Pacific College appointed the then interim president as its 10th president on July 1, 2013. All members of the Life Pacific College community openly noted that this is the first president to have a background in higher education administration. (CFR 3.8)

Following his appointment, the president began to immediately address the need to strengthen the leadership team around him. As a result, Life Pacific College realigned, reorganized, or added several administrative positions and groups to increase governance effectiveness and efficiency. By early 2013, the President's Cabinet was in place—consisting of the president's direct reports (vice president, academic affairs; vice

president, enrollment management; chief financial officer; and dean of institutional effectiveness). As noted in the institution's report, and verified during the site visit, the Cabinet also serves as the campus Budget Committee (working in collaboration with the board's Finance Committee) and the Accreditation Steering Committee.

In addition, the Administrative Council was realigned to better impact the governance needs of Life Pacific College; this body now includes the members of the Cabinet, members from the faculty, staff, the director of development, and occasionally, a visiting trustee liaison. (CFR 3.7)

Growing from a commitment for greater dialogue and collaboration between the board and the college's governance bodies, the Cabinet and the Administrative Council attend and participate in all of the Board of Trustees teleconferences as well as portions of the trustees' face-to-face meetings. According to the report, and evidenced onsite, this has resulted in greater communication and understanding among these governance bodies.

Growing from a commitment to transparency, the board hired an external consultant who guided the board's Governance Committee in developing a process of presidential review. In 2014, the president went through this formal review with the understanding that this would be conducted on an annual basis. (CFR 3.9) Currently, the president is in a one-year formal coaching relationship with a retired WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)-accredited institution president and accreditation consultant.

Likewise, the trustees, following through on the consultant's recommendation, performed its first annual review of itself along with a comprehensive self-review by

individual members. During its June 2014 meeting, board members reviewed the results of the review provided by the Governance Committee.

As the visiting team spent time in conversation with trustees, faculty, staff, students, and community members, it became overtly apparent that the president's leadership has had a transformative role in shaping the future direction of Life Pacific College. (CFRs 3.6, 3.8)

2. Governing Board

In the time since the fall 2012 Special Visit, a vast array of significant changes pertaining to the issue of institutional leadership and the governing board have occurred at Life Pacific College.

Following the resignation of the former president on January 1, 2013, the Board of Trustees appointed Dr. Jim J. Adams as Interim President on January 2, 2013. Dr. Adams quickly began to address the issues raised in the Commission Action Letter through the introduction of an emergency action plan, evidenced as the Strategic Priorities. The board, used to only meeting biannually, began a series of monthly face-to-face or teleconference meetings, working through the strategic challenges facing the institution.

In the months that followed, the board engaged a series of consultants to assist the trustees in improving board functions. As a result of this significant focus, professional protocols for handling of board minutes were developed and an experienced assistant was hired to manage board organization and documentation as evidenced during the site visit on the SharePoint intranet site. In response to the trustees' self-evaluation, it was agreed that changes were needed in the make-up of the board. Nearly one-third of the board's

members either resigned or termed-out, enabling seven new trustees with specific expertise and experience to be appointed to the board. (CFR 3.6)

A newly-instituted Governance Committee designed and approved a matrix that identified desired characteristics and expertise, and the board successfully recruited individuals with experience in higher education administration, accreditation, faculty affairs, finance, fundraising, human resources, and business. Changes were also made to the committee structure of the board to better align with the Association of Governing Board (AGB) standards. The board handbook, along with its policies, was updated, and the team verified that work is now proceeding on revising the bylaws in order to make certain that the board is in alignment with the WSCUC Policy on Independent Governing Boards. (CFR 3.7)

The board has also taken significant steps to address the effectiveness of its governance. Along with a board education focus at each of the three annual face-to-face meetings, new trustees are required to attend a new member training session. In conversations with the trustees, the team noted that the board is effectively utilizing the new dashboard to track progress and to guide decision-making. This is particularly true in the area of finance and the budget—a subject that has received significant attention at the majority of meetings. (CFR 4.1) The board’s familiarity and use of the dashboard (includes 50 indicators deemed most instructive for institutional health) was confirmed during a conversation between the team and the director of institutional research.

The board has also taken seriously the need to own the strategic planning process of Life Pacific College. During the period in which the current plan, Vision 2020, was under development, board minutes evidenced that trustees were involved in revising the

mission, vision, and values statements of the institution; guiding the development of the plan as it progressed; and enthusiastically endorsing the final plan. The membership of the Strategic Planning Committee also includes four trustees. (CFRs 1.1, 4.1, 4.2)

Board minutes also identify that trustees have focused significant energy on the issue of enrollment strategy with an intentional focus on increasing traditional on-campus enrollment through the development of new academic programs. The board's Academic Committee has also worked with the full board to ensure the academic effectiveness of the institution.

Through discussions with trustees, faculty, staff, and administration, it was evident to the visiting team that the current board is fully engaged in exercising its fiduciary and legal responsibilities, is acting with appropriate independence, is carefully monitoring and supporting senior leadership, and is providing an appropriate level of oversight in the areas of financial viability and academic effectiveness. (CFRs 3.6, 3.9)

B. Achieving Financial Sustainability and Enrollment Stability (Standard 3)

1. Financial Sustainability

Life Pacific College has taken a number of actions to address and significantly improve its long-term financial sustainability. (CFR 3.4) Interviews with board members and senior administrative staff, credited the improved financial position to various actions taken by the institution. These actions include purposeful reductions in operating costs, such as the voluntary separation program, and the adjustment or suspension of academic programs, which allowed Life Pacific College to focus resources on its strategic initiatives. Other actions cited in the interviews during the site visit include the addition of two new academic programs, student enrollment growth from 295 FTE (fall 2012) to

335 FTE (fall 2014) students, the procurement of a five-year pledge of financial support from the Foursquare Church, and a verbal commitment from the Foursquare Church to fund the pledge at a level of at least \$800,000 per year. Finally, actions cited include the development of a comprehensive budget planning process, the development of realistic five year budget projections through FY 2018-19 that are based on data, and the linkage of the budget projections to both Life Pacific College's strategic plan (CFR 3.4), and to key metrics such as the Composite Financial Index (CFI).

Review of budget documents and strategic plans (especially budget, enrollment, and fundraising projections) by the team confirmed the integration of the strategic plan with the five-year budget projections and the general reasonableness of projections. (CFR 3.4) Review of operating results (internal reports and external audits) by the team confirmed that Life Pacific College achieved unrestricted net income of \$962,025 (11.8% of total unrestricted revenue) for FY 2013-14 and unrestricted net income of \$756,164 (9.1% of total unrestricted revenue) for FY 2012-13. The review of operating results by the team also confirmed the maintenance of a positive score of 3 (the highest possible score) on the US Department of Education's financial responsibility test, two-year positive trends in all financial ratios, and a significant improvement in the CFI. Life Pacific College's CFI score of 7.62 at the end of FY 2013-14, and its five year average CFI score of 5.42, are both above a threshold CFI score of 5.00 that is widely viewed as being necessary for an institution of higher education to advance and sustain its mission.

The team notes that Life Pacific College retained a new and nationally recognized independent auditing firm (Capin Crouse, LLP) with significant higher education experience for the FY 2012-13 and FY 2013-14 audits. The team also notes that the

previous independent auditor had not issued any management letters to give the board and senior administrative staff guidance in matters such as best practice and compliance. The new auditors, by contrast, have issued detailed and directed management letters in association with each of their two completed audits. They have also provided presentations on the use of key financial ratios such as the CFI to gauge the financial health of Life Pacific College.

An interview with the independent auditor further confirmed the significantly improved financial position of Life Pacific College. The one year \$1.4 million or 5.0% increase in net assets to \$28.5 million as of June 30, 2014, the strong primary reserve ratio of 1.3, and the 5.1% return on net assets ratio were cited by the auditor as evidence of this improvement. The auditor also cited improved oversight of the institution's finances by the Board of Trustees and its Audit Committee and by the implementation of improved systems and controls—as recommended in the FY 2012-13 auditor's management letter, as implemented by the board and Life Pacific College during FY 2013-14, and as further confirmed in the FY 2013-14 auditor's management letter.

Document review and interviews with board members and senior administrative staff indicate that Life Pacific College has also recently (May 2014) developed a comprehensive advancement plan, integrated with the strategic plan, and with five-year budget projections. Evidence of Life Pacific College's commitment to implement the advancement plan includes the addition of staff (director of development, grant writer and part-time administrative assistant), the addition of expertise to the Board of Trustees (two new members with extensive advancement experience), the procurement of donor management software (Raiser's Edge by Blackbaud), and the research based formulation

of a detailed list of prospective donors with giving capacity to meet or exceed Life Pacific College's fundraising goals.

Review of audited financial statements and internal financial reports revealed that annual giving to Life Pacific College's LIFE Fund has averaged \$251,000 over the last three years and is in addition to the significant support it receives from the Foursquare Church, which has averaged \$1.3 million in total over the last three years. It is this giving history, and the strategies and actions noted above, that form the basis of the projections in the advancement plan for the LIFE Fund giving to grow in phases from \$246,000 in FY 2014-15 to \$578,500 in FY 2018-19.

Document review and interviews with members of the Board of Trustees and senior administrative staff revealed that 100% of the board members are now financially supporting Life Pacific College. Further, advancement staff participate in formal professional development activities and are supplementing their efforts with fundraising consultants as necessary. In addition, it was noted that the president is leading the advancement office and is actively engaged in donor development, solicitation, and stewardship. Based on the evidence seen, the team expects that Life Pacific College will continue to accelerate its efforts in implementing the new advancement plan and will be able to modify its goals as necessary based on actual gift procurement results.

Finally, Life Pacific College's recent (March 2014) designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) by the US Department of Education makes the institution eligible to apply for targeted federal grants to support its growing population of Hispanic students while relieving it from institutional financial matching requirements as required under Title IV programs. (CFR 2.13)

The team notes that the sufficiency of faculty and staff levels (CFR 3.1) at Life Pacific has improved with the recent hiring of two additional full-time faculty members and 8.25 FTE (full time equivalent) staff members. The hires were all associated with strategic plan initiatives and included faculty for two new academic programs and staff support to expand key areas such as student recruitment and fundraising.

The team also notes that the independent auditor's management letter for fiscal year (FY) 2013-14 recommends that Life Pacific College create and hire a part- or full-time position dedicated to the human resources function at the college. Interviews with various members of the campus community supported this recommendation and it is currently under consideration by the senior leadership. Life Pacific College will be served well in the long run to develop and implement a strategy for enhanced oversight and administration of the human resources function at the college.

2. Enrollment Stability

The fall 2012 Special Visit team observed that Life Pacific College's enrollment targets lacked clear implementation plans and that there was a lack of professional enrollment specialists. Since then, the institution has restructured its enrollment functions and transferred all admissions activities from the Office of the Registrar to the Office of Admissions—led by a vice president of enrollment who is able to focus exclusively on developing and meeting (if not exceeding) the annual enrollment targets. (CFR 3.7) Additionally, Life Pacific College, with the president's recommendation and the board's approval, created a full-time assistant director of admissions position to support the vice president's enrollment efforts. Based on a yield of 50-80 enrolled students for every 250-300 applications, Life Pacific College further strengthened its admissions staffing plan by

hiring an additional counselor for academic year (AY) 2014-15. As a result, Life Pacific College has grown its inquiry pool in one year from 1200 to 2000 inquiries.

Life Pacific College also retained the professional services of the Ruffalo Cody group to guide the restructure and assist in the development of its enrollment management plan. The team was able to review the consultant's report and recommendations, and observe that in just a short turnaround time, best practices have been put into play at Life Pacific College since the fall 2012 Special Visit. The enrollment management plan provides a five-year strategy for increasing enrollment (both aggregated and disaggregated by academic program). (CFR 2.10)

Informed by 10-year enrollment trends, Life Pacific College has recognized the need to expand its academic degree programs in order to attract and matriculate new student enrollments. In consultation with faculty and the Administrative Council, two new degree programs were proposed and approved by the board for fall 2014 implementation. The two programs are the BA in Business Administration and the BA in Human Development and Psychology. (CFR 2.1)

For AY 2014-15, Life Pacific College set a goal of 120 new students for its four Bachelor and two Associate of Arts degree programs. It exceeded its goal by 9 for a total of 129 new students. Additionally, as evidenced during the team visit, the new student enrollments in the two new academic programs puts Life Pacific College on a trajectory to continue for a third year (AY 2015-16) to meet if not exceed its enrollment targets. With enrollment targets of 16 new students for each of the two new programs, Life Pacific College enrolled 19 for the BA in Business Administration and 45 (almost triple the target) for the BA in Human Development and Psychology. During interviews on site,

the vice president for enrollment management and members from the Strategic Enrollment Management Committee voiced that they will continue to use the formula developed based on historical data to guide its future enrollment goals—especially since a third new academic program is planned to be offered in fall 2015. (CFRs 4.3, 4.7)

Life Pacific College has also increased its sophistication in aligning the enrollment projections to the budgetary process. The institution formerly held to a May 1 deadline; it has since moved the earlier deadline up to December. This shift has resulted in more applications by mid-academic year (7 to 70 from December 2012 to December 2013), but more sustainably, it has allowed the institution to develop reasonable budget scenarios linked to enrollment goals.

Based on enrollment projections for AY 2014-15, three budget scenarios were developed and approved by the board this past January 2014—high, average, and low scenarios that were linked to student FTE (336, 325, and 310) targets. Realized for AY 2014-15, Life Pacific College ended up with an FTE of 335 and was able to adopt the “high” budget scenario. This strategic and sustainable process is being repeated for AY 2015-16 with enrollment inquiries through October 2014 inputted into the enrollment management formula so that projections and targets can be set and two budget scenarios developed.

Life Pacific College has taken seriously the need to increase enrollment in order to be financially sustainable as an institution of higher education. The board and president’s commitments to the increased resources needed to participate in the “science of enrollment management” was evidenced by the team first in the report and verified on

site during the visit. Life Pacific College will do well to continue to assess and refine its enrollment management plan as it moves forward. (CFRs 3.4, 4.3)

C. Improving Retention and Graduation Rates (Standards 1, 2, and 4)

As part of the 2014 Special Visit, retention and graduation rates were seen and understood as urgent in terms of the role they play to achieve financial stability at Life Pacific College. In contrast, at the time of the 2012 Special Visit, the visiting team observed that while a retention committee had been established, there was “little evidence of trend analysis and the development of data-driven initiatives to solve persistent attrition.” In addition, the visiting team found that the three-year average graduation rate of 36% was lower than what was acceptable for a WASC accredited institution.

In response to the Commission’s previous concerns, Life Pacific College made student success a prominent part of their strategic plan, as evidenced by the newly drafted Life Pacific College Retention Plan 2014. Tied to their Strategic Initiative 1D: Improve student retention and graduation rates through the creation of a comprehensive retention plan, this document includes 12 strategies and 35 initiatives to take place over the next three years with the overarching goal to retain students to degree completion, and to create a framework that consolidates campus leadership, faculty, and staff members’ retention efforts to “create a learning environment that encourages students to realize their career aspirations....” (Life Pacific College Retention Plan 2014)

The process by which the Retention and Student Success (RSS) Committee developed these strategies began with research on best practices in the area of student retention, the compilation of examples of initiatives from the research, the administration of a survey to prioritize those initiatives, and finally, the identification of the strategies to

include in the plan. The retention plan is well researched and detailed—it commits Life Pacific College to certain actions, including maintaining and utilizing comprehensive data on retention and graduation rates, and administering student surveys to gather data on student engagement and satisfaction. (CFRs 1.2, 2.10)

At the time of the writing of the 2014 Special Visit Report, the RSS Committee had also generated and analyzed an extensive array of trend data on retention and graduation rates—rates for Life Pacific College students along with students from comparable peer institutions: WSCUC, regionally accredited ABHE, and Foursquare-affiliated.

In addition, the 2014 Special Visit report includes the presentation and analysis of data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, entering student type (first-time or transfer), enrollment status, gender, program, residence (in- or out-of-state), and by risk factors (high school grade point average (GPA), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, first term GPA, Pell grant recipients, and housing status). Additionally, time to degree data was also evident. The Office of Institutional Research has developed a list of peer institutions—and the primary recurring data instruments and scheduled data reports will inform Life Pacific College’s ongoing evaluation of issues related to and impacting student success. (CFR 1.2, 2.10)

Life Pacific College implemented several of the recommendations that came from the RSS in June 2013, including launching additional majors, beginning efforts to enroll with the National Student Clearinghouse student tracker, increasing the minimum entrance high school GPA, expanding the number of units covered by the block tuition fee, and revising the admissions application to identify first generation students. Life

Pacific College has taken a first step towards a complete alignment of the co-curricular programs with academic goals by its recent organizational restructure that now assigns the oversight of the Life Pacific College's comprehensive retention plan to the director of student development. (CFR 2.11) The director of student development now reports to the vice president for academic affairs.

Life Pacific College's serious commitment to assess both the co-curricular and academic programs to support student success is demonstrated in its institutional assessment plan. Likewise, the college has established a clear and concrete framework for regularly assessing the co-curricular programs. An example of this is the assessment of the Residence Life programs. According to the Residence Life Programming Plan 2014-15, each of the several residential programs (e.g., Time Management Workshop, Relationship Panel, Stress Relief Night) is assessed by identifiable learning outcomes, learning assessment methods, timing, and responsible staff for each. Once each event has occurred, the plan calls for a report to be written covering the assessment method, evaluation, and recommendations.

As it claims in its report, Life Pacific College has "improved...the systems in place to gauge the effectiveness of current retention protocols," as evidenced by their intensive data gathering to date, which provides comparison and trend data with which to measure the success of student success initiatives. Notably, the current status of Life Pacific College's retention and graduation rates has the institution in the middle of the ABHE institutions, and on the high end of the WSCUC institutions in terms of the first-year fall-to-fall retention of its traditional undergraduates. In addition, the most recent cohort graduation data for Life Pacific College shows marked improvement in the four-

year graduation rate for the 2010 cohort from the 2009 cohort (+22.6%), and improvement of the 6-year rates for the 2007 and 2008 cohorts compared to the 2006 cohort (+12.9 and +7.9% respectively). (CFR 2.10)

It also appears that retention, which had declined from the five-year high of 70% for the 2008 cohort, to 58.6% for the 2012 cohort, reversed its downward trend with a 66.7% first-to-second year retention rate for its 2013 incoming cohort. However, Life Pacific College appears to understand that one year of improvement is not a trend, and its work must continue to gain traction in order to improve and sustain additional positive trends in these rates.

Life Pacific College provides a great deal of data both aggregated and disaggregated on retention and graduation rates, including benchmarking those rates against WSCUC and ABHE peer institutions. Clearly, the concern expressed by the Commission in earlier reviews has been internalized by the institution. Efforts to improve retention and graduation rates are part of the strategic plan and “cascading plans,” which includes a comprehensive retention plan. In developing its retention plan, Life Pacific College has invested what appears to be considerable time in researching good practices related to student success. In addition, the institution’s assessment plan includes the timing and method that the institution will employ in assessing both its academic and co-curricular programs.

The institution needs to continue its work in creating and sustaining a cohesive focus for their retention efforts, as many recommendations were made—some stemming from data and some from best practices. Life Pacific College will be best served if it expedites

the refinement and monitoring of its retention plan in order to maximize its effect on enrollment.

D. Developing Strategic Planning Processes & Institutional Research Capacity

(Standard 4)

1. Strategic Planning Processes

In reviewing the findings of the 2012 Special Visit with the members of the board, the consultant retained by Life Pacific College noted: “In a conversation with the visiting team, members of the Board recognized that there are significant strategic challenges facing the College...” and that there is no clear understanding of the strategic planning process or the appropriate qualitative and quantitative data needed for a robust analysis of LPC’s current situation.” (p. 10)

As presented in the report prepared by Life Pacific College for this 2014 Special Visit, a number of decisive steps to address these issues have been taken. First, Life Pacific College held preliminary meetings with stakeholders and with leaders from the Foursquare Church in the first three months of 2013. This resulted in a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis from external constituencies. Life Pacific College also joined the Society for College and University Planning and enrolled its dean for institutional effectiveness in the Society for College and University Planning institute. The process began in earnest in July 2013 with the development of a timeline to submit a strategic plan to the board for its approval in February 2014. Life Pacific College formed a Strategic Planning Committee with broad campus and board representation that met every other week through December 2013.

The Strategic Planning Committee began by focusing on the mission of Life Pacific College and noted the need for mission clarification. By the end of July 2013, a revised mission, vision, and strategic goals were forwarded to the board for its review and comment.

In August 2013, a consultant led a two-day planning session with the college community. More than 40 members of Life Pacific, including faculty, staff, and students, participated. This resulted in an internal SWOT. The Strategic Planning Committee continued to meet, focusing on both the external and internal SWOTs, as well as utilizing an array of data from California, the Foursquare Church, and higher education. (CFR 4.1)

By October a draft of the plan was submitted to the Faculty Forum and the Staff Forum, as well as to the trustees. The Strategic Planning Committee received comments from these groups, as well as reviewed the plan's alignment with the President's 10-Point Vision presented during his inauguration. By January, the faculty reviewed and vetted the nearly-completed plan.

The process culminated with the Board of Trustees approving the plan, Vision 2020, during its February 2014 meeting. The plan, focused on the five-year period of 2014-2019, is organized around five strategic goals. It should be noted that the plan is supported by what the college refers to as cascading plans—an academic plan, enrollment management plan, and an advancement plan. (CFRs 4.3, 4.6)

Currently four trustees, along with the president and four members of the administration, three faculty members, two staff members, two students, and one community member, serve on the Strategic Planning Committee. Life Pacific has noted that planning is a continuing process and that the Strategic Planning Committee will

continue, with the guidance and oversight of the board, to remain focused on this central task. (CFR 4.6)

Over the past year there has been significant focus given to the work of institutional research (IR), and this new capacity has helped to guide institutional leadership in developing new academic programs and initiatives. The team is encouraged that the strategic plan now in place provides a platform for realistic and informed decision making across all segments of the college. (CFR 4.7)

2. Institutional Research Capacity

While it was recognized in the 2013 Commission Action Letter that progress had been made in establishing a viable institutional research function, the Commission found “that LPC is not in compliance with Standard 4, especially CFRs 4.1-4.5 [2008],” and that it would need to “demonstrate that it has fully developed its new institutional research capacity, and that it is generating data to evaluate programs and initiatives, inform decision making, and create realistic and achievable plans.”

In response, Life Pacific College created the new position of dean of institutional effectiveness (IE) which integrated institutional research, strategic planning, assessment, program review, and accreditation. According to the report, where in the past institutional research (IR) had minimal support from the institution’s leadership, currently the dean of IE participates as a non-voting member in the Cabinet meetings and serves as chair of the Administrative Council (Ad Council), a body that makes recommendations for actions directly to the Board of Trustees. In addition, a part-time institutional research fellow and an Institutional Research Work Group were established to further support IR. (CFR 4.2)

As evidenced both in the institution's 2014 Special Visit Report and in supplemental documents, numerous sets of internal and external (benchmarking) data tracking trends over time are produced by IR to support the strategic plan. Life Pacific College's capacity to analyze and interpret the data is supported by the IR Working Group, which was formed specifically to serve this purpose. In addition, while the report included the admission that the "urgency with which the institutions needed to establish a new plan hindered as comprehensive a review of data as the Strategic Planning Committee would have liked," the Strategic Planning Committee is now reviewing the relevant data at each of its quarterly meetings. The Ad Council also reviews the data monthly, in particular a dashboard produced by IR that includes 200 metrics, all related to issues and items within the strategic plan. IR is also providing data to the Office of Admissions which is analyzed to develop enrollment projections with recruitment and retention targets. The new IR structure with Cabinet level authority further ensures that the college has the capacity to review and respond to the data provided. (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.5)

The sustainability of the current level of data production, given the staffing for institutional research, is worthy of the attention of the college. In addition, regardless of staffing levels, more sophisticated presentation of the data, a determination of which data sets are the most meaningful, and where a deeper rather than broader analysis of the data is appropriate, would serve to both aid in its analysis and better support strategic decision-making. Finally, the college must put in place a means for conducting periodic reviews of the institutional research function to ensure the suitability and usefulness of the data generated. (CFR 4.2)

SECTION III – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

1. The team commends the Board of Trustees for reforming board culture through its membership and expertise, organization, development efforts, engagement, collaboration and commitment. (CFR 3.9, 4.7)
2. The team commends the president for his transformational leadership, recognized and celebrated by all segments of the campus. (CFR 3.6)
3. The team commends college leadership for including faculty, staff, students, community and church in the development of a comprehensive and integrated strategic plan. (CFR 4.6)
4. The team commends the college for strengthening its financial position by refining its budgeting processes, strategically focusing its expenditures, growing its enrollment, securing the continued support of the Foursquare Church, appointing a new independent auditor with higher education expertise, generating positive operating results, and increasing its net assets. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5)
5. The team commends the Board of Trustees and campus leadership for expanding degree and program opportunities to better meet the educational needs of students while broadening the definition of ministry. (CFRs 2.1, 4.7)
6. The team commends Life Pacific College for living its stated mission. (CFRs 1.1, 1.5)

Recommendations

1. The team recommends that the college now conduct periodic reviews of the institutional research function to ensure the suitability and usefulness of the data generated. (CFR 4.2)
2. The team recommends a continued sense of urgency in the refinement, implementation and monitoring of the college's retention plan. (CFRs 1.2, 2.10)
3. The team recommends the development of an institutional financial aid philosophy, and a strategy for implementation, in order to advance the college's recruitment and retention goals. (CFR 2.13)
4. The team recommends that in light of its HSI designation, the college consider the impact of a more diverse campus on the support services necessary to ensure student success. (CFRs 1.4, 2.13)