

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

To La Sierra University
April 11-13, 2018

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

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Accreditation History (CFR 1.1)

Founded as La Sierra Academy in 1922, La Sierra University is self-described as a liberal arts post-secondary institution that is sponsored and maintained by the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Integral to its founding by the Southeastern California Conference, one of the regional governing bodies of the Seventh-day Adventist church, was a gift of 300 acres of land in an unincorporated area of Riverside County. The land was once a part of a large Mexican land grant named Rancho La Sierra, giving La Sierra its current name.

In 1939, it became La Sierra College, and was initially accredited as a four-year liberal arts college by WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) in April 1956. In 1967, La Sierra College merged with Loma Linda University and took the Loma Linda name. This merger helped provide access to a liberal arts education for students seeking admission to Loma Linda University health professions programs.

La Sierra University and Loma Linda University separated in 1990. Four schools (The College of Arts and Sciences; the Schools of Education, Business, and Religion) and the Division of Continuing Studies became La Sierra University. This separation allowed the faculty of La Sierra to rethink their mission and to affirm their commitment to being a liberal arts university.

Today, ninety-six years after its beginning, La Sierra University is fully committed to its heritage as a Seventh-day Adventist institution and its mission to provide an excellent liberal arts education for approximately 2,400 students.

The institution is clear in stating its mission, especially as it relates to its religious roots. (CFR 1.1) Faculty, staff, students and trustees are aligned with the purpose of serving La Sierra University's community and use service learning and volunteer activities to make their commitment clear. The institution has a clear and readily available statement of its religious commitments (through its web site), and is specific and transparent about its commitment to academic freedom. (CFR 1.2)

La Sierra's last reaffirmation of WSCUC accreditation followed the visit in 2010, and resulted in an eight-year term of accreditation. Since that time, two special visits were conducted, one in April 2011 and one in October 2013. The special visits were concerned with the independence of the Board of Trustees and issues related to academic freedom and the teaching of evolution. As a result of the special visits, the Commission removed its Notice of Concern in its letter of March 7, 2014 and voted to continue with an Interim Report in November 2014.

After considering La Sierra's Interim Report, submitted on November 1, 2014, WSCUC's Interim Report Committee examined the five areas of:

1. Strategic Planning
2. Assessment
3. Student Success
4. Institutional Research and Information Technology, and
5. Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom.

The committee acted on three items, including one that has special relevance to the reaffirmation process, namely the committee “...***Request that progress on the five topics addressed in this letter be included in the institutional report for the Offsite Review (OSR) in***

fall 2017 and Accreditation Visit in Spring 2018.” (Letter of February 6, 2015, Maloney to Wisbey, emphasis added.)

The Reaffirmation Review Team considered that request germane to its review, and focused attention on the progress being made in the five topic areas specified in the Interim Report.

B. Description of Team’s Review Process

The team began its review process in advance of the Offsite Review (OSR) on November 28-29, 2017, by studying the institutional report and associated evidence, and completing WSCUC worksheets that invited examination of the La Sierra University institutional report under the WSCUC standards and components. During the OSR, the team prepared lines of inquiry (areas for further exploration at the time of the visit) and identified commendations based upon the institutional report. The OSR included a 20-minute video conference call with La Sierra University administrators in which the team shared the areas that would be further explored during the Accreditation Visit (AV) on April 10-13, 2018. The lines of inquiry were provided to La Sierra University, and the institution subsequently submitted additional information requested in that document.

Prior to the AV, the team reviewed the additional materials and in a pre-AV conference call, discussed the materials, and determined a plan for conducting the AV. The team considered a preliminary visit schedule drawn up by the La Sierra University Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) with respect to individuals and groups with whom the team wished to meet. A final visit schedule was prepared and sent to the team prior to the actual visit.

The AV began with a team executive planning session on Tuesday, April 10, 2018 in which the team discussed the visit process, including the AV deliverables, decision options

available and WSCUC's policies on public disclosure. The team reviewed the final visit schedule, considered the areas of inquiry and identified specific questions to be pursued during each group or individual meeting.

The on-campus AV began on Wednesday, April 11, 2018 with a meeting with the president, followed by a session with the La Sierra University WSCUC Steering Committee. These two meetings helped set the context for the visit, including the challenges and opportunities at La Sierra University. Team members met with the CFO, provost, director of institutional research, vice president for integrated communications & marketing, faculty leaders of assessment, and strategic planning committee members throughout the day. The second day began with a series of meetings with members of the faculty senate, undergraduate and graduate council members, and the vice presidents of institutional advancement and enrollment services. The team held open forums for students and faculty. The final meeting of the day was with trustees, the majority of whom were present either in the room or by telephone.

In meeting with various constituencies and individuals, the team learned more about the institution, the organizational structure, its values, the faculty, staff, and students. Sessions were focused on the original lines of inquiry and additional questions developed by the team. Generally two team members were present for meetings with La Sierra University representatives, with one member of the team assigned to lead the discussion for each session. A confidential email account was established to allow for greater participation from the campus community, and the team saw evidence that the email account was established and communicated to campus personnel and students by La Sierra University. The account was monitored by the assistant chair throughout the visit: no emails were received.

The visit ended on Friday, April 13, 2018 with a private meeting between the team chair and president, followed by a public exit meeting in which the final commendations and recommendations were presented. Every session was productive and positive, and the team was very impressed by the level of commitment of all with whom team members spoke.

Team members composed sections of the report based on the initial review of the institutional report, lines of inquiry, interviews, meetings with groups, and new information from the AV. Team members reviewed the entire report for accuracy and clarity and to assure compliance with WSCUC expectations, satisfactory representation of team findings, and respect for La Sierra University's thorough self-examination and investment in the accreditation review process.

C. Institution's Reaccreditation Report and Update: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence (CFR1.8)

The institutional report is organized around WSCUC's guidelines, including a specific response in the introduction to the issues raised by the Interim Report Committee. The organizational structure and writing of the report is clear, although the review team found the report lacking in clear and linked reference to the CFRs.

The condition of the institution is adequately represented by the institutional report, and is based on extensive consultation with faculty and staff. However, there appeared to be limited involvement with students and little apparent involvement by recent alumni. Trustee involvement appears to have been limited to receiving copies of the report. (CFR 4.5)

The institution addresses the tough questions and the need for critical self-analysis. Goals are identified, but specific, numerical targets for accomplishing the goals are scarce. In general,

the conclusions of the institutional report align with data presented. However, there appears to be more reliance on consensus opinions than on rigorous data analysis, especially in linking strategic issues such as student recruitment plans, market demand and alumni outcomes.

Importantly, the self-review has resulted in the formation of much more comprehensive and inclusive planning structures than reported in earlier years. The linking of these structures to specific institutional outcomes will not be known until these processes have been operational for several academic years, and only if close and continued attention is paid to numerical goal setting and rigorous assessment.

The team's issues and questions were responded to with appropriately prompt attention during the OSR and AV processes.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

COMPONENT 1 Response to Previous Commission Actions

The institutional report contains a specific section devoted to the five major topics that have been the focus of reviews from the last reaffirmation review in 2010, and subsequent Special Visits. (References in this section to “WASC Concerns” are drawn from the February 6, 2015 letter of WSCUC Staff Liaison Maloney to La Sierra University President Wisbey.)

Topic 1: Strategic Planning (CFR 3.4, 3.7, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7)

Nature of WASC Concern (A): “...more work needs to be done to evidence the alignment of strategic planning with other planning functions including financial, academic, assessment, student life, enrollment, technology and facilities planning.”

- The university community is commended on its efforts and commitment to establish a comprehensive and integrated planning process. Of particular note is the inclusive nature of membership on key committees.
- The addition of an Academic Master Planning Taskforce, with strong faculty involvement, is an important and appropriate addition to the planning structures. So, too, is the creation of a Strategic Enrollment Planning Council.
- The first-listed strategy of Goal 1 in La Sierra University’s Strategic Plan is to “Develop an efficient and effective Adult Degree Completion program through Online Learning to enable adults to complete their degrees for personal and financial advantage.” During the visit the team learned that an online Liberal Studies degree as an adult degree completion program received approval by the Undergraduate Academic Council after the self-study had been written. At present, the only degree program that appears to show a commitment to distance education lies in the School of Education at the graduate level (see Appendix B). (WSCUC “Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning)”, 1(a), (b), (c), (d), 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e).)
- The institution has created a complex and inclusive set of deliberative bodies; however, there is a dearth of specific numeric goals, timetables and champions for strategic priorities.
- As a result, processes that need to be aligned are still in active development, and it can reasonably be expected that several budget cycles will need to be worked through before alignment is complete

Nature of WASC Concern (B): The previous reaffirmation panel urged La Sierra University to separate the audit sub-committee from the university’s finance committee.

- The audit subcommittee has not been separated from the university’s finance committee as a free standing committee in its own right. Given the national concern for board involvement in personnel and Title IX issues, among others, this continues to be an area in which La Sierra University has not accepted the WSCUC recommendation (see Commission Action Letter dated February 2015), nor provided an adequate rationale for not doing so.

(See Recommendation 3a)

Topic 2: Assessment (CFR 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 2.10, 4.6, 4.7)

Nature of WASC Concern: La Sierra University should “...provide evidence of the alignment between assessment and program review results and the university’s budgeting and planning efforts.”

- The university is commended on its commitment to assessment, having reached 100% of academic units and service areas submitting annual Assessment Reports in 2016-17.
- Progress toward a genuine culture of evidence-based assessment leading directly, and in a continuous feedback loop, to resource allocation decisions is not yet a deeply entrenched part of the culture of improvement.
- Only two academic departments per year appear to be undergoing program review over the last seven years. This is not an effective pace.

La Sierra University has expended much institutional energy in recent years meeting internal challenges to academic freedom and science education, challenges that the institution has largely met. In the interim, the financial futures of small to mid-size private universities across the nation have continued to deteriorate, as evidenced by the negative national

assessments by the major bond agencies, and by the quickening pace of small college closures. The president, executive team, faculty, staff and board need to not only keep up the current high activity level in planning, but also step up the pace. Time is of the essence, even for an apparently idyllic campus such as La Sierra's.

Recommendation 1. The team recommends that the board engage vigorously and appropriately in planning and ensuring financial sustainability. Time will be of the essence in implementing new plans for enrollment and program developments. (CFR 3.4, 3.7, 3.9)

Topic 3: Student Success (CFR 1.2, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 4.1, 4.7)

Nature of WASC Concern: La Sierra University should "...clarify the goals and guiding principles of the Student Retention Task Force, explain the criteria used to determine when retention and graduation rates are "good enough", and provide evidence to illustrate the alignment between improvement efforts and student success results."

- La Sierra University is committed to student success, and its efforts have resulted in considerable improvements in retention rates in recent years.
- Amalgamation of student service departments is credited with aiding the retention gains, but few data are provided to show the specific link between assessment, structural change and student outcomes.
- La Sierra University's student job placement post-graduation is a topic that will become increasingly important as La Sierra University adapts to a new student market (more Hispanic, more local, more career focused, and less campus-based in their housing choices). Employment outcomes data provided to prospective and current students should be reviewed in order to meet peer standards.

- La Sierra University has made a number of productive changes in academic advising, especially for new students, and is focusing on at-risk student identification and support.

Topic 4: Institutional Research and Information Technology (CFR 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 4.7)

Nature of WASC Concern: “Institutional research needs to be upgraded from basic reporting to a core function of the institution.”

- La Sierra University has made good progress on recognizing the importance of institutional research as the basis for establishing a more strategic approach to analysis and planning.
- The lack of a committed, permanent specialist in institutional research has been problematic, and the La Sierra University Fact Book, for example, changed from a rudimentary, but extensive, data report in 2016 to minimal in 2017. The data systems and analytical products will need to become more sophisticated to support a strategic focus.

Topic 5: Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom (CFR 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2a, 3.7)

Nature of WASC Concern: The Commission asks that the following matters noted by the team be given close attention prior to the next WSCUC interaction:

“The university should take steps to increase clarity regarding lines of authority and interactions among the constituency, board of trustees, administration and faculty in the shared governance model that *emerges through the implementation of and transition under its new bylaws, and ensure that this effort continues.*” (Emphasis added.)

WSCUC policy allows for the existence of more than one board, as at La Sierra University, but certain parameters and due process requirements are stipulated in WSCUC’s “Governing Board

Policy,” (GBP) and the associated statements “Governing Board Policy Implementation Guide” (GBPIG) and “Related Entities Policy” (REP).

The team examined several issues.

- **Reserve Powers:** The reserve powers enumerated in the University Bylaws are generally consistent with the WSCUC policies on governance. However, a question may be asked about the independence of a Board that does not control its own bylaws. WSCUC guidelines (“Governing Board Policy Implementation Guidelines,” p. 8) state that “...where a power is reserved, it is always important for the organizational documents to ensure that the governing board will make the initial decision, reserving to the related entity (parent organization) only the power of final approval.”

While Article 5, Section 5.7 of the La Sierra University Bylaws calls for the formation of a board “Articles and Bylaws Committee,” and for a process for the board of trustees to make a case to the Constituent Assembly for bylaw changes, the language of Article 10 of the University Bylaws (coupled with the language of Article 5, Section 5.2 – “...to adopt, amend, or repeal the Bylaws as set forth in Article Ten hereof”) does not make a documentary provision for the “initial decision” to emanate from the board of trustees. Thus, while Article 5 allows for board input, Article 10 of the University Bylaws does not require it.

(ARTICLE TEN: Amendments “These Bylaws may be amended by an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the constituent members present and voting at a regular or special meeting of the Constituent Membership when the proposed amendment does not conflict with federal or state laws or with the Articles of Incorporation.”)

- **Independent Trustees:** The board and all its standing committees conform to the majority of independent trustee policy (WSCUC) requirement.
- **Conflict of Interest Policy:** The current La Sierra University Board Policy is designed to cover financial and competitor issues. It does not specifically address the issue of how trustees appointed ex officio by a related entity might have a conflict between the interests of their employer (a Related Entity) and the university itself.
- **Application of Conflict of Interest Policy:** La Sierra University provided signed Conflict of Interest forms for all current trustees.
- **Board and Management Responsibilities:** The University Bylaws (Section 7.2) provide that "...The president shall be the chief executive officer of the University and shall be responsible for the general direction of all of its operating units. In addition, the bylaws (Section 7.2 (b)) provide that the President shall:
 - "...appoint, promote, direct, discipline, reassign, and discontinue vice presidents (*other than the vice president for financial administration*)."
 - Somewhat differently, the institutional report for reaffirmation, consistent with the University Bylaws in Section 6.7 (c), states that, "...These new Bylaws expanded the presidential powers such that the Board only hires the **president, provost, and chief financial officer**."
 - The designation of a Chief Executive Officer who may not have direct management, hiring and firing control over his principal deputies raises a question related to the WSCUC requirement that, "The governing board must... (8) Delegate day-to-day management of the institution to the chief executive officer." (Governing Board Policy). (CFR 3.6, 3.8 and 3.9)

Recommendation 3: The team recommends two further changes at the trustee level (CFR 3.6, 3.7, 3.9):

b) invest the power to make the initial recommendation for changes to the Board of Trustees' bylaws solely to the Board of Trustees, and

c) delegate sole responsibility for the executive staff, including Provost and CFO, to the President, according to normal practice in higher education.

COMPONENT 2 Review under the Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements

A. Review under the WSCUC Standards

Standard 1 Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

La Sierra University's sense of mission and purpose are well established, and it is broadly supported by university stakeholders. (CFR 1.1) Educational objectives and learning outcomes are becoming more widely shared as the culture of assessment begins to support a more strategic and analytical focus for program review and achievement. (CFR 1.2)

La Sierra University has a clearly stated policy on academic freedom that is prominent on the website, and published in both the Faculty and Student Handbooks. The university's commitment to academic freedom was a focus of previous Special Visits, and the team reports from those visits found evidence of major improvement. The institution states that it does not experience interference in substantive decision or educational functions by external bodies. It should be noted that La Sierra University's board of trustees does not control its bylaws, and the continued maintenance of due process procedures is therefore solely dependent upon the goodwill of administrators and trustees. (CFR 1.3, 1.5)

La Sierra University's student diversity has increased rapidly in recent years as it appears to be transitioning to a majority Hispanic institution. The institution has appointed a Special Assistant to the President for Diversity and Inclusion and has recently reinvigorated its Diversity Committee. La Sierra University notes that clarification of the Diversity Committee's role is needed and communication of its activities needs to be more widespread. This group is working with the Division of General Education to enhance diversity in hiring plans and faculty awareness. In 2016, La Sierra University received a Title V grant to strengthen its role as a Hispanic serving institution, and much remains to be done with respect to grant objectives. (CFR 1.4)

La Sierra University's Student Handbook outlines clear policies and procedures for managing student grievances. The university shows timely responses to complaints and grievances, as evidenced through interviews with students, faculty and staff, and through examination of records. (CFR 1.7) The university truthfully represents its academic programs, goals and services. (CFR 1.6)

The institution has shown honest and open communications with the Commission and has conducted a thorough and openly candid self-study. La Sierra University has abided by Commission policies, but as indicated above, it has not yet accepted a suggested trustee committee change with respect to forming a free-standing audit committee. (CFR 1.8)

Standard 2 Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions

La Sierra University has set appropriate standards of performance for the undergraduate and graduate degrees it offers. Several of its academic programs are accredited or approved by

professional organizations and are regularly reviewed to ensure that they meet professional standards. (CFR 1.1, 1.2)

La Sierra University's University Studies Program (US) of general education is guided by the strong mission of the institution, with learning outcomes that are driven by the institutional outcomes. The US program, with its cross-disciplinary approach and its strong service learning component, is integrated throughout the curriculum. (CFR 2.2a, 2.3) The documents the team reviewed did not provide student learning outcomes for all graduate programs. During the visit, the team was assured that all graduate programs have student learning outcomes, which are published in the University Bulletin. The team found, however, that several graduate programs in the School of Education, for example, do not have specific outcomes listed in the Bulletin; instead, learning expectations are embedded in a narrative on program objectives. La Sierra University should examine its inventory of learning objectives to ensure clarity of expectations and the use of appropriate assessment tools. The team recognizes that many of the graduate programs (education, theology, social work, music and business) are regularly reviewed by professional accreditors and have been found to meet the standards of the profession. (CFR 2.2b, 2.3)

Learning outcomes have been developed by faculty; the institutional outcomes are mission-driven and widely shared. As noted above, however, learning outcomes for some programs and courses are not complete or are written in such a way that does not allow measurable, actionable results. (For samples of learning outcomes, see institutional report Appendix A4-02.) (CFR 2.3, 2.4)

La Sierra University's assessment processes have improved over the years and are starting to become part of the culture of the institution. It is less clear how assessment results of

student learning are used, although there are examples in psychology and information literacy that indicate results are being used to improve learning effectiveness. Service learning experiences are assessed by external partners, faculty, and students to ensure that experiences are opportunities for students to apply what they have learned. (CFR 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6)

Annual assessments of program performance are carried out by departments and co-curricular programs, and all relevant units submitted reports in 2015-16 and again in 2016-17. A more comprehensive program review, which includes an analysis of student learning, is scheduled to occur on a 7-year cycle. The team notes that reviews of a significant number of programs are not current, although documents refer to a systematic process. (CFR 2.7, 2.11)

La Sierra University indicates that it has an expectation for research, scholarship and creative activities. Expectations are more specifically addressed in the Faculty Handbook. Additionally, in interviews with faculty the team learned that departments can publish an outline of scholarly expectations that align with their professional areas. A Distinguished Scholarship Award recognizes faculty work and promotes the connections among scholarship, teaching, and service. (CFR 2.8, 2.9)

La Sierra University disaggregates enrollment, graduation rates and other outcomes by gender, race/ethnicity as evidenced by an extensive Fact Book in 2016 (significantly reduced in 2017). However, the self-study does not describe a great deal of analysis or describe steps taken on the basis of such analyses. (CFR 2.10)

La Sierra University's admissions requirements are disclosed in the Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins. The requirements are appropriate for a liberal arts institution. The materials La Sierra University makes available on the web are sufficient for prospective students to make an informed decision about whether or not La Sierra University is a good fit for them. Academic

advising of undergraduates has recently been combined with the Career Center to become the Office of Advising and Career Success. This office, staffed largely by graduates of La Sierra University's programs, advises students throughout their time at La Sierra University. (CFR 2.12, 2.13, 2.14)

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

The institution has a sufficient number of qualified faculty and staff to offer its academic programs. According to the 2017-18 Fact Book, there are 117 tenure-track/tenured faculty; nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of these faculty hold a PhD with the remaining having a master's degree. The self-study refers to a staffing plan, but faculty and staff recruitment, workload, and evaluation practices are not addressed in the self-study or appendices. (CFR 3.1, 3.2) The self-study acknowledges that more attention to faculty and staff development would be welcome. As part of the Title V grant, La Sierra University contracted with AVID to conduct several faculty workshops on teaching techniques, and the Provost's Office sponsors a monthly lunch meeting which focuses on faculty development in research and teaching. (CFR 3.3). Additionally, the Provost's Office conducts a year-long new faculty orientation that introduces newly hired full time faculty to information about rank and tenure requirements, among other topics.

La Sierra University has received unmodified audit opinions in each of the three years through June 2016, realized net increases in unrestricted net assets and shown positive operating cash flows. La Sierra University is tuition dependent with 75% of revenues sourced from student tuition, net of aid, and auxiliary enterprises.

As a tuition-driven institution, a stable or growing enrollment is important. La Sierra University has a current enrollment of 2400 students (by headcount) and has provided documentation articulating an aspirational goal of 3,500 students by 2022. The institutional report does not provide the strategic plans for how this enrollment growth will be achieved, in a time when nationwide high school graduates are projected to decline through at least 2027. Additionally, La Sierra University acknowledges the need to diversify revenue streams but has not provided a specific plan describing how this will be achieved. (CFR 3.4)

La Sierra University appears to have the personnel and resources to adequately support its academic and co-curricular programs. Library resources in terms of qualified staff, information databases, and physical space are in place to support its academic programs. (CFR 3.5)

The university has a full-time President and CFO and a leadership team that supports the university's mission with integrity. The roles and responsibilities of both the President and CFO are described in the Faculty Handbook. There are a number of leadership committees consisting of faculty and administrators, but their charges and authority, and the flow of decision making are not clear from the self-study. (CFR 3.6, 3.7, 3.8)

La Sierra University modified its bylaws after the 2013 Special Visit report to enhance the independence of the board of trustees. However, the Constituent Membership still has authority to amend and repeal the bylaws, dispose of all La Sierra University assets, and to dissolve the University. Additionally, while the board has established an Audit Subcommittee of the Finance Committee (addressing a suggestion articulated in the Commission's action letter of 2015), best practices call for an Audit Committee that is independent of the Finance Committee. (CFR 3.9)

La Sierra University modified its planning framework after the 2013 review to provide a stronger connection between academic planning and institutional budget priorities. The current framework includes a greater role for academic leadership, especially the Faculty Senate, but the authority, decision making, and accountability processes within this framework need to be clarified. (CFR 3.10)

Standard 4 Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

Quality assurance programs at La Sierra University are in a developing stage. The institution implemented a campus-wide assessment program in 2009-2010, but cohesive, consistent implementation of review, analysis, and action on the results of the data are not apparent. There are indications that several departments are utilizing available data to improve the quality of student experience and learning. The procedure for the proposal of new programs now requires feasibility data to link proposals to external and internal needs. (CFR 4.1, 4.4)

The institution's "new" data gathering and analysis process, implemented in 2009-2010, was disrupted by an extended search for a new director of institutional research (IR). This position was filled in June 2017. While all departments appear to be participating in the annual reporting process, the more comprehensive program reviews appear to have suffered. Without a director of IR, limited information has been available to the campus community in programmatic review, planning, and decision making. As a result, not all programs have undergone a recent review. Throughout the institutional report, references are made to this complication and plans for more evidence-based analysis, planning, and decision making are to be incorporated in the future. The institution speaks to its commitment to assessment and evidenced-based analysis and

decision-making; it will be important for the institution to continue to develop and measure progress in building a culture of evidence that supports student learning. (CFR 4.2, 4.3, 4.5)

The institution has strengthened the processes designed to engage and connect its multiple constituencies in planning processes. For example, the university has established a connection between the academic master plan and the strategic plan, with participation from multiple constituencies in the development and execution of both. The team notes that the language of the academic master plan may not provide for measurable results or specific timelines, which may hinder the effectiveness of this arrangement. The Strategic Planning Committee is focused on overseeing and assessing implementation of strategic goals, which indicates that a cross section of the campus community is reviewing how things are done. The team did not find evidence of changes made as a result of this process either in the institutional report or during the visit. (CFR 4.6)

There has been an important shift at La Sierra University in the demographics of its incoming students, with a significant portion now coming from “regional public schools... among the lowest achieving in the nation” and a growing population of Hispanic students. The institution demonstrates its awareness of this change and has secured a \$2.6 million Title V grant to assist with development of appropriate programs and resources. While comprehensive implementation of plans do not appear to be in place as of yet, La Sierra University has contracted with AVID Higher Education to assist with the development of techniques especially for first-generation and at-risk students in developing good learning practices. (CFR 4.7)

B. Compliance with Federal Requirements (*see also Team Report Appendices*)

1-Credit Hour and Program Length

La Sierra University's policy on Credit Hour

and Program Length is found in the Faculty Handbook, as well as in the Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins. The Undergraduate Academic Council reviews, manages and reviews curriculum and credit hour compliance. The Team reviewed syllabi of traditional and non-traditional courses (practica, internships, seminars, etc.) and found compliance with credit hour and program length policies.

2-Marketing and Recruitment Review

La Sierra University's admissions requirements are disclosed on pages 27-31 of the Undergraduate Bulletin and pages 23-26 of the Graduate Bulletin. The requirements are appropriate for the type of institution. The materials La Sierra University makes available on the web are sufficient for prospective students to make an informed decision on whether or not La Sierra University is a good fit for them.

3-Student Complaints

La Sierra University's complaint policy and procedure are disclosed in the consumer information section of the school's website at <https://lasierra.edu/consumer-financial-aid/student-complaint-process/>. The process is clearly described and the ability to file a grievance readily available. La Sierra University has a formal process for responding to complaints. Records of complaints and responses are maintained by the responding departments, e.g., Provost for complaints against faculty and Student Life for complaints regarding students.

4-Transfer Policy

La Sierra University has transfer of credit policies that are publicly disclosed and include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI)

The institution's IEEI displays the current condition of its program assessment processes. While not all programs are assessed as regularly as the team would deem optimal and the pace of progress toward complete and regular assessment of all programs is slow, progress is being made. The institution is encouraged to modify its new 7-Year Program Review Schedule in order to bring all program reviews current as quickly as possible. The lack of fully staffed institutional research and analytical services may have hindered refining the IEEI, and the institution is encouraged to continue taking appropriate steps to build this core functionality.

Specific commentary on the IEEI may be found in the team's report under Components 3, 4, 5 and 6.

COMPONENT 3 Degree programs: Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees (CFR 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.3)

Meaning of a La Sierra University degree: La Sierra University's mission is to seek truth; to know God, ourselves, and the world; and to serve others. La Sierra University's institutional learning outcomes are consistent with the mission in the context of Seventh-day Adventist Christian beliefs. La Sierra University faculty, through its decision-making bodies, developed seven institutional outcomes, which were approved by the Faculty Senate in 2015. (CFR 2.4)

In addition to demonstrating discipline-specific knowledge and skills, graduates of La Sierra University's undergraduate programs are expected to demonstrate outcomes that prepare them for work, citizenship and life-long learning. (CFR 1.2, 2.2a) The seven institutional

learning outcomes include core competencies (acquisition, critical evaluation and synthesis of information; effective communication); appreciation and understanding of differences; and acting in ethical and socially-responsible ways. Somewhat more unique to La Sierra University, graduates are expected to demonstrate knowledge about Seventh-day Adventist heritage, culture and values; and to reflect on their spiritual lives and development.

Undergraduate Outcomes: All undergraduate degrees (BA, BS, BFA, BM, BSW) are built on a core of general education courses that supports and reinforces the university's learning outcomes. (CFR 2.2a) Referred to as University Studies (US), the general education program consists of a minimum of 72 quarter units arranged in three parts spanning the entire undergraduate experience:

- Foundational studies (20-33 units), that correspond to core competencies of accreditation;
- Theme courses in four different areas (48 units)—with a focus on interdisciplinary approaches; and
- Senior seminar (4 units).

In addition, a minimum of three service learning courses reinforce education in the service of others. The six US learning outcomes are aligned with the institutional outcomes.

Program outcomes are listed by departmental program in the university's Undergraduate Bulletin and appear on sample course syllabi reviewed by the team. (CFR 2.3) Learning outcomes have been developed by faculty at the departmental level. (CFR 2.4)

Graduate Outcomes: La Sierra University offers 20 graduate programs including master's level degrees, EDDs in several focus areas, and a PhD in Leadership. Graduate learning outcomes are aligned with La Sierra University's institutional outcomes and emphasize competencies in the

context of professional disciplines. Several of the graduate programs have outcomes that are impacted by professional accreditation. (CFR 2.2b) Student outcomes are listed in the Graduate Bulletin and on sample course syllabi reviewed by the Team.

Monitoring quality and integrity of Degrees: Departments prepare annual assessment reports and are scheduled to undergo a comprehensive program review every seven years. (CFR 2.6, 2.7) If a program review results in a change that impacts departments in other schools/colleges, the changes are sent to the university-wide Undergraduate or Graduate Council. Although La Sierra University has a clear paper policy and practice for gathering, analyzing and interpreting information relevant to monitoring quality of programs, the described process appears relatively new at La Sierra University. Thus, the analysis of data, reflection on its meaning, and its use in monitoring and improving quality are sometimes unclear.

The Office of Institutional Research has been understaffed and without a director for several years; in June 2017, a director was hired and expanded capacity is anticipated. This support should strengthen quality review processes at all levels. (CFR 4.2, 4.3)

COMPONENT 4 Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation (CFR 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.3)

Leadership at all levels, including faculty, staff, and administration, is committed to improvement based on the results of inquiry, evidence, and evaluation. Assessment of teaching, learning, and the campus environment—in support of academic and co-curricular objectives—is in place, being used for improvement, and incorporated into institutional planning processes. (CFR 4.3)

Assessment methods appear to be comprehensive and in alignment with WSCUC core competencies, and university, departmental and program goals. The institution speaks to its commitment to assessment and evidence-based analysis and decision making throughout the report. Continued work to implement and improve processes is indicated in the institution's report. The institution has made significant progress in campus-wide data gathering, although much remains to be done. (CFR 2.2, 2.4)

The institutional report provides several examples of how assessment is achieved and how results have led to course and program changes. La Sierra University has evaluated institutional student learning outcome five and University Studies student learning outcome four, the Community Engagement/Service-Learning outcome, in a student's first and last years to evaluate change over time in students' civic responsibility and engagement. Results show that seniors do see themselves as significantly more able, responsible and likely to engage in service in the future than do freshmen. This supports the thinking that the institution is achieving the goal of instilling a commitment to service in students. The Psychology Department assesses critical thinking with an instrument given to students in their first-year and then again near graduation. The department developed a new course, Critical Thinking in Psychology (PSYC 106), to enhance critical thinking skills for students in the major and adjusted other courses. Assessment of critical thinking is continuing. The institution also collects data on students presenting at conferences and meetings and/or publishing articles. (CFR 2.2a, 2.6) It is expected that closing-the-loop efforts will strengthen over time as longitudinal data become available.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results show that experiences of La Sierra University students are not statistically different from peer institutions with strengths in faculty-student and student-student interactions, writing, discussing, presenting, understanding

other viewpoints and service learning; 98% reported that by their senior year they had participated in a high-impact practice. (CFR 2.4)

The institution's use of the College Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+) exam represents a good first step into general learning assessment of certain critical skills. The institution is learning from experience in applying this test and acting on its results, and the team encourages continued assessment of critical skills so that valid results over time can be accumulated and compared to peers. (CFR 2.6, 2.7, 4.1).

COMPONENT 5 Student Success (CFR 1.2, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 4.1, 4.7)

The Institutional Report states that "...La Sierra students complete their goals," and that appears to be substantially true. First to second year retention rates are claimed to have climbed from the low 60%'s ten years ago to around 78% today. The University has set a goal of 85% for this indicator. The goal was set by the Provost. (CFR 1.2, 4.5, 4.6).

Student success rates appear to be improving in the aggregate; however, gains are not necessarily true for all segments. According to La Sierra University's 2016 Fact Book, only 21% of females graduate in 4 years, and 46% of females graduate in 6 years compared to the male rate of 55%. While this may be an artifact of female transfers to health science schools after two years, the team notes that females represent 58% of students, 40% of faculty, and 37% of the Trustees. La Sierra University's commitment to representing the shape of the community it serves suggests La Sierra University could do better on this front. (CFR 1.4, 2.10, 3.4).

The institution reports that its transfer out rate has recently increased from 11% in 2012-13 to 28% in 2014-15. This could be a cause for concern and investigation, followed by action if

needed. (CFR 2.7, 2.10, 2.14, 4.7). WSCUC's Graduation Rate Dashboard does not feature in the Institutional Report, but should be a useful tool once institutional research is fully staffed.

Potentially complicating the issue is that a high proportion of incoming students are now first-generation and often under-prepared for university work, which may raise retention and graduation rate challenges. (CFR 1.4, 3.9, 4.7). The institution's commitment to its rapidly increasing Hispanic student body, now comprising 58% of the first-time first-year class, is demonstrated in its recent receipt of a major Title V grant to become a better Hispanic serving institution. The support activities covered by the grant appear to be well designed to meet student needs. Over time, La Sierra University will need to monitor the composition of its board of trustees, leadership and faculty to more closely reflect the community it targets for recruitment. (CFR 3.9, 4.7).

Student academic progress should be helped by La Sierra University's move to an early warning system, a choice that is especially appropriate for a university operating on a quarter system. The decision to enlist help in communications and predictive modeling will likely also have positive effects on student success. These are examples of good efforts that should be maintained as a critical element of La Sierra University's progress. (CFR 2.12, 2.13).

The team notes, from the institutional report, that, La Sierra University added "...a Career Services office in 2014." This late recognition of the need for career services may be underlying the apparent absence of normal placement records for alumni six to twelve months after graduation. (There are limited data for recent years, based on surveys around graduation time, but the results as presented are largely anecdotal). It is suggested that La Sierra University look carefully at elevating the level of support for and analysis of this core function, especially given the changing demographics of its student body. The inauguration of the reorganized Office of

Advising and Career Success in 2017-18 is a recognition that La Sierra University is moving in this direction already. (CFR 2.13).

Many efforts to foster student success are focused on the first year and early experience at La Sierra University. However, survey results from NSSE suggest there is dissatisfaction among seniors who score La Sierra University low on whether, in retrospect, they would make the same choice of college if starting over again. Close attention to graduating seniors may pay dividends in future alumni support. La Sierra University's participation in NSSE is providing actionable material for improvement, and the institution is encouraged to ensure that the results of student engagement and satisfaction assessment are widely distributed and appreciated. (CFR 2.6, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13).

The university is commended for its integration of service learning and volunteer activities for students. This integration is consistent with the University's mission to produce good servants of the community. The university also shows appropriate recognition in its institutional report that career planning and placement are important elements of student success. (CFR 1.2, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.11).

COMPONENT 6 Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review; Use of Data and Evidence (CFR 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 4.1-4.7)

La Sierra University's institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) guide the assurance of a quality education. These ILOs were developed by faculty and approved by the Faculty Senate in 2015. (CFR 2.4) La Sierra University identifies the characteristics of students through disaggregating data. (CFR 2.10) These data are being used to improve educational effectiveness, although it is not clear how stakeholders across the institution are engaged in

considering assessment results and developing action plans. Because these processes are new, it is too soon to know the full impact actions will have on improving student learning and outcomes.

Recommendation 7: The team recommends that the university continue to build a robust institutional research department and follow accepted higher education standards in the compilation and reporting of enrollment, retention, and graduation data. (CFR 4.1, 4.2)

La Sierra University has been engaged in systematic annual review since 2009. Annual reviews of department/program effectiveness look at the capacity of the program (faculty and classes taught), the program mission and student learning outcomes, results for learning outcomes assessed during the year, and on planning for the upcoming year. A more comprehensive Program Review is scheduled to occur every seven years and is to include a summative assessment of all student learning outcomes, a departmental capacity review, and getting and responding to feedback from external reviewers. (CFR 4.1, 4.5)

Annual Assessment Reports: In summer 2017, all of La Sierra University's academic and academic support programs submitted an annual assessment report. The university's Assessment Committee judged the reports to vary in quality, with 61% of reports indicating assessment processes that are well developed and effectively assessing student learning. Thirty-nine programs were judged to have assessment reports in the emerging stage or to be lagging behind expectations.

Several examples are given where departments with well-developed assessment programs have used the results to refine learning outcomes and/or to modify curricular requirements.

Program Reviews: La Sierra University has not completed comprehensive reviews of academic programs for the past 4 years; consequently, several academic programs have not been reviewed on the prescribed 7-year cycle. Of the 31 programs listed in the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI), 20 have undergone a comprehensive program review in the past seven years; based on the IEEI, 4 program reviews are in progress in 2017-18, and 4 programs do not show any prior or scheduled reviews. While most departments have completed a program review in the past 10 years, those departments with professional accreditation (H.M.S. Richards Divinity School, Music Department, Department of Social Work, and the Tom and Vi Zapara School of Business) have completed program reviews for their respective professional accreditors that validate the rigor and professional value of their degrees.

Major barriers to completing a program review seem to be based on two factors: a lack of impact of Program Review findings on strategic-decision making; and the time and effort required of program personnel to carry out the review. The university has recently made some changes expected to mitigate the factors hindering the program review process. First, the Academic Master Calendar has been revised to allow program review results to be integrated into the planning process. (CFR 4.3, 4.6) Additionally, the Office of Institutional Research has a new director who is working on systems that will permit easier access to collected data—thus allowing more time for analysis, interpretation, reflection and action proposals based on data. (CFR 4.2) Furthermore, the Assessment Committee has lengthened the timeline for completing a program review to 2 years.

A recently-developed 7-Year Program Review Schedule with a time line for academic program review is commendable. The team notes that all programs reviewed using the new schedule will not be complete until 2028, that during the transition to the new schedule the lapse

between successive reviews of a program will exceed 7 years, and can be as many as 12 years. The rapidly changing La Sierra University and faculty can benefit when the results are used to support student success.

Recommendation 6: The team recommends that La Sierra University modify its schedule of academic program reviews so that the time lapse between reviews during this transition period is 10 years or less. (CFR 2.7, 4.1)

Assessment of Student Learning: The institutional report gives some evidence of university-wide assessment of learning; assessment results at this point have been primarily used to refine SLOs and the assessment process. While curricular and structural changes have resulted from some annual assessment results, it is not always clear what role student learning assessment results played in the decisions. (CFR 4.7)

Worthy of note is the development of a Good Teaching Document (CFR 4.4) developed by the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate. The document outlines the major components of good teaching, including staying abreast of developments in the discipline. The motivation was to make the evaluation of teaching in the promotion and tenure process more transparent. Importantly, the document provides a way for faculty to self-evaluate their instructional practices.

COMPONENT 7 Sustainability: Financial Viability; Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment (CFR 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3-4.7)

The report and evidence provided show that La Sierra University's plan for a sustainable future is evolving in terms of enrollment goals, program planning, and the effectiveness of assessment processes discussed previously in this report. The team found that key processes are

in place and there are ongoing efforts to assess and improve them. Further work is required to tie all components together in a sustainability plan. (CFR 4.3, 4.7)

The La Sierra University institutional report focuses a discussion of financial strength on improvement in the asset and equity position of the university since the last visit in 2009. La Sierra University attributes this to prudent financial management during a period of enrollment increase through 2014 and strategic budget cuts during the past three years as total enrollment has declined by 3.7% or 92 headcount. As an overall measure of financial position and performance and an adequate system of related controls, La Sierra University has received unmodified audit opinions for the last four years. (CFR 3.4, 3.6, 3.7)

La Sierra University has produced net revenue surpluses in unrestricted net assets in each of the past four years ending June 30, 2017. However, La Sierra University combines total return from endowment in revenues rather than only the annual allocation derived from the spending policy. While La Sierra University's auditor reports that this is allowable under Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, the team was not able to readily determine a measure of operations on the annual Statement of Activities had La Sierra University used the spending policy amount in revenues. (CFR 3.4)

The team is concerned that the current practice of including endowment total return in revenues on the Statement of Activities could be misleading to readers who believe it portrays a measure of operations. The more conventional practice is to report in revenues only the amount approved under the endowment spending policy.

Recommendation 5: Following best practices, the team recommends that La Sierra University consider changing its display on the Statement of Activities to reclassify total return in excess of

the allocation of endowment under the spending policy from revenues to changes in net assets from non-operating activities. (CFR 3.4)

The overall student aid discount rate has steadily increased as a percent of tuition revenue from 26.3% to 28.4% in fiscal years ending 2014 to 2017, respectively. The result has been flat net tuition revenues during fiscal years ending 2014 through 2016 at approximately \$47 million and a decline to \$44.9 million in fiscal year ending 2017. Total unrestricted revenues have ranged during this time from \$61 million to \$70 million with the variance largely due to investment returns and gifts. (CFR 3.4)

La Sierra University reports steady enrollment growth during the years 2009 through 2014 but has experienced declining undergraduate enrollment since 2014 in all schools, primarily in first-year cohorts. La Sierra University reports that the impact to net tuition revenues from the decline in enrollment since 2014 has been mitigated by savings from employee attrition: persons holding positions that do not negatively impact long-term strengths are not being replaced. (CFR 3.4, 3.6)

While operating revenues are being challenged from declining enrollment and an increasing student aid discount rate since 2014, La Sierra University reports maintaining a consistent Composite Financial Index of approximately six. (Subsequent to the site visit, La Sierra University officials communicated to the team that their auditors report a 2016-17 Composite Financial Index of 8.07, a five year average of 7.65, and a three year average of 6.96,) when a score of three is considered a threshold low point and ten a maximum level. (CFR 3.4, 3.6)

The Strategic Planning Committee in March 2014, looking forward to the completion of the current Strategic Plan, voted to grow the student body to 3,500 by La Sierra University's centennial in 2022, along with enhancing La Sierra University's reputation and fortifying students' abilities to obtain employment or entrance to good graduate programs. The team noted during the AV that La Sierra University has fallen short of the progression towards the 3,500 goal set in La Sierra University's "Report of Task Force 3500" by approximately 300 headcount as of fall 2017. Upon further review and questioning during the AV, the team learned that the progression in this report was largely aspirational and lacked formal modeling. Further, the Strategic Planning Committee reported during the AV that the 3,500 headcount goal was being reconsidered with a revised goal due to be completed in June 2018.

The uncertainty about the enrollment goal was also evident during team meetings with the Vice Presidents of Enrollment Services and Integrated Communications/Marketing during the AV. These vice presidents were not aware of realistic tactical plans or modeling to reach 3,500 students and believed that this goal was under revision. Further, the team noted that there appears to be a lack of coordination between these two important departments towards achieving the sustainable enrollment goal once determined.

In order to improve efforts towards establishing a sustainable plan forward, the team has two recommendations:

Recommendation 4: The team recommends that La Sierra University conduct formal financial modeling that ensures strategic enrollment goals are realistic and will produce positive net financial results. (CFR 3.4)

Recommendation 8: The team recommends that La Sierra University align marketing and enrollment efforts and develop actionable metrics to maximize effectiveness in the critical area of recruitment. (CFR 3.7, 4.5, 4.6)

The Strategic Plan sets three overarching goals: 1) Commit to provide opportunity to students and support and high achievement in a Seventh-day Adventist environment; 2) Investigate ideas of consequence; and 3) Engage local communities. The Strategic Plan refers to nine other more focused, detailed plans for action steps. La Sierra University provided the Academic Master Plan and the beginning concepts of the strategic plan of the Office of Advancement to the team for evaluation against the Standards. (CFR 3.6, 3.7, 3.10, 4.3, 4.7)

The Academic Master Plan (AMP) commits to the liberal arts core and calls for diversifying course and program offerings. The AMP is highly aspirational and presents objectives in four areas:

- 1) Student transition – Acknowledges the changing demographic in the geographic area and a need to develop courses and programs that attract non-traditional students. (CFR 1.4, 4.7)
- 2) Program Access and Delivery – Recognizes the need to stay nimble in course and program offerings, adopt lifelong learning programs and courses, and address skills that employers want. (CFR 4.7)
- 3) Faculty – Recognizes the need for a faculty of adequate size and skills and calls for financial support for faculty compensation and development. (CFR 2.1, 3.1, 3.3)
- 4) Identity – Describes the desire to maintain Seventh-day Adventist principles and core values, and acknowledges the fact that profitable programs will need to subsidize

unprofitable programs that are needed to provide a comprehensive curriculum. (CFR 3.10)

The AMP does not go to the extent of including tactical plans on academic programs that will be added or eliminated, or how programs will attract and accommodate growth to the revised enrollment goal by 2022.

La Sierra University provided minutes of selected Strategic Planning Committee meetings in 2014 and 2016 that provide evidence of discussions regarding La Sierra University's growth and related goals, demographic and occupation circumstances in Riverside County, and evolution of the Computer Science major – a program that was identified in 2014 as poor performing. These discussions led to the further development of the academic planning process to revise the role of the Faculty Senate, the establishment of the Strategic Enrollment Planning Council in January 2017, and revision of the university-wide planning calendar. (CFR 4.3, 4.6, 4.7)

The team was not able to assess the scope and depth of planning for sustainability in co-curricular programs, administrative support functions, or within individual schools as other more detailed plans supporting the Strategic Plan were not provided.

COMPONENT 9: Reflection and Plans for Improvement

The team believes that the actions La Sierra University has taken since the visit in 2009 to prepare for the changing higher education environment are positive steps.

The team observed that La Sierra University is a mission-driven institution focused on teaching and learning in support of student success. This is demonstrated through its efforts to

embrace diversity and inclusion, its service learning programs, the establishment of the Office of Advising and Career Success, the implementation of the early warning system for at-risk students, use of the College Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+) exam as well as NSSE, and a continued focus on assessment as an integral component of the academic culture. Efforts towards improvement in the annual department and program review processes, achieving 100% participation in annual assessment reporting in 2015-16 and 2016-17, are notable. Continued progress in refining the learning outcomes, assessment, and analysis process will yield escalating benefits.

La Sierra University's evolving strategic planning process indicates that the institution is actively engaged in improving the quality of educational experience. There is a strong university-wide awareness of the need to continue developing its culture of evidence-based decision making and strategic planning. The continued investment in institutional research functions and the resulting use of data across departments will significantly aid the university in planning for a sustainable future. The established structure of shared governance and inclusive committee membership is positioned to take advantage of more robust institutional research and data management systems as it moves toward the establishment of actionable metrics and timelines. Continued efforts in this area are strongly encouraged to aid the university in its forward progress.

Recommendation 2: The team recommends that La Sierra University continue the practice of encouraging committees and task forces to maintain broad membership, while also ensuring concerted efforts in creating actionable goals, setting timely milestones, and assessing progress in a well-documented and open fashion. (CFR 3.7, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6)

The team believes much work still needs to be completed to grow enrollment, including completion of the more detailed plans that support the strategic plan and linking those plans to budget projections. The creation of advanced financial models, the use of higher education standards of reporting, and the employment of market research tools will aid the admissions, marketing, and academic teams involved in strategic enrollment management. With reliable data in hand, these teams can create measurable plans for effective pathways to growth and act on them in a timely manner as a key component of a sustainable future for La Sierra University.

Enhanced vertical and horizontal alignment and engagement, from adjunct faculty to the board of trustees, is critical for La Sierra University's success. The campus culture of inclusion and shared governance can facilitate communication and the realistic assessment and alignment of goals and measurement of progress.

SECTION IV FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

The team observed that La Sierra University is an institution of higher learning that is aware of its strengths and shortcomings, and is therefore steadily pursuing constant improvement. Its commitment to teaching and learning, shared governance, diversity and inclusion, and academic excellence are apparent throughout. The staff of administrators and educators demonstrate a high level of care for the students, the university, and each other which facilitates effective change and growth.

I. The team commends the institution for the following accomplishments and practices:

1. La Sierra University's sense of mission and purpose is well established and widely supported.
2. The institution's attention is focused on student success.
3. Service learning is valued and integrated across the curriculum.
4. La Sierra University is committed to establishing a comprehensive and integrated planning process. Of particular note is the inclusive nature of membership on key committees.
5. La Sierra University demonstrates a commitment to assessment and moving to a culture of evidence-based decision making.
6. La Sierra University has recognized the importance of institutional research as the basis for establishing a more strategic approach to analysis, assessment, and planning.
7. The university is embracing diversity and provides an inclusive and welcoming environment for students of all faiths.
8. The La Sierra University community has managed a significant challenge to academic freedom and emerged as a stronger and more cohesive institution.

II. The team recommends that La Sierra University respond to issues in the following areas:

Governance:

1. Engage the board vigorously and appropriately in planning and ensuring financial sustainability. Time will be of the essence in implementing new plans for enrollment and program developments. (CFR 3.4, 3.7, 3.9)

2. Continue the practice of encouraging committees and task forces to maintain broad membership, while also ensuring concerted efforts in creating actionable goals, setting timely milestones, and assessing progress in a well-documented and open fashion. (CFR 3.7, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6)
3. Make changes at the trustee level including:
 - a. create a free-standing audit committee with independence from the Trustee Finance Committee,
 - b. invest the power to make the initial recommendation for changes to the Board of Trustees' bylaws solely to the Board of Trustees, and
 - c. delegate sole responsibility for the executive staff, including Provost and CFO, to the President, according to usual practice in higher education. (CFR 3.6, 3.7, 3.9)Finance:
4. Conduct formal financial modeling that ensures strategic enrollment goals are realistic and will produce positive net financial results. (CFR 3.4)
5. Following best practices, consider changing its display on the Statement of Activities to reclassify total return in excess of the allocation of endowment under the spending policy from revenues to changes in net assets from non-operating activities. (CFR 3.4)
Program Review and Institutional Research:
6. Modify its schedule of academic program reviews so that the time lapse between reviews during this transition period is 10 years or less. (CFR 2.7, 4.1)

7. Continue to build a robust institutional research department and follow accepted higher education standards in the compilation and reporting of enrollment, retention, and graduation data. (CFR 4.1, 4.2)
8. Align marketing and enrollment efforts and develop actionable metrics to maximize effectiveness in the critical area of recruitment. (CFR 3.7, 4.5, 4.6)

Appendix A
FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FORMS

1 - CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW FORM

Under the federal requirements referenced below, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's credit hour policy and processes as well as the lengths of its programs.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.)
Policy on credit hour	Is this policy easily accessible? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, where is the policy located? Faculty Handbook , Part II, Section 5.1; Undergraduate Bulletin 2017-18 p. 52 ; Graduate Bulletin 2017-18 pg. 58 .
	Comments: Policy is accessible. Page 89 of Faculty Handbook; Page 52 of UG Bulletin; Page 58 of Grad Bulletin. Policy is 10 hours of instruction during a 10 week quarter and 100 minutes of preparation/homework for each 50 minutes of instruction, or 25 to 30 laboratory hours for laboratory studies – complies with WASC Credit Hour Policy.
Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour	Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: The faculty of the Schools and College are responsible for the management and review of curriculum. The College has the Academic Standards Committee that does this work. Other smaller schools have curriculum committees as well. University Studies has a policy committee that reviews all additions to the university studies and general education curriculum.
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: Schedule is available online at https://banner.laserra.edu/pls/lisu/lisu_web.course_list It appears from a sampling of various courses that the class time requirements comply with the credit hour policy.
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? 2
	Type of courses reviewed: <input type="checkbox"/> online <input type="checkbox"/> hybrid ; Online, hybrid
	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral ; Graduate
	What discipline(s)? Technology in Education, Administration and Leadership
	Are students doing the amount of work per the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? x YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated) <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? 9
	What kinds of courses? Practicum, internship, seminar, directed study
	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral ; Undergraduate
	What discipline(s)? Health and Exercise Science, Social Work, Criminal Justice
	Are students doing the amount of work per the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? x YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)	How many programs were reviewed? 7
	What kinds of programs were reviewed? Undergraduate – Business Management, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Computer Science, Film and Television Production; Graduate – Education, Psychology and Counseling, Divinity
	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral MA and Doctoral
	What discipline(s)? Accounting, Human Resources, Engineering, Editing, Counseling, Theological Studies
	Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of an acceptable length? x YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

2 - MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulation §602.16(a)(1)(vii), WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's recruiting and admissions practices.

Material Reviewed	Questions and Comments: (Enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections of this table as appropriate.)	
**Federal Requirements	Does the institution follow federal requirements on recruiting students?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:	
Degree completion and cost	Does the institution provide information about the typical length of time to degree?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Does the institution provide information about the overall cost of the degree?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: The length of time to degree is specific to each discipline, but is found in the Undergraduate Bulletin 2017-2018, pages 63-65 . The institution provides information about tuition per unit at: https://lasierra.edu/tuition-and-costs/ . The Undergraduate and Graduate bulletins provide information on the number of units necessary to complete the degree.	
Careers and employment	Does the institution provide information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Does the institution provide information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: The institution does not have any certificate programs or other programs that require reporting gainful employment under federal rules. However, the institution does have the Office of Advising and Career Success that helps students identify career paths appropriate to their fields of study. That office is also begun the process of tracking graduates. The institution does not have any programs that, under federal rules, require reporting gainful employment statistics.	

**Section 487 (a)(20) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) prohibits Title IV eligible institutions from providing incentive compensation to employees or third party entities for their success in securing student enrollments. Incentive compensation includes commissions, bonus payments, merit salary adjustments, and promotion decisions based solely on success in enrolling students. These requirements do not apply to the recruitment of international students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal financial aid.

3 - STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulation*§602-16(1)(1)(ix) WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's student complaints policies, procedures, and records.
 (See also WSCUC Senior College and University Commission's Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.)

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections of this table as appropriate.)
Policy on student complaints	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Is the policy or procedure easily accessible? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? La Sierra University Website (https://lasierra.edu/consumer-financial-aid/student-complaint-process/)
	Comments:
Process(es)/ procedure	Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, please describe briefly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
Records	Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? Academic Appeals are housed in the Associate Provost's Office. Student Discipline appeals are housed in the Office of Student Life. Faculty grievances are housed in the President's office.
	Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly: Administrators in charge of the above areas are responsible for addressing patterns of complaints.
	Comments:

4 – TRANSFER CREDIT REVIEW FORM

Under federal requirements*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s recruiting, transfer, and admissions practices accordingly.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections of this table as appropriate.)
Transfer Credit Policy(s)	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for reviewing and receiving transfer credit? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, is the policy publicly available? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, where? La Sierra University Website (https://lasierra.edu/records-office/forms/ - c4961) Does the policy(s) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:

*§602.24(e): Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that--

- (1) Are publicly disclosed in accordance with 668.43(a)(11); and
- (2) Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

See also WSCUC Senior College and University Commission’s Transfer of Credit Policy.

Distance Education Review-Team Report Appendix B

Institution: La Sierra University

Type of Visit: Reaffirmation

Name of reviewer/s: Dr Geoffrey Bannister; Eleanor Siebert; James Dunkelman; Michael Neubauer; Bill Smith

Date/s of review: April 10-13, 2018

A completed copy of this form should be appended to the team report for all comprehensive visits to institutions that offer distance education programs¹ and for other visits as applicable. Teams can use the institutional report to begin their investigation, then, use the visit to confirm claims and further surface possible concerns. Teams are not required to include a narrative about this in the team report but may include recommendations, as appropriate, in the Findings and Recommendations section of the team report. (If the institution offers only online courses, the team may use this form for reference but need not submit it as the team report is expected to cover distance education in depth in the body of the report.)

1. Programs and courses reviewed (please list)

Master of Arts in Teaching program

2. Background Information (number of programs offered by distance education; degree levels; FTE enrollment in distance education courses/programs; history of offering distance education; percentage growth in distance education offerings and enrollment; platform, formats, and/or delivery method)

La Sierra University offers only one program delivered at 50% or more by distance: the Master of Arts in Teaching. This program has been offered online, as approved by WSCUC, since 2003. Typically the online courses are used primarily by face-to-face students to allow them to “mix and match” for a more accessible or convenient program. While use of the online MAT courses have been growing (698 credit hours total in the 2018-2019 school year) there have only been 2 or fewer students in any given year who have graduated having taken their MAT fully online.

Blackboard is the platform used to deliver the online courses; however, the Curriculum & Instruction department also uses Zoom for conferencing weekly with the student teachers who are registered via the online program. Zoom is also used for delivery of some distance courses to extension campus students; this provides real time interaction. Additionally, the department uses Panopto for lecture capture and delivery.

All courses delivered by distance are keyed directly to the standards and objectives of the face-to-face courses, providing active teacher involvement with students; because the MAT provides teacher credential preparation, these courses also fall under the review of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

3. Nature of the review (material examined and persons/committees interviewed)

¹ See Distance Education Review Guide to determine whether programs are subject to this process. In general only programs that are more than 50% online require review and reporting.

Observations and Findings

Lines of Inquiry (refer to relevant CFRs to assure comprehensive consideration)	Observations and Findings	Follow-up Required (identify the issues)
<p><i>Fit with Mission.</i> How does the institution conceive of distance learning relative to its mission, operations, and administrative structure? How are distance education offerings planned, funded, and operationalized?</p>	<p>The distance learning option provides another venue for serving students in the credential preparation program. Support for the distance education MAT students is provided by a full-time tech support staff member, plus part time support by the Curriculum & Instruction department secretary who promotes the program, assists students with registration issues, and oversees the contract preparation for teachers in the program (typically the same teachers who deliver the face-to-face courses).</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Connection to the Institution.</i> How are distance education students integrated into the life and culture of the institution?</p>	<p>Distance Education students (who are adults returning to prepare for their teaching credential) are typically also face-to-face adult students. Those who take more than 50% of the program by distance see their teacher and fellow students in the Zoom online conferencing environment.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Quality of the DE Infrastructure.</i> Are the learning platform and academic infrastructure of the site conducive to learning and interaction between faculty and students and among students? Is the technology adequately supported? Are there back-ups?</p>	<p>The infrastructure of Blackboard, Panopto and Zoom work together well in supporting teacher-student interactions in both asynchronous and synchronous delivery. The institution has a system for backups, and the tech support staff member is easily accessible to students by email and phone for problem-solving.</p>	<p>None</p>

<p><i>Student Support Services:</i> What is the institution's capacity for providing advising, counseling, library, computing services, academic support and other services appropriate to distance modality? What do data show about the effectiveness of the services?</p>	<p>As this is a graduate program, advising is provided by the department. Library online resources are robust and easily accessible. Student feedback on alumni surveys has been positive about the learning experience.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Faculty.</i> Who teaches the courses, e.g., full-time, part-time, adjunct? Do they teach only online courses? In what ways does the institution ensure that distance learning faculty are oriented, supported, and integrated appropriately into the academic life of the institution? How are faculty involved in curriculum development and assessment of student learning? How are faculty trained and supported to teach in this modality?</p>	<p>Both full-time and adjunct teachers—typically the same individuals who teach the face-to-face versions of the courses—teach the online courses. Because the program is very small, it has been easy to call the teachers together on several occasions to orient them, acquaint them with updates on the course content due to CCTC changes, etc. The tech support staff member provides one-on-one orientation, training and help to the teachers who are teaching online for the first time.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Curriculum and Delivery.</i> Who designs the distance education programs and courses? How are they approved and evaluated? Are the programs and courses comparable in content, outcomes and quality to on-ground offerings? (Submit credit hour report.)</p>	<p>Courses have been designed by selected individuals who translate the face-to-face offerings into the online environment, and have been evaluated and adjusted by the School of Education's staff member who works with assessment and accreditation concerns. The department has made sure that all online courses serve the same content, objectives, quality and signature assignments as the face-to-face courses.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Retention and Graduation.</i> What data on retention and graduation are collected on students taking online courses and programs? What do these data show? What disparities are evident? Are rates comparable to on-ground programs and to other institutions' online offerings? If any concerns exist, how are these being addressed?</p>	<p>Very few students take the MAT completely online (0-2 graduates in a year); typically these have been students who are place-bound or who wish to access Seventh-day Adventist graduate education specifically. Numbers of those individuals are so low that</p>	<p>None</p>

	<p>data is hard to collect; however, anecdotal observations show that students typically remain in the program until completion.</p>	
<p><i>Student Learning.</i> How does the institution assess student learning for online programs and courses? Is this process comparable to that used in on-ground courses? What are the results of student learning assessment? How do these compare with learning results of on-ground students, if applicable, or with other online offerings?</p>	<p>Student learning is assessed through signature assignments which are submitted and evaluated in LiveText, exactly as the signature assignments in face-to-face courses. Additionally, the students are evaluated using the same instruments and evaluations used for CCTC standards in face-to-face classes. The director of student teaching travels to observe the student teacher or intern at least once in their program. While articulating with local student teaching supervisors is more of a challenge, the department has been working through the logistics for improvement of communications and credible evaluation of the students.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Contracts with Vendors.</i> Are there any arrangements with outside vendors concerning the infrastructure, delivery, development, or instruction of courses? If so, do these comport with the policy on <i>Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations</i>?</p>	<p>The School of Education does not use outside vendors in providing infrastructure, delivery, development or instruction. The philosophy is one of homegrown, hands-on teaching and interactions with distance education students.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><i>Quality Assurance Processes:</i> How are the institution's quality assurance processes designed or modified to cover distance education? What evidence is provided that distance education programs and courses are educationally effective?</p>	<p>The faculty of the department, who are also involved with the online students, use the same evaluation and quality assurance processes that they use with the face-to-face students, particularly in light of the fact that most distance education students are local and using the online provision for their convenience as busy adult learners. The CCTC-required evaluation systems for the face-to-face learner give evidence that the online students are being taught and</p>	<p>None</p>

	evaluated effectively in their programs.	
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