

REPORT OF THE WSCUC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM

To Vanguard University of Southern California

February 24-26, 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.

Table of Contents

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT	3
Institutional Context and Accreditation History	3
Description of team’s review process.....	5
Quality and Rigor of the Report and Evidence	6
SECTION II – TEAM’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS	7
Issue 1: Alignment of enrollment planning and recruitment with strategic and financial planning ...	7
Issue 2: Diversifying revenue streams, growing enrollment, and increasing the endowment.....	10
Issue 3: Integration and implementation of strategic and operational plans built on the strategic and continuous planning model (CFRs 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7)	15
Issue 4: Ensuring support services targeted at closing the achievement gap for students of color, particularly Hispanic students	17
Issue 5: Increasing the number and diversity of faculty and staff sufficient to support students’ and programmatic needs (CFR 3.1, WSCUC Diversity Policy)	21
SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE	24
SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW	24
Commendations	24
Recommendations.....	25

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Institutional Context and Accreditation History

Background Information: Located in Costa Mesa, Vanguard University of Southern California (VUSC) is a faith-based, mission-driven institution, grounded in the Assemblies of God as its denominational roots. It was founded in 1920 as the Southern California Bible School and became Southern California College (SCC) in 1959. It was accredited by WSCUC for the first time in 1964. In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, SCC expanded to include credential, graduate, and degree completion programs. In 1999, the university adopted its current title of Vanguard University of Southern California (VUSC), with a mission to “pursue knowledge, cultivate character, deepen faith, and equip each student for a Spirit-empowered life of Christ-centered leadership and service.” Its current academic structure consists of five interdisciplinary units, with 30 baccalaureate majors and concentrations, and the School of Professional Studies, comprising five baccalaureate majors, one associate degree program, and six master’s degree programs. In 2011, VUSC received WSCUC approval for its first online program. Now the university has 15 active distance education programs.

Enrollment at VUSC has grown, increasing from a headcount of 2,104 in 2016 to 2,289 in 2020. Of the students enrolled at the university, Hispanic students make up 41% of the population, surpassing the White student population for the first time in fall 2018. VUSC received designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and was awarded two Developing Hispanic Serving Institution – Title V Grants by the U.S. Department of Education one in 2017 and another in 2020. Vanguard cites two illustrative examples, the Global Center for Women and Justice (GCWJ) and outreach programs coordinated through the Office of Global Education and Outreach (GEO), as the means of living its commitment to the public good.

Institution's Recent Reaccreditation History: The last reaffirmation visit for VUSC was February 28 - March 2, 2017. As a result of that visit, the Commission commended VUSC for clearly articulated and aligned mission, vision, and values in support of student success; an independent, engaged, and committed Board of Trustees and the employment of a qualified, experienced senior administrative team; a collaborative, dedicated, and qualified faculty and staff who have supported the university as it has experienced financial stresses and have fully engaged in advancing the mission, vision, and values of Vanguard; the adoption of a strategic and continuous planning model aligned with the University's mission, vision, and values and focused on assisting Vanguard in responding to a changing higher education environment in the decade ahead; the improvement of Vanguard's financial status over the past five years including a significant increase in unrestricted net assets, the significant reduction in liabilities, and improved key financial ratios; an improvement in the overall retention rate since 2010-11, using methods such as targeted interventions for at-risk students; and the development and implementation of a systematic review and yearly assessment process, completed specific, credible assessments for the five competencies, and articulated levels of performance at graduation.

The Commission had concerns about enrollment planning, diversification of revenue and the implementation of strategic planning. At their June 23, 2017 meeting, the Commission acted to reaffirm accreditation for a period of eight years and request a special visit in fall 2020 to address:

1. Progress in completing the alignment of enrollment planning and recruitment with strategic and financial planning (CFRs 3.4, 4.6, 4.7);

2. Progress in diversifying revenue streams, growing enrollment, and increasing the endowment (CFR 3.4);
3. Completion of the integration and implementation of strategic and operational plans built on the strategic and continuous planning model (CFRs 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7).
4. Progress on ensuring support services targeted at closing the achievement gap for students of color, particularly Hispanic students which is the largest growing student group (CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.13); and
5. Progress on increasing the number and diversity of faculty and staff sufficient to support students' and programmatic needs (CFR 3.1, WSCUC Diversity Policy).

Description of team's review process

The VUSC Special Visit Team reviewed thoroughly the materials uploaded by the institution, including the VU Special Visit Report, all supporting documents for the report, additional documents submitted in response to WSCUC team requests, interviews with small groups and individuals, open meetings with faculty and staff, and messages received through the confidential email account. Team members were assigned various areas of responsibility for the review as primary or secondary readers, which were confirmed by all during the two team meetings before the visit. Team members prepared worksheets reviewing each of the five issues outlined in the June 30, 2017 letter from the WSCUC Commission and noting areas of focus for the review.

In preparation for the Special Visit (SV), the team met remotely to review completed worksheets, identify key issues, and develop questions for further exploration. Team members requested additional documents and confirmed the meeting schedule through email during the

next weeks. The team refined their questions and information gathering strategies during the team meeting the day before the start of the visit. During the SV, the 2021 team conducted interviews with the Board of Trustees, a broad array of administrators (president, provost, vice presidents and deans, other administrative directors), faculty members, staff members, student leaders, and independent auditors. Meetings were designed with a focus on one or two related issues, and team members were assigned as lead, to facilitate questioning.

For the duration of the SV, the team collected information, examined the interview outcomes and refined these for questions in subsequent interviews. Throughout the process, the team encouraged open communication and rigorously reviewed and triangulated information provided during the SV interviews. As the visit drew to a close, the team members collectively agreed on the final set of commendations and recommendations based upon careful and comprehensive analysis of the evidence gathered from institutional materials and interviews during the visit.

Quality and Rigor of the Report and Evidence

The VU Special Visit Report offered a candid, clear update on the institution's progress on the five issues outlined for the SV by the WSCUC Commission. Financial and revenue budgeting data was generally of good quality, but operating budget expense projections and associated assumptions were not available. Quite a bit of information was provided regarding enrollment strategies in professional studies, but not much information about TUG enrollment strategies including financial aid strategies. The information about the strategic planning process included a discussion of their work to build their leadership team and develop a process to implement their strategic goals, including developing several strategic partnerships. They briefly

outlined how the planning process allowed them to quickly pivot into online delivery during the pandemic and secure additional funding. There was less information about how VUSC ensured that all constituents were involved in the decision-making process, or the process of communication across areas of the university, and only a hint that these might be areas to explore.

Vanguard provided disaggregated retention and graduation data and discussed their data-informed approach to student success. The student success team summarized student survey data as part of a report to the board. VUSC outlined in the SV report many examples of evidence-based strategies and grant-funded initiatives that were developed in response to their analysis of the student data in these key areas: academic, financial and basic needs, marketing, policy, and spiritual development. Finally, VUSC provided data on faculty and staff hiring and discussed their program prioritization process that aligns resources with strategic priorities.

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

Issue 1: Alignment of enrollment planning and recruitment with strategic and financial planning

VUSC has been using a flexible approach to strategic and operational planning since 2014 based on a comprehensive system (Paterson StratOp process) that integrates strategic, operational, and financial components. Based on a review of institutional documents and interviews with senior administrators, members of the Board of Trustees, and members of the campus community, VUSC appears to have used, learned and benefited from this system, with few exceptions.

Evidence of the continuing use of the Paterson StratOp process was provided in the form of a graphic of the What's Important Now (WIN) Wheel. The WIN Wheel was updated for FY 2020-2021 and depicts six institutional priorities and functions. It shows eight major strategic planning initiatives underway, links them to the six institutional priorities and functions, and assigns responsible parties to each strategic planning initiative. Finally, the WIN Wheel is complemented by action initiative profiles that track implementation progress.

Evidence of the impact of the effective use of the Paterson StratOp process and the alignment of planning efforts include a 2017 campus master plan that is guiding the development of the physical campus. The facilities projects in the campus master plan are reflected in the recently completed Imagine Campaign supporting capital projects and endowment and in the upcoming Imagine II campaign. Finally, the facility projects are reflected in Vanguard's comprehensive academic plan (CAP).

The CAP appears to be the academic center of strategic planning efforts. It is not yet in final form and is being developed and implemented over two phases through 2025. The CAP is comprehensive in nature, and reflects the President's four major strategic priorities of access, affordability, facilities, and student success. It also provides an alignment with institutional values (who we are), an assessment of current conditions (where we are), and a statement of desired actions and outcomes (where we are going), for each of the four strategic priorities.

A recent planning effort aligned with the CAP is the newly-formed program inventory and vetting team (PIVoT). This team is focused on developing an inventory of programs, assessing existing programs to determine programs to enhance, combine, or phase out, and formulating a process for the development, approval, implementation, monitoring and

assessment of new programs. PIVoT is composed of representatives from each vice presidential area and other members at large as needed. This initiative is in its early stages.

Vanguard's various responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provide yet another example of the alignment of planning efforts. It was clear from interviews with multiple members of the campus community that Vanguard's strategic plans and processes were guiding decision making in response to the pandemic.

However, it was also clear from interviews with multiple members of the campus community that some of the strategic planning processes may not have been conducted in a collaborative and fully transparent manner (CFR 4.5). For example, there appears to be no designated faculty representation on key decision-making bodies such as PIVoT, the President's Cabinet, and the Board of Trustees. Also, the recent dissolution of the faculty senate as part of a protracted transition to a different, and possibly provost-led, shared governance model has created confusion and is little understood by members of the faculty. If this continues, it has the potential to negatively impact the academic leadership of the faculty (CFR 3.10). It has also created a situation where there is not an accurate faculty handbook that addresses the current state of faculty governance at Vanguard (CFR 3.2). The team was assured that both the handbook and the academic leadership system design were well on the way to completion, under the supervision of a committee of (former) faculty senate leaders.

Another theme that emerged from these interviews is the lack of a centralized, responsive and effective institutional research function. This type of function will be important to assure data informed decision making and to assess the effectiveness of outcomes as strategic and operational plans are implemented (CFR 4.2).

The team's finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that Vanguard has, for the most part, made effective use of the Paterson StratOp process to integrate and align its strategic planning efforts and to provide an agile response to the COVID-19 pandemic (CFR 4.6 and 4.7). Additional progress in aligning and integrating strategic planning efforts should occur to assure that these efforts are more collaborative, do not negatively impact the faculty role in academic leadership, and are data informed through a more centralized and effective institutional research function (CFR 3.10, 4.2, and 4.5)

Issue 2: Diversifying revenue streams, growing enrollment, and increasing the endowment

Since the 2017 visit of the team, VUSC has maintained a composite financial responsibility score above 1.5 with a FY 2020 score of 2.39. The calculation of this score is required by the Higher Education Act of 1965 and is used to demonstrate that institutions are maintaining standards of financial responsibility necessary to participate in Title IV student financial aid programs. The composite scores reflect the overall relative financial health of institutions along a scale of negative 1.0 to positive 3.0 with scores above 1.5 indicating that an institution is financially responsible.

VUSC has also continued to strengthen its financial position as evidenced by the accelerated growth of its net assets. Independent audit reports indicate that net assets grew by \$15.4 million or 60% from \$25.7 million on June 30, 2016 to \$41.1 million on June 30, 2020.

Institutional reports and interviews with senior administrators and members of the Board of Trustees indicate that the growth in net assets is the result of an intentional financial planning strategy and was achieved through a multi-faceted approach. The approach included efforts to manage debt, diversify revenue streams, grow enrollment, and increase the endowment.

Ongoing debt management efforts had reduced VUSC's long-term debt from \$35.6 million on June 30, 2008 to \$7.4 million on March 31, 2020. The reduced level of debt allowed the University to take advantage of favorable lending terms and an historically low interest rate environment on April 30, 2020 to negotiate a \$42.0 million private placement tax-exempt loan agreement at a 10-year fixed rate of 2.75% with amortization over 25 years. Proceeds from the loan agreement were used to refinance the existing debt outstanding (\$7.4 million) with the balance used to invest in new and renovated facilities (\$26.2 million), to fund a property lease buy-out (\$6.0 million), to cover closing costs (\$0.7 million), and to create a contingency (\$1.7 million).

A review of independent audit reports and internal financial reports from the fiscal years ending June 30, 2016 (FY 2016) through June 30, 2020 (FY 2020) indicates that VUSC has made some strides in diversifying its revenue streams. Net tuition revenue comprised 73.1% of total operating revenues in FY 2016 and was reduced to 69.6% of total operating revenues in FY 2020. Auxiliary revenue, in turn, comprised 20.1% of total operating revenues in FY 2016 and was reduced to 15.6% of total operating revenues in FY 2020. These reductions in primarily student dependent revenue sources were offset by increases in contribution (i.e., gifts) and federal grant revenue sources with contribution revenue increasing from 4.1% of total operating revenues in FY 2016 to 13.9% in FY 2020 and with federal grant revenue increasing from 0.5% of total operating revenues in 2016 to 6.2% in FY 2020.

Institutional reports and interviews with senior administrators and members of the Board of Trustees indicate that the efforts to diversify revenue streams included capital campaigns for campus development and endowment growth, targeting grant applications for specific programs, general giving campaigns, and boosting facility rentals and events. The success of most of these

efforts was exemplified by the successful completion of the Imagine Campaign, which raised over \$12.9 million for the construction of the Waugh Student Center (\$10.4 million goal) and for endowment (\$2.5 million goal). Examples of success also included a successful campaign to renovate Dean Harvey Baseball Field (\$0.7 million goal), a successful campaign to renovate Lyceum Theater (\$0.6 million goal), a record high number of President Circle membership (\$1,000 or more) of 290 members in FY 2019, the initiation of a Vanguard Giving Day on November 12, 2020 that raised over \$0.3 million and generated nearly 1,000 new donors, and 84% of faculty and staff making an annual gift in FY 2019. Finally, a significant indicator of success in diversifying revenue streams was the award of two U.S. Department of Education Title V grants totaling \$6.3 million as well as the award of grants from the Lilly Endowment Inc. (\$1.0 million), the National Endowment for the Humanities (\$0.1 million), the Hugh and Hazel Darling Foundation (\$0.3 million), the Fletcher Jones Foundation (\$0.3 million), the OL Halsell Foundation (\$0.1 million), and the Edison Foundation (\$0.1 million).

Although Vanguard was gradually increasing income from facility rentals and events, which amounted to \$0.78 million in FY 2019, this revenue source experienced a 44% reduction in FY 2020, primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews with senior administrators indicate that efforts to continue to grow this revenue source will continue once pandemic use restrictions are eased. This will include rentals of the former Newport Mesa Church that became available through the lease buy-out and rentals of the new student center.

A review of internal reports indicates that Vanguard has increased its total headcount enrollment by 212 students or 10.2% from 2,077 in fall 2016 to 2,289 in fall 2020. This growth includes an increase in traditional undergraduate (TUG) students of 311 or 21.7% from 1,435 in fall 2016 to 1,746 in fall 2020 and an increase in graduate students of 60 or 19.2% from 313 in

fall 2016 to 373 in fall 2020. Also, this overall growth in total headcount enrollment occurred despite a decrease in professional studies (i.e., adult accelerated undergraduate programs) of 159 students from 329 in fall 2016 to 170 in fall 2020. Finally, TUG institutional aid discounting has been increased to 48.5% in FY 2020, which is lower than the national average for similar institutions, and is projected to further increase to 54.6% by FY 2025.

Interviews with senior administrators and members of the Board of Trustees indicated that strategic efforts focused on increasing TUG enrollment included investments in enrollment management, new athletic sports, and facility improvements. The interviews also indicated that the growth in graduate enrollment occurred without the addition of any new programs and was attributed primarily to enhanced enrollment management practices. Finally, the interviews reported that, although enrollment in professional studies has been on a continual decline, this area has remained net revenue positive even at its current low point.

More focused interviews with senior administrators indicated that TUG institutional aid discounting will continue to increase gradually to assure affordability and are projected to remain below national averages. The interviews also indicated that multiple strategies to increase enrollment in professional studies are being developed and deployed under the leadership of a new dean. These strategies include an overhaul of branding and marketing, implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) system, the implementation of two fully online degree programs in psychology and management, the development of partnerships with other institutions of higher education and churches, and the expansion of the number of states that Vanguard can offer online courses in from 22 to 30.

A review of independent audits and internal financial reports documented that Vanguard has been successful in growing its endowment. Endowment assets grew by \$2.9 million or

61.7% from \$4.7 million on June 30, 2016 to \$7.6 million on June 30, 2020. Interviews with senior administrators and members of the Board of Trustees indicated that this growth was accomplished primarily by the success of the Imagine Campaign and that additional deferred revocable and irrevocable gifts totaling \$2.6 million are expected to be received to further grow the endowment.

The team's finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that VUSC has made great strides in diversifying its revenue streams, growing enrollment, and increasing its endowment (CFR 3.4). It has also had great success in improving its overall financial position by maintaining compliant composite financial responsibility scores and by increasing its net assets by 60% over the last four fiscal years (CFR 3.4). Finally, Vanguard has had relative success in managing through the COVID-19 pandemic and has been, and will be, financially assisted by a \$5.1 million Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, a Higher Education Relief Fund (HERF) grant of \$1.9 million, and an expected HERF II grant of \$3.4 million (CFR 4.6 and 4.7).

Challenges remaining for VUSC include recovery from the various negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic including the eventual discontinuation of federal relief funding. Other challenges include continuing and/or replacing Title V grant funds, being able to pay increasing debt service costs, and refinancing and/or retiring the scheduled \$26.2 million balloon debt payment due on April 1, 2030. Finally, Vanguard is likely to be challenged in meeting its various budget projection targets as well as its targets for revenue diversification, enrollment, and endowment due to a rapidly changing higher education ecosystem and its attendant demographic challenges.

Issue 3: Integration and implementation of strategic and operational plans built on the strategic and continuous planning model (CFRs 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7)

VUSC's institutional review in 2017 revealed challenges that, given the expected changes in higher education, could prevent them from meeting their mission. VUSC was advised that prompt attention was needed in the following areas: diversification of revenue streams, enrollment, university support for faculty and staff, and the endowment. The review team at that time emphasized that a clarity of purpose and commitment, along with strategic and operational plans to address the areas listed above, would advance educational effectiveness and institutional capacity through the alignment of resources and institutional priorities.

VUSC's response in 2017 indicated they were working on accelerating timelines for integrating and implementing strategic and operation planning based on the continuous improvement model. VUSC stated that the strategic operational planning process was a priority and to support this, the president appointed a Director of Operational Strategic Planning and Special Projects reporting directly to the president.

In response to the 2020 special visit request, VUSC explained that their use of the Paterson model (StratOp) has enabled them to approach strategic planning in a constructive way. The steps taken to implement the model included building the team, building the process, monitoring implementation, and realignment of functions. VUSC provided evidence to demonstrate that they have made significant progress in these areas since 2017. Specifically, building the team was led by the appointment of both a Dean of Strategy and Innovation and a Dean of Missional Effectiveness who subsequently collaborated with the President's Cabinet to engage in strategic planning. As VUSC pursued building the process, they intentionally focused

on integrating strategy and innovation, missional alignment, and the academic plan. In analyzing this synergy, VUSC identified critical interdependencies across operational units, opportunities for articulation between vice-presidential areas, and a rejuvenation of the overall strategic planning process. It was reported that weekly interactions led to greater ownership, responsibility, and accountability for university-wide strategic planning. VUSC provided their W.I.N. Wheel as evidence of increasing participation and engagement in strategic planning. The final step, growth in integration and implementation of strategic and operational plans, was evidenced through example case studies. Included were strategic partnerships with other faith-based institutions to build enrollment and generate revenue, a focus on online learning, and a dual degree program with Trinity College. VUSC indicates that these partnerships required operational planning, resources, and accountability and supported their efforts towards strengthening strategic planning.

The COVID-19 pandemic was also referenced as an example where VUSC relied on their previous planning and ultimately their preparedness in meeting the challenges of a major pivot from traditional face-to-face undergraduate programs to emergency remote instruction. VUSC reports that they were able to rapidly move to an online platform that delivered quality academic and comprehensive student experiences through the reallocation of funds and prioritization of efforts in support of online learning and faculty training. Additionally, VUSC succeeded in moving professional studies programs in management and psychology to an online format. VUSC reports that through analyzing lessons learned from the pandemic, successful practices and new strategies will be integrated into subsequent stages of planning and this in turn will make for a more resilient institution.

In response to the third issue regarding strategic planning, the visiting team reviewed the submitted documentation and conducted interviews that identified multiple plans that are in process. While the use of StratOp has positioned VUSC with the resources to develop planning, facilitation of strategic objectives appears to be elusive. Interviews detailed operational planning efforts that seemed to consist of a number of plans that were yet to be finalized and implemented. Additionally, the existing structure of faculty self-governance, i.e., the faculty senate, appeared to be changed without having an alternate plan in place. A new faculty governance model was proposed, without modifying the faculty handbook to accommodate the change. Interviews also indicated that the university would benefit if senior administration better communicated their plans and implementation steps to a wider audience on campus, and broadened the opportunities for collaboration in the early stages of strategy.

VUSC is blessed to have faculty and staff who are committed to the success of VUSC and this is something that administration would be well served to recognize, nurture and harness as they move forward in achieving the mission, vision, and values of the university.

The team's finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that VUSC has made positive steps towards organizing and developing strategic and operation planning but would benefit from an intentional inclusion of a broader spectrum on campus to operationalize strategic plans and a broad communications method (CFR 4.6).

Issue 4: Ensuring support services targeted at closing the achievement gap for students of color, particularly Hispanic students

VUSC's 2017 institutional review showed that Vanguard had taken important steps towards the assessment and improvement of students' success (CFR 4.1). There was evidence that the University was taking a more data-driven approach to understanding the retention and

completion rates of diverse groups of students, although their institutional research capacity was limited (CFR 4.2. or 4.3).. The VUSC student success team and others designed interventions to close the achievement gaps for different student populations, including the use of a new software system called ADVISE that would allow them to track detailed information about student progress. At the time of the 2017 review, Vanguard showed progress in student success outcomes for many student groups, except Hispanic students. Also, at the time of the last visit, the retention rate for the Hispanic student population had dipped 5%, from 84.4% to 79.4%. The graduation completion rates for these students had also sustained decline, falling more than 20% and then holding steady for the past 5 years. The Hispanic completion rate also consistently ran 5%+ lower than the overall University-completion rate. Given the large increases in Hispanic-student enrollment, resulting in Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) status, the achievement gap was a concern to the 2017 review team.

There was evidence during the special visit that VUSC continues to make progress in closing the achievement gap for Hispanic students. Data from the Retention Graduation 2013-2020 VUSC Report showed that the overall retention rates remained steady since the last visit, with rates at 81.6% in 2018, 82.6% in 2019, and 81.5% in 2020. Hispanic student retention increased from slightly below to slightly above the overall retention rate, with the rates at 80.2% in 2018, 81.7% in 2019 and 82.2% in 2020. The 6-year graduation rate data also showed progress. The rates for the 2014 cohorts were higher compared to the 2013 and 2011 cohorts. However, the dip in the graduate rate for the 2013 cohort means that these gains could be temporary. Still, there is evidence that Vanguard has had early successes in closing the achievement gap for Hispanic students (CFR 2.10, CFR 2.11, CFR 2.13). The team encourages them to continue on their student success path.

While Vanguard has been successful in retaining some groups of students, keeping retention rates consistently high for all students of color remains a challenge. Retention rates continued to be lower for African American students compared to other ethnic groups, with rates at 77.9% in 2018, to 80.3% in 2019 and 72.3% in 2020.

The pandemic appeared to impact 2019 to 2020 retention as well. Residential student retention decreased by 2.2%, most likely due to the necessary closing of residential housing. Female retention decreased by 1.4% while male retention decreased by 0.5%. The SV report indicates that student survey data showed that female students were more likely to report considering pausing their education for financial reasons. The decrease in female retention in 2020 was mostly likely the reason for the drop in White female first-time student retention in 2020.

During the last review, VUSC was developing additional support systems to benefit historically underrepresented student groups at Vanguard, with many activities funded by a 5-year Title V grant. Student affairs was developing opportunities for cultural sensitivity and growth (CFR 2.13). Student groups centered around identity were being formed and the Office of Spiritual Formation and the Athletics Department increased their programming and staff. Students had expressed strong support and appreciation for the dedication of the faculty and staff, repeatedly citing their hard work and dedication to student success.

Vanguard's 2020 report and interviews with staff, faculty, and student leaders provided evidence that the student success team has continued their data-driven approach to providing students with resources they need to be successful. The team has been using student survey data for continuous improvement in student support in many several key areas: academic, financial and basic needs, marketing, policy, and spirituality. The 2020 SV report describes internal and

external faculty development with training and tools for Culturally-Responsive Teaching (CRT), including workshops, webinars, and courses. Fifteen faculty participated in Yale University's Inclusive Teaching Summer Institute on Scientific Teaching and support continued as the University moved to remote teaching in response to the pandemic. Freshman undergraduate students also experienced training through a cornerstone class as part of a culturally-informed curriculum.

In response to financial and basic needs, VUSC established the Living Well Community Resource Center, which opened in January 2020. The University reported that funds from the Title V grant will be used to add financial literacy education into the curriculum. To address issues of psychological safety and voice, the student government created Courageous Conversations, which are confidential gatherings to discuss issues with peers. Marketing materials and family admissions events are now provided in both Spanish and English. Fees and fines have been reviewed and, in some cases, reduced to provide financial relief to economically vulnerable students, especially due the pandemic. The total number of credit hours to graduate was reduced from 124 to 120. Multiethnic representation in spiritual leaders has increased.

Interviews with the staff, faculty, and student leaders provided evidence that the offices in student success, spiritual formation, and academic affairs collaborate regularly on many initiatives to help students feel prepared academically, socially, and spiritually (CFR 2.10, CFR 2.11, CFR 2.13) and to support greater diversity and inclusion (CFR 1.4; WSCUC Equity and Inclusion Policy). Yet, staff and faculty were also aware that VUSC is not retaining and graduating all of the student groups at high levels, as the retention and graduation data shows. There are several grant-funded initiatives around access. Vanguard is building pipelines into the

STEM fields for Hispanic students and bridges into graduate programs for African American students.

Faculty and staff discussed how they mentor students to use existing resources because survey data suggested that students often do not know services are available. Student leaders discussed how a strong feeling of belonging was key to staying and thriving at Vanguard and then praised the programs created by these offices. Data from Remote Learning Student Success survey also supports Vanguard's approach to student success through addressing basic and academic needs, providing a culturally-informed curriculum, and building community.

The team's finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that VUSC has made significant progress in ensuring support services targeted at closing the achievement gap for Hispanic students, but progress is still to be made to ensure that all student groups are successful (CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.13). The University is positioned to meet challenges in the future in this regard through their use of productive partnerships across campus.

Issue 5: Increasing the number and diversity of faculty and staff sufficient to support students' and programmatic needs (CFR 3.1, WSCUC Diversity Policy)

VUSC's institutional review in 2017 found that while VUSC core values included diversity, it also acknowledged an earlier concern about their ability to hire and retain a diverse faculty. The visiting team at the time recognized the considerable work that had been done and noted the commitment by the Chief Diversity Officer in developing a diverse and inclusive student community. VUSC's comprehensive human sustainability strategy had also been noted for improving the recruitment and retention of qualified employees but the team felt that more could be done. VUSC in their 2017 response stated that they were committed to providing the

appropriate number of faculty and staff to support student learning and program needs while ensuring support for these faculty and staff.

VUSC's submitted documents for the 2020 special visit included charts and tables supporting their efforts to increase diversity. Total percentage of black employees rose from 3.3% in 2015 to 4.6% in 2020. Hispanic employee numbers increased from 9.2% in 2015 to 14.8% in 2020. Overall, VUSC reported that minority faculty and staff increased from 26% to 37% over the period of December 2015 to November 2020. Also included in the report was that over 50% of VUSC faculty are first-generation college graduates which VUSC believes allows underserved populations to find role models among their faculty. VUSC attributes the increase in minority faculty to their intentional use of targeted advertising and their inclusivity training for VUSC search committees.

In support of programmatic needs, the members of the Academic and Administrative task forces were asked to review all academic and administrative programs. The goal was to better align resources with institutional priorities, strengthen program quality, and provide the greatest return on investment for both students and stakeholders. The recommendation formulated by the task force was tiered over five categories ranging from programs that were mission-aligned, in high demand, and most ready for additional resources to those that were deemed non-essential, underperforming, or had declining relevance. Identified tiers were: Programs Retained with Higher Level of Support, Programs Retained at Neutral Level of Support, Programs Retained at Lower Level of Support, Programs to be Re-engineered, Restructured or Combined, Programs for Reduction, Phasing Out or Consolidation. As a reference, Tier One contained 22 campus programs, Tier Two consisted of 33 campus programs, Tier Three had 8 campus programs, Tier

Four identified 57 campus programs, and in Tier Five, a total of 10 campus programs were identified.

Results from the findings of the task force were mixed – there was an additional reduction of personnel to 545 in 2018 from 551 in 2017 and then a growth to 587 as of November 2020. In VUSC’s 2020 report it was stated that finding the best structure and personnel levels was a work in progress. VUSC reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, to date, they have not laid off or furloughed any employees but rather shortened 10- and 11-month contracts to 9 months and increased teaching load to 5/5 for one academic year. VUSC was candid in their response in stating that faculty faced increased strain due to preparing each course in multiple modalities, the unanticipated high enrollment in online courses, and the expectation to provide a highly personalized experience. Additionally, these issues contributed to the potential for not meeting student expectations. Overall VUSC reported that they remain committed to aligning resources with institutional priorities and to provide programs that not only offer the highest possible value to both students and stakeholders but also meet quality standards. According to VUSC, there has been a significant increase in ethnic diversity of faculty and staff and the Organizational Health Team continues to develop ways to promote VUSC as an employer of choice.

During the visiting team’s discussions on the effectiveness of VUSC's approach, senior administration stated they needed to “come up with ways to get the pulse of the faculty.” Faculty, on the other hand, reported a disconnect and the lack of effective communication – one faculty’s perspective was that “whatever the administration does we continue to do what we do – teach.”

The visiting team’s finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that VUSC has made progress in ensuring diversity of their faculty and staff but that additional work needs to be done on making sure that both planned and incorporated changes do, in fact, result in increased student success and address programmatic needs (CFR 2.10 and 2.13).

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE

There were no additional topics.

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

VUSC’s report and response to the team’s information requests demonstrated that the institution had prepared a careful and thoughtful reflection for this Special Visit. The report responded to each of the issues in the WSCUC Commission’s letter. Interviews with Board of Trustees members, administration, faculty, staff, and students showed steady progress and a commitment to continuous improvement. Vanguard appears to have a clear sense of the challenges it faces ahead and the ability to meet them. The team found no areas of non-compliance with the standards or federal policy requirements. As an encouragement for future directions, the team offers commendations and recommendations below:

Commendations

The team would like to commend Vanguard University of Southern California for the following:

1. The consistent and long-term use of a strategic and continuous planning model aligned with the University’s mission, vision, and values. This enabled Vanguard to agilely respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (CFR 4.6 and 4.7);

2. The significant increase in net assets, growth in traditional undergraduate and graduate enrollment, increased diversification of major revenue sources, strategic use of debt financing in a low interest rate environment, success in raising funds including grant awards, and the growth in endowment assets over the last four years (CFR 3.4);
3. The productive partnership with student and academic affairs and the evidence-based practices implemented by the student success team, producing early results in closing the achievement gap among Hispanic students (CFR 2.10, CFR 2.11, CFR 2.13);
4. The progress made by the collaboration of student success, spiritual formation, and academic affairs offices on diversity and inclusion for students through curriculum development and co-curricular programming (CFR 1.4; WSCUC Equity and Inclusion Policy).

Recommendations

The team recommends that Vanguard University of Southern California must:

1. Ensure reflection and planning with all appropriate constituencies when aligning strategic priorities with academic programs by developing and instituting collaborative processes (CFR 4.5);
2. Ensure effective academic leadership by the faculty by actively and collaboratively engaging faculty in developing and applying clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes (CFR 3.7 and 3.10);
3. Review faculty and staff policies, including the faculty handbook, to ensure they are well developed, consistent, communicated, and applied (CFR 1.7 and 3.2);

4. Support data-informed strategic planning and operational decision making by providing sufficient institutional research capacity, including the use of key performance indicators to measure success (CFR 4.1 and 4.2);
5. Apply mission and data-informed efforts more broadly to increase retention and close the achievement gaps for disaggregated student groups (CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.13);
6. Effectively meet the challenges of the rapidly changing higher education environment by continuing to focus on diversifying revenue sources, building the endowment, and addressing enrollment management (CFR 3.4, 4.7).
7. Provide sufficient resources (e.g., faculty, staff, facilities, marketing, etc.) for innovation and new programs while continuing to adequately support retained programs (CFR 3.1, 3.3, 3.5).