

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM  
SPECIAL VISIT

To Simpson University

March 18-19, 2021

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

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## SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

### a. *Description of the Institution, its Accreditation History, as Relevant, and the Visit*

The institution has been in existence since 1921, named Simpson Bible Institute, and was initially based in Seattle, Washington. The mission of the Bible Institute was to support student spiritual growth and prepare missionaries for work around the world. While always affiliated with the Christian & Missionary Alliance, in 1941, Simpson Bible Institute was formally affiliated with the denomination and fourteen years later, in 1955, the campus relocated to San Francisco and was renamed Simpson Bible College. Simpson Bible College obtained its first WASC accreditation in 1969, and the college began adding new programs and broadened its offerings to add a liberal arts focus. Within two years, in 1971 they changed their name to Simpson College to reflect the growth that occurred. Finally, in 1989, the college moved to its current location, Redding, California, and in 2004, the College Board of Trustees voted to rename it Simpson University.

The university has four schools and each school offers various programs of study: School of Undergraduates (TUG); School of Nursing RN (Nursing); School of Adult and Graduate Professional Studies (SAGPS); and School of Tozer Seminary (TZ). Simpson offers two associate degrees, three degree completion majors, 17 bachelor level undergraduate majors and five master's degrees, in addition to several certificates. The current mission statement of the university is: *Simpson University is a Christ-centered learning community committed to developing each student in mind, faith and character for a lifetime of meaningful work and service in a constantly changing world.* A limited number of Tozer Seminary courses are offered in Woodland, CA and Columbia, MO. The institution also has an online program with one associate's degree, two bachelor degree options and four Master's degree options.

Since the initial accreditation, Simpson has had challenges with meeting WSCUC standards, and in 1981 – 1990, the institution received a formal warning (1981), sanction (1983), probation (1987), sanction (1988), and warning (1990). In 1995 Simpson College received reaffirmation of accreditation, but in 2006 and 2008, the institution received a notice of concern with reaffirmation, and in 2010 the commission removed the notice of concern. Again following a 2016 WSCUC visit, the commission took action to place the institution on probation at the February 2017 meeting. The Commission Action Letter included two issues: 1) financial strength and sustainability, and 2) strategic planning. They further identified two recommendations for the institution: 1) Use direct outcomes to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning on a regular basis, and 2) improve diversity with recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty from diverse backgrounds and conduct training to reduce perceptions of privilege. Simpson's most recent accreditation visit was in the fall of 2018. The 2018 Special Visit team found that Simpson had made significant progress on the issues identified in the 2017 Commission Action letter and detailed those improvements along with recommendations in their report. Based in this report, the Commission removed Probation, issued a Formal Notice of Concern (with a Special Visit for spring 2021) and reaffirmed the Simpson accreditation for a term of six years.

The Commission Action Letter from March 4, 2019 identified the following three issues for Simpson to continue working on:

1. Strategic planning connected to decision making regarding the financial health of the university, especially as it relates to enrollments and non-tuition revenue streams. (CFR 3.4, CFR 4.6)

2. Develop and implement a systematic program review process for all programs and expand the Assessment Committee to include full-time faculty who are appropriately trained. (CFR 2.7, CFR 4.1, CFR 4.3, CFR 4.5)

3. Ensure sufficient number and appropriately trained FT faculty are in place to cover all active programs, particularly adult and graduate programs. (CFR 2.2b, CFR3.1)

It was on these three issues that the March 2021 Special visit team focused their attention. During the remote visit, the team referred to posted or printed institutional documents, their web home page, and verified/clarified assessments during face-to-face interviews with the board, president, cabinet, chief financial and chief operations officers; Offices of Admissions and Marketing, and committees such as Strategic Planning, Faculty Personnel, and Assessment/Program Review. There was a wide representation of faculty, staff, administration, and board members who were remotely interviewed. The team also reviewed the confidential email account on the night prior to the remote visit, and throughout the remote visit.

*b. Description of Team's Review Process*

The Special Visit team gained access to view the Simpson University Institutional Report on January 8, 2021 from the approved secure document storage (wascsenior.account.box.com) and began a review of the submitted documents to prepare the team worksheet to be used during the teleconference meeting. The team used the Commission Action Letter, dated March 4, 2019 outlining three areas of focus. The team identified four themes from these three areas that guided the team's analysis while reviewing all the documentation and evidence during preparations and eventual remote visit: strategic planning connected to decision making, financial sustainability related to enrollment and budget management, program review, and sufficient number of appropriately trained faculty to support Simpson's programs. The four members plus the

WSCUC Liaison, Mark Goor, met via Ring Central on February 5, 2021 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. to discuss findings, articulate follow-up questions, identify additional documents needed and construct a visitation meeting schedule with key individuals or committees. Shortly after the telephone conference, the chair, Kerry Fulcher, communicated with the ALO about additional documents requested and the supplemental tables were uploaded to box.com for the team to review.

*c. Quality and Rigor of the Institution's Special Visit Report and Supporting Evidence*

The team found Simpson's report addressed all the issues identified in the CAL from March 2019 at least at a surface level. It was candid, honest, and the institution appears to take responsibility for the previous conditions that led to the current issues identified by WSCUC. The institutional report responded with the first three areas well, but with less clarity on the fourth area, ensure sufficiently trained faculty.

The team found the highlights of the report to be in the areas of communicating changes that have been made since the last visit in connection with the areas identified in the CAL and suggestions from the 2018 WSCUC visiting team report. For example, one of the suggestions by the visiting team was to utilize WSCUC resources and external higher education consultants to help jumpstart them in areas where they were lacking internal expertise or had experience gaps. Simpson has excelled in these areas at several levels including significant engagement by the board of trustees to incorporate regular training and development of their membership in important areas for the higher education context (fund raising, investment management, legal issues, enrollment and demographic trends and governance). This was also evident on the institutional side in assessment, program review, enrollment management/admissions, financial aid, and budget management. The combined efforts of these engagements with outside

consultants have led to a significant amount of activity and change as outlined in Appendix 2 (The President's Summary of Activities). The amount of work that Simpson has been able to accomplish that is aimed at the issues identified in the 2019 CAL and connected to their strategic plan is impressive, especially considering the impact of the pandemic on their overall timeline. As they move toward stability of administration, faculty, and staff, the institution can now develop strategies to reduce reliance on external consultants as they increase internal capacity for these functions.

While the report did contain sufficient relevant information relating to the issues raised in the 2019 CAL, the team found several redundancies and the details in the narrative portion of the report did not always match the data that was given in the appendices. For example, the narrative section of the report on the positive trends in enrollment since the last visit were not corroborated in the data provided in the appendices, which still showed declining trends and it did not have the most recent two years of data. Similar mismatches between the narrative and supporting data were found in the areas of budget health and strategic planning. To Simpson's credit, they were able to provide updated data that had informed the report narrative upon request from the team, but inclusion of the data with the report would have made it easier for the team to follow. Finally, while the report was very strong on documenting activities and changes that were made in alignment with the issues identified in the 2019 CAL, it did not contain the depth of reflection on the impact of these activities and changes that the team was expecting. This left the team with the overall impression going into the remote Special Visit with Simpson, that they had been very active and engaged in addressing the appropriate issues, but that it was too early to tell if all the work they had done would have a significant impact or make a big enough difference to help them overcome the challenges identified in the 2019 CAL.

## *SECTION II – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS*

### *a. Issues 1 & 2: Implement & use the Strategic Plan to guide decisions, and strengthen the Budget, and Enrollment*

In the March 4, 2019 official notification letter to Simpson University summarizing the October 2018 team visit, it was noted that the university should “continue to implement the existing strategic plan to monitor and strengthen the financial position of the institution, with a special emphasis on growing enrollment in net revenue producing programs and increasing revenue from non-tuition dependent sources. Prioritize the use of limited resources to areas that strengthen the mission of the institution. Continue to use financial and non-financial metrics to monitor progress. (CFR 3.4, CFR 4.6).” As a result of this recommendation the March, 2021 visiting team paid specific attention to the financial condition of the institution, to enrollment, and to the use of the university strategic plan. Our observations during the special visit which occurred on March 18 and 19, 2021, indicated that there had been significant attention to strengthen these areas and that significant progress had been made.

The team was able to observe that the strategic plan which had been put into place shortly after the arrival of Dr. Norman Hall to assume the presidency of Simpson University (Simpson Rising), had been well cascaded out to the broader community and that it was being used effectively to measure progress. The team was informed by the trustees that the Simpson Rising strategic plan has been on the agenda of every board meeting and part of monthly trustee committee meetings since the last special team visit in 2018. In addition, in every meeting that the team participated in, it was clear that all audiences were very familiar with the Simpson Rising strategic plan and knew how their particular area connected to it. As a result, the team noted that significant work had been done across the board to align the institution to specific

strategic objectives and that the strategic plan document was being used to form decisions and to identify the tactics necessary in order to accomplish the strategic objectives. (CFR 4.6) During the visit, it was apparent that this initial strategic plan (put in place within Dr. Hall's first 100 days), was being updated to cover the next 5 years for the university (2021-2026) and that a larger constituency group was being sought for input into the construction of that draft strategic plan document. This update to the Simpson Rising strategic plan is slated for completion by the October 2021 trustee meeting. (CFR 4.6)

As part of this review, the team evaluated the current and projected financial condition of the institution and found it to be much improved from the team's prior visit. In fact, during that 2018 visit it was noted that there was a \$1.5 million deficit. The new CFO, Timothy Dietz, indicated to us that the university was projecting a surplus of \$3 million or more for the fiscal year closing April 30, 2021. In addition to the financial improvement itself, it was apparent that there is a significant increase in the understanding of the finances of the institution by staff and faculty, including greater ownership for financial decisions, and the improved stewardship over those tuition resources being provided by students. While the current year-end financial statements will certainly show improvements in the results, and those financial improvements are projected to continue, it was the attitude, ownership and management changes noted by the visit team which provides a greater sense of confidence in Simpson University's financial future and sustainability. (CFR 3.6)

Changes made in the organization which are driving this improvement include the following, which have all occurred in the time since the 2018 WSCUC special visit:

1. The hiring of a new CFO with significant experience in both private industry and university operations.

2. The hiring of additional personnel in the finance department including an assistant controller.
3. The implementation of budget processes which instilled greater ownership and accountability throughout the organization. This included the use of a modified zero-base budget model and routine budget reviews.
4. A change in external auditors to bring in a firm that was larger and more experienced in auditing universities, who could also provide financial advice to those in leadership.
5. The refinancing of debt to provide a greater predictability of payments and improvement in future cash flows.
6. The reallocation of available funds completed in consultation with personnel to ensure alignment of financial resources with the strategic plan and the accomplishment of the institution's mission.
7. The use of financial information to provide data for program reviews and other analysis.
8. A partnership attitude between the CFO and others across the organization which has provided education, accountability, and transparency around how budgets are determined and monitored.
9. The development of a trigger budget, (a budget which clearly identifies future spending opportunities with improvements in enrollment) which was well understood and communicated across the campus, providing incentive to each member of the

community to better participate in enrollment goals as well as to encourage everyone to be a good steward of expense budgets.

10. As necessary, the use of outside consultants to help address specific gaps in expertise and to provide training to the staff as they were building their own skill sets.

In the area Financial Aid, discussions with their Director of Financial Services indicated that their approach to student aid has been well-thought-out and implemented. Simpson has adjusted their philosophy recently to be more need based in nature, ensuring that those students who cannot afford a college education will be able to do so. This was also evident in our discussions with the enrollment management team, who indicated that they have a process to help students find jobs on campus or locally to help fill any unmet financial need. Simpson has contracted with an outside agency, Credo, to help them structure financial aid packages and to monitor their discount rate. This is done monthly during the enrollment season to ensure that the discount rate is in alignment with budget.

In addition to establishing robust processes to assist students financially, Simpson has taken the approach of giving students their best possible aid package upon acceptance, while still allowing for appeals which typically happen in this environment. Funds are set aside in the annual budget to allow for such appeals. To further assist continuing students financially, Simpson University's approach has been to reserve for this student group the income coming from endowed scholarships as an aid to retention. By using a combination of funded and unfunded resources, Simpson has been able to shape the class they desire while maximizing net tuition revenue and meeting student need.

The team noted during the visit that there was a great spirit of alignment between the finance office, and the areas of financial aid, advancement, and enrollment management. This

has led to improvements in outcomes for these individual departments, a more appropriate alignment of resources and consistency in the implementation of the strategic plan.

To borrow from their strategic plan slogan, Simpson is Rising in its financial strength. The institution's DOE financial responsibility composite score has shown year over year improvements (currently above 2.0), its balance sheet is improving and its attention to budgeting and planning has greatly improved. While there was a change in external auditors, Simpson has continued the positive trend in receiving unqualified opinions on its year-end financial statements. Discussions with the board indicated that they were exceptionally pleased with the personnel changes in the finance department, as well as the improved data accuracy and transparency. As such, they were comfortable in stepping away from an "operating" role necessitated by past leadership challenges and moving back into a "strategic" role as would be expected for any healthy institution.

There appears also to be a new spirit of collaboration and partnership between the finance office and the other departments in the university. As an example of this, in our conversation with the CFO it was noted that he had just identified \$100,000 of excess funds in enrollment management's budget. In a spirit of partnership, the CFO and the Director of Marketing/Dean of Admissions entered into discussions on how to best utilize this newfound money, resulting in an agreement on how to best utilize these funds to advance the mission of the institution and to provide additional contingency for the university. The CFO then remarked that when he had first arrived at Simpson, the budget contingency was approximately \$50,000 and now it had grown to \$400,000.

In one example on how the university is using a modified zero-base budgeting to reallocate resources to support strategic needs, monies were provided to the advancement office to fund

additional salaries and benefits. This has shown to be a success, as the annual fund fundraising target of \$1.6 million had already been achieved. In fact, the fundraising total on a year-to-date basis was \$2.4 million, well in excess of the original budget. (CFR 3.4) In another example of modified zero-based budgeting re-allocations, substantial resources had been made available to the nursing program, which is one of Simpson University's largest programs and one of the more well-regarded programs in the country.

Engaging with outside third parties to fill immediate needs and skill gaps has proven successful throughout the university, including in enrollment. Tony Smarrella is the new Director of Marketing and Dean of Admissions and had originally come to Simpson University as an outside consultant to assist in examining their processes and growing their enrollment. Mr. Smarrella has years of industry enrollment experience, in both traditional undergrad and adult completion areas. Shortly after his arrival, Mr. Smarrella was asked to stay on and assume a leadership position. Under his leadership, the staff has put in place both system and process improvements which allow them to more readily understand the data that they are using to drive enrollment. There appears to be a greater sense of accountability and a significant desire to improve enrollment outcomes for the university. In fact, in the midst of the meeting between the visiting team and the enrollment management team, it was noted that the staff had data at their fingertips which could tell them exactly where enrollment stood as compared to last year and to goal. When asked to quantify the expectations for fall 2021, the team estimated they would see 20% to 30% year over year growth in enrolled students.

From a marketing perspective, it was clear that Simpson had identified the areas of opportunity that they have and were specific in targeting certain geographies, income levels and ethnic groups from which they believe they could be successful in attracting students to Simpson

University. While they are certainly resource constrained, it appeared that they were using the resources available to them in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

It was also noted that the enrollment management personnel care deeply about the mission of the institution and believe strongly in the value of a Simpson education to individual students as well as to the Redding community at large. This was evident in terms of the outreach that the department was doing to attract both the traditional undergrad and adult completion students at local high school and community colleges. With regards to applications, Mr. Smarrella indicated that there had been significant improvement in both the frequency of calls to potential students to answer questions, and in the time it was taking to move from application to acceptance to notification of the student that they could now begin their journey at Simpson University.

*b. Issue 3: Develop & Implement Program Review Process*

The March 4, 2019 Commission Action Letter includes the following issue:

“Develop and implement a systematic program review process for all programs using the WSCUC program review resource guidelines and complete the program review on a select number of undergraduate and graduate programs within two years. In addition, the Assessment Committee should be expanded to include full-time faculty who are appropriately trained. (CFR 2.7, CFR 4.1, CFR 4.3, CFR 4.5)

In the report for the 2018 Special Visit to Simpson University, the visiting team’s review found that the quality of assessment varied by program. Some assessment reports “included little, if any meaningful data and virtually no analysis” and that additional full-time faculty support was needed to provide the necessary oversight to ensure educational effectiveness as well as capacity to conduct annual program assessment and program reviews. The 2018 report noted the

institution had taken some steps to develop their capacity in conducting program review, including bringing on Taskstream to collect and store data. While the institution had planned to revise their nascent process to include guidelines by WSCUC, nothing had yet been put in place. Training and engagement with appropriate stakeholders were also identified as needs critical to the success of this process.

The 2021 Special Visit team reviewed artifacts and conducted interviews to form conclusions regarding progress on stated recommendations from the 2018 report. The most direct pieces of evidence were discussed and presented in the 2021 Report to the WSCUC Special Visit team. These include: program reviews for Nursing (Appendix 14), MA in Teacher Education (Appendix 15) and BA in History (Appendix 16); Program Review Policies and Procedures (Appendix 6) which includes a review cycle timeline for all undergraduate, graduate and non-academic programs; access to the institution's Taskstream software that includes sample reports and curriculum maps (Appendix 19); and sample screenshots from their Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) interface that provides evidence of integration with Taskstream (Appendix 20). In addition, the Simpson University Strategic Plan and the institution's report describe efforts in providing training on new systems and in working to build a culture of assessment. The Special Visit team also had the opportunity to meet with the Assessment Committee, Faculty Policy Committee and other stakeholders to discuss the program review process and related activities.

The team finds that the institution has made significant progress in developing its program review process and capacity for collecting and analyzing relevant data. (CFR 4.1, 4.3) A "revitalized" Assessment Committee, charged with establishing a process for program review was implemented in the spring 2020 with expanded representation to include faculty from all the

schools, the registrar, institutional research, dean of students, director of the Academic Success Center and librarian. (CFR 4.5) A meeting at the site visit with the Assessment Committee revealed a high level of collaboration in developing and implementing a program review process and review cycle timeline. Review of the process by the Special Visit team affirms that it is based on WSCUC guidelines.

The three program reviews submitted with the institutional report are well-written, comprehensive, provide evidence for decision making, and articulate an understanding of best practices in assessment and data-informed improvements. (CFR 2.7) In a meeting with the Special Visit team, the program directors who submitted these reviews enthusiastically described their experience with the program review process, relaying that they are eager to share results across the institution and learn what other programs are doing. They went on to provide examples of how the reviews will help to improve their own programs, such as strengthening PLOs and developing stronger rubrics for signature assignments. The committee plans to use the results of the inaugural implementation to further refine and improve the program review process.

Overall, a “culture of assessment” is growing at the institution. Training in assessment, SLOs and PLOs and how this is facilitated in Canvas and Taskstream has been conducted, an on-demand archive of which is also available as a resource to faculty. A week-long faculty training covering Canvas, online pedagogy, assessment (Taskstream) and other learning technology was conducted in the summer of 2020. Program review policies and other support resources have also been centralized and made available. Program directors with experience using the new program review process noted that they will be training those who will be using the process for the first time, so that they may benefit from their experience. Both the dean of students and librarian

noted they are working on assessment, with an eye toward implementing a full program review in the future. The CFO and COO also discussed their awareness of the program review process and looked forward to data from programs to incorporate into budget, enrollment, and marketing planning. This culture has extended beyond program review and outcomes assessment to also include more scrutinization of data including institutional KPIs, engagement with the strategic plan, and evaluation of financial indicators to make informed decisions. (CFR 4.5)

While the institution has made great strides in building a culture of assessment and in bolstering their capacity to conduct assessment and program review, there is still a great amount of work to be done in using data to drive continuous improvements in programs, learning outcomes and budget allocation decisions. (CFR 4.1, 4.3) The institution has acknowledged that due to organizational changes and the pandemic, they have had challenges in engaging faculty around assessment and program view. The program reviews submitted with the institution's self-study highlight these challenges, but also provide information that will help to pave a way forward. For example, the History program review discusses the difficulty in assessing outcomes based on the availability and consistency of data but indicated that new technology recently put in place would benefit this process in the future. Software integration between their LMS (Canvas, fully implemented in the fall of 2020) with their assessment system (Taskstream) promises to offer a more streamlined, consistent, and systemic method of assessing CLOs. In addition to effective utilization of technology, continuing to provide adequate support and training to faculty and staff will be critical in ensuring assessment practices that lead to continuous improvement.

- c. *Issue 4: Ensure sufficient appropriately trained faculty to cover all active programs, particularly adult and graduate programs*

Based on the recommendation from the fall 2018 Special Visit, the institution made decisive movement in dealing with this recommendation. The report references improvements in faculty training, reallocation of administrative FTEs to show a truer picture, redistribution of faculty to programs with substantial growth, hiring of additional full-time (FT) faculty with terminal degrees, and hiring faculty with one-year contracts. (CFR 3.1)

The previous practice for Simpson was to lump the teaching loads for all individuals with faculty status into their university-wide faculty FTEs. In the last two years, administration looked closely at the faculty FTE counts within each program in order to do a more detailed financial analysis. Administration, in collaboration with academic program directors, also correlated faculty FTEs with student enrollments, and redistributed faculty lines, moving them from programs with dwindling enrollment to more robust growth programs. In conversations during the Special Visit, the Provost indicates faculty are now distributed in the right places, and they have a clearer picture of the quality and quantity of faculty. Additionally, in the adult programs, administration have designated faculty as the “Lead Faculty,” giving them oversight responsibilities for the programs to ensure quality improvements. (Appendix 2)

Furthermore, this decisive action has led to many changes to the faculty body that, to all accounts has caused some distress. The number of faculty fluctuated from the closure of three programs, retirements, resignations, redistributions, and hiring of faculty on one-year contracts. The net result is that almost half the faculty have been replaced to reach the goal of increasing faculty numbers with terminal degrees; all these changes seemed to point to an instability of the faculty body. This fluid situation made it challenging for the visiting team to determine the

current status of full-time faculty with terminal degrees. In the institutional report, page 5, it says the number of full-time faculty with terminal degrees increased to from 74% to 78% (eighteen out of twenty-three), while in Appendix 12b, there are 30 Faculty listed, 10 with an MS/MA degree and 20 with doctoral level degrees. There are three positions in Psychology or Clinical Psychology that are vacant as there was a large turnover in this department. An active recruitment campaign to fill these positions is underway. Follow up conversations with the Simpson administrative team provided more clarity on the faculty staffing picture that showed a continuing positive trend of faculty with terminal degrees to around 80% in the fall of 2020. The provost indicated, if all the current searches for FT faculty were to conclude successfully, Simpson would have 34 FT *teaching* faculty and be close to 85% with terminal degrees. While in the end these are positive trends, given these conditions over the past few years that represent a significant turnover of about half of their FT faculty, the special visit team recommends undertaking measures to stabilize the faculty body in order to promote a healthy faculty culture to sustain Simpson into the future. (CFR 3.1)

When analyzing faculty preparation by level of the programs, there are 17 undergraduate programs (UG) and 7 graduate programs (Appendix 12b). From the list, it appears 14 UG program directors have doctoral degrees, or almost-as the program director for Nursing is a PhD candidate with a projected June 2021 graduation date. Of the three remaining UG program director positions, the program directors have MA/MS degrees; but noteworthy, is that some of these three are in doctoral programs. In the Degree Completion programs, while the program director does not have a terminal degree, the disciplinary lead faculty for each of the completion programs do have terminal degrees. There are seven graduate programs; all have program

directors with terminal degrees except for one: the program director for the MA Education program (I. Lopez) has a MA degree.

The team verified graduate degree requirements are found online in the 2020-2021 catalog, starting on page 62-67 and then general graduation information included in each program of study. The university also has forms to fill out during the senior year to ensure all graduation requirements are met. The institutional report did not discuss this issue, but looking at the information online, the instructions and forms are clear to understand and comply. (CFR 2.2b)

### *SECTION III – INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC*

The Special Visit team cannot complete this report without mentioning the untimeliness and additional stress experienced by the institution with the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic started just after one year of efforts to “turn things around” and improve their financial base, increase enrollment, create a unified cohesive program review plan, and find qualified, well prepared faculty within a two-year span before the next WSCUC special visit. In discussions with the leaders, staff, and faculty, the Special Visit team found they responded quickly to the March 2020 California state directive in shutting down face to face classes and transitioned rapidly to online instruction. They continued to grow the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CELT) and hired a new director who created training videos and worked closely with the key administrative person in charge of Special Projects for Simpson University to help faculty rapidly transition to online learning. Prior to the pandemic, the institution had begun the process of switching to a more mature, robust Learning Management System (LMS), from Moodle to Canvas, when the campus had to offer all courses online. They created standards for online classes for the faculty and established a quality control aspect where directors of

departments or programs would check course design or follow up on concerns. They also continued to move forward with their efforts around program review.

Despite the pandemic and a lack of students on campus, they have been able to hold very successful events for prospective students which appear to have a high rate of return, many requesting more information or completing an application to the institution. They took full advantage of the governmental relief CARES ACT 1, 2, and 3 to support the students and have completed introductory steps to apply for Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation to support students of Hispanic heritage with additional grant monies. There was some discrepancy between the data provided in the institutional report regarding the percentage of Hispanic students and what we were told verbally. According to Appendix 1 (KI\_Rep\_0121), the percentage of Hispanics in the student population was 16% in 2018 whereas the team was told this figure was 22% for 2018. While the team could not verify their verbal report, the fact that they had completed the application for HSI designation (requires 25% Hispanic student FTE) would suggest that Simpson has made significant progress in this area since 2018.

In summary, the culture displays less negativity, more collaboration, and despite the pandemic, they continued to make bold changes for the good of the institution. When asked, the president indicated they are in the stabilizing phase of the Simpson Rising Strategic plan and are working diligently on issues identified from the last WSCUC Special Visit team.

#### *SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW*

##### *a. Commendations*

The team commends Simpson University for:

1. Establishing clear and effective channels of communication for keeping the entire community informed and engaged with the important work of the university.
2. Creating a university-wide culture that owned and used the Simpson Rising strategic plan to guide tactics and inform its daily work and decisions.
3. Significantly increasing the capacity of several key areas of support and operations through successful hiring and/or training of qualified leaders and teams.
4. Making a significant financial turn-around by creating an environment of greater institutional understanding and ownership of financial resources and priorities, increased financial stewardship, and alignment of resources consistent with the strategic plan.
5. Embracing a culture of data-informed decision-making and establishing a growing infrastructure for the development and implementation of strategic university assessment processes including program review.
6. Proactively engaging with the external community through intentional outreach to build mutually beneficial partnerships that strengthens both the institution, the City of Redding, and surrounding areas.

*b. Recommendations*

The team recommends that Simpson University:

1. In the context of ongoing change, intentionally foster a stable and inviting employment culture that supports the mission of the university. (CFR 3.1)
2. Identify metrics and establish best practices in recruiting and hiring processes to ensure a sufficient number of qualified faculty to successfully deliver current and future programs. (CFR 1.2, 3.2, 3.7)

3. Build on the developing process of regular and systematic program reviews, using the results to drive continuous improvements in programs, learning outcomes and budget allocation decisions. (CFR 4.1, 4.3)

*c. Conclusions*

The Special Visit team evaluated the institution's response to three issues broken into four areas specified in the March 2019 Commission Action Letter. These include their implementation and use of a strategic plan to guide decisions, strengthening their financial position, developing, and implementing a program review process, and ensuring sufficient and appropriately trained faculty to cover all active programs. Overall, the team found that the institution has demonstrated a high level of engagement around these issues and have taken the recommendations of the last Special Visit to heart.

The above commendations illustrate the institution's commitment and dedication to shifting their culture to one that supports positive change. The fact that this has occurred during a pandemic further demonstrates this commitment, as well as their ability to proactively confront challenge. These qualities will serve the institution well as it addresses the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.