

# REPORT OF THE WSCUC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM

To

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology  
2301 Vine St  
Berkeley, CA 94708

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 WASC Senior College and University Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission.

The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WASC website.

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## **SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### *A. Description of the Institution and Visit*

The Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT) was established as St. Albert's College (SAC) in 1931 by the Western Dominican Province (hereafter, "Province"). From the outset, the Province envisioned a twofold mission for SAC: 1) advancing the intellectual development of the Province's friars and 2) carrying out educational outreach to the Dominican communities in the Province region which comprise the Dominican Laity—i.e., religious communities of Dominican monks and nuns, parishes served by Dominican priests, and lay Dominicans.

Approximately 30 years after its establishment, SAC sought WSCUC accreditation to further develop and meet its broad mission to the laity. SAC was granted initial accreditation by WSCUC in 1964. That same year, SAC joined the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) "to more fully engage contemporary scholarship and the challenges of contemporary society." Further, GTU membership "provided additional resources for teaching and research, along with increased diversity on many different levels." In 1976, SAC moved to leased space in Berkeley, CA and changed its name to the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology. In 2004, the Province invested in DSPT by purchasing the property at 2301 Vine Street.

Toward fulfilling its mission to the laity, DSPT "draws its students into the rich tradition of classical philosophy and Catholic theology, especially as exemplified by St. Thomas Aquinas, and from the tradition engages contemporary scholarship and culture in mutual enrichment." At present, DSPT continues its "long-standing pedagogical approach of the Dominican Order that places philosophy as the foundation for theological inquiry." The School asserts a unique position "among Catholic institutes of higher education in the U.S. as being the only school to offer a fully integrated concurrent MA program in philosophy and theology." Further, DSPT is the only institution in the GTU to offer a graduate program in classical philosophy, thereby making a unique contribution to the GTU consortium.

To date, DSPT remains a WSCUC accredited institution. This team report is submitted in response to the WSCUC Commission's actions of June 22-24, 2011 to reaffirm accreditation of DSPT and call for a Special Visit in the fall of 2014 to address issues raised in the Commission's action letter dated July 5, 2011. The WSCUC Special Visit was originally planned as a joint visit with the Association of Theological Schools, Commission on Accreditation (ATS/COC). However, a joint visit did not occur. Thus, this report solely reflects the observations, findings, commendations and recommendations of the WSCUC Special Visit team (hereafter, "the team").

### Relevant Accreditation Actions

Since its initial accreditation, DSPT has been subject to several Special Visits focusing on the School's compliance with Standard 3. Specifically, the Commission has expressed persistent concerns (1988, 1993, and 2002) in respect to the structure and functioning of the governing board, development and fundraising, and institutional financial planning. DSPT last underwent a comprehensive review by WSCUC and ATS/COC in March 2002. The Commission last reaffirmed accreditation in March 2012. Below are relevant highlights of SAC/DSPT accreditation history.

St. Albert's College was granted initial WSCUC accreditation in 1964. The Commission first reaffirmed accreditation in 1967 for two (2) years and subsequently approved an institutional request for a one-year extension of accreditation in 1969. The Commission reaffirmed accreditation in 1970 for five (5) years, and requested an interim report on enrollment due in 1973. A comprehensive review of the institution was postponed until spring 1980. However, the fifth-year visit and associated interim report of 1974 and 1975, respectively, resulted in a one-day interim visit scheduled in 1978. The interim visit focused on the recommendations of the comprehensive visit evaluation team. The Commission reaffirmed accreditation in 1978 and requested an interim report, due in spring of 1980, to address "establishment of the new Board of Trustees, progress in development and student recruitment, [and] progress in developing a more structured MA in philosophy." Subsequently, the Commission requested brief addenda to annual reports in 1981 and 1982 focusing on the "development and election of the Board of Trustees."

A fifth-year visit scheduled for the spring of 1983 was changed to a comprehensive visit in order to accommodate and coincide with an ATS/COC visit. In 1983, the Commission reaffirmed accreditation and called for an expanded fifth-year visit in the spring of 1988 to be conducted by a WSCUC “three-person team with expertise in administration, governance, theology and philosophy.” The Commission reaffirmed accreditation in 1988, but expressed a central concern “over the School’s lack of compliance with Standard 3.” Consequently, the Commission requested a Special Visit in the spring of 1991 to “determine compliance with Standard 3 in respect to structure and function of the governing board.” Due to institutional capacity issues, in respect to difficulty managing “an overload of visits,” DSPT requested and was granted a change of the Special Visit date from spring 1991 to spring of 1993 in order to coincide with an ATS/COC visit. Further, since the last comprehensive visit was conducted in spring of 1983, with a fifth-year visit in 1988, the Special Visit was changed to a comprehensive visit.

The Commission reaffirmed accreditation in 1993 and requested a Special Visit in the spring of 1997 focused on concerns regarding the physical plant location, Board of Trustees development and fundraising, and library usage. In March 1998, the Commission accepted the Special Visit report. However, the Commission requested a follow-up report by November 1, 1998 addressing progress made in respect: 1) assuring the present and future housing of DSPT, 2) establishing and implementing a comprehensive financial plan for DSPT, and 3) actions taken toward exploring an appropriate governance structure for DSPT. Per request of the institution, a comprehensive visit scheduled for spring of 2001 was changed to spring 2002 to accommodate a coordinated visit with ATS/COC.

Following the 2002 comprehensive visit, jointly conducted with ATS/COC, the Commission reaffirmed accreditation and requested a Special Visit in spring of 2005. In June 2005, the Commission accepted the Special Visit report and noted a request for a Progress Report by March 1, 2006 to address progress in the following areas: 1) governance; 2) finances, including fundraising; 3) the acquisition and move to the 2301 Vine Street facility; and 4) assessment of student learning and program review. In May 2006, the Interim Report Committee (IRC)

reviewed the Progress Report requested by the Commission. DSPT was commended for taking positive steps to address the Commission's concerns. However, recommendations for improvements in all noted areas of concern were cited by the IRC. Moreover, the IRC requested a subsequent Progress Report due on March 1, 2007 to address the areas of concern cited by the Commission in June 2005, with added specificity. In response to the March 1, 2007 Progress Report submitted by DSPT, the IRC once again noted progress in the following areas: 1) governance, 2) facilities, 3) finance, and 4) assessment. However, another Progress Report addressing the four areas of concern was requested, due March 1, 2008. In light of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) in spring 2009, the IRC accepted the interim report in April 2008 and no further institutional actions were requested.

A CPR visit was jointly conducted with ATS/COC in March 2009. The Commission accepted the CPR report, continued accreditation, and rescheduled the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) from fall 2010 to spring 2011. At its June 2011 meeting, the Commission reaffirmed accreditation and requested a Special Visit in fall 2014 to address the following issues cited in the EER report: 1) strategic planning, 2) financial planning and stability, 3) board development, 4) assessment of student learning outcomes, and 5) program review. Various WSCUC actions, visits and reports evidence that current issues are persistent concerns throughout the accreditation history of the DSPT. It was the intent of the Special Visit report, submitted by the institution, and this team's review to describe and assess the nature and impact of DSPT efforts to address the Commission's most recent concerns in its action letter dated July 5, 2011. This team report is organized in sections that explicate the overall progress of DSPT in attending to the Commission's concerns.

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

The DSPT community was well prepared for the Special Visit and was aware of its importance. The Special Visit report prepared by DSPT and submitted to WSCUC addressed each of the issues raised by the Commission in its action letters and correspondence. DSPT was forthcoming in providing additional information requested by the team. During the visit all persons with whom the team met were open, positive and candid.

DSPT faculty, administrators, Trustees, and the President were aware of and very positive about progress made by DSPT in addressing the Commission's concerns. Four current students with whom the team met conveyed positive DSPT experiences, making particular mention of the strong faculty and esprit de corps of a student body dually comprised of Dominican friars and lay persons. Overall, the tone on the campus was positive and confident about the future. The team was impressed with the dedication of all present on the visit to the mission and unique culture of DSPT, and the commitment to maintaining the educational quality of its programs.

### *C. Description of the Team's Review Process*

The team was well chosen for this particular special visit. Two members had extensive experience at small, faith-based colleges and one had extensive experience at the graduate level. Team members were well prepared by their respective educational experience to focus on the areas which required attention. To prepare for the visit the team carefully reviewed the materials submitted by DSPT to WSCUC and all correspondence from WSCUC to the DSPT. Team members were unified in their approach from the time of the pre-visit conference call through the visit itself and the preparation of this report. Since the DSPT is small the team decided to focus the visit on extensive interviews with key administrators, staff, and board members.

The team organized its efforts to focus on five issues that were highlighted in the action letters and Commission correspondence with the institution leading up to this Special Visit. Each team member assumed primary responsibility for one or more of the five issue areas. The team vice chair served as a secondary reviewer. DSPT has a small staff so the team was able to attend most meetings together. All team members participated in key interviews with the Trustees, Chancellor, President, Academic Dean, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Advancement and Donor Relations, and Directors of Admissions, Marketing and Communications.

The meetings were informative and the discussions candid. The institution provided all requested materials electronically, including the Special Visit report, so the team was able to

complete most of its document review and verification in advance of the visit. The visit served to validate and clarify information provided in those documents.

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

The Commission action letter of July 5, 2011 noted the following issues as requiring DSPT attention for a Special Visit:

- 1) Strategic Planning (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
- 2) Financial Planning and Sustainability (CFR 3.5)
- 3) Board Development (CFR 3.9)
- 4) Student Learning Outcomes (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 4.6, 4.7)
- 5) Program Review (CFR 2.7)

This report summarizes the team's findings regarding these issues.

### **1) Strategic Planning**

**Issues:** DSPT presented a “basic outline of a strategic plan” during its February 23-25, 2011 EER visit. The Commission noted in its July 5, 2011 action letter that DSPT should “make the plan more comprehensive and complete.” Further, the Commission emphasized an “accelerated” need for DSPT to “move away from a perpetual state of planning” and evidence the existence of a “comprehensive strategic plan fully developed and being implemented with measurable outcomes, metrics, accountability, and timelines.” (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

**Observations and Conclusions:** The team examined the FY14-FY18 Strategic Plan and supplemental 2014 Operating Plans presented in the appendices to the Special Visit report. The extant 5-year Strategic Plan is significantly more developed than a “basic outline” and includes thoughtful sections on strategic initiatives and performance metrics. The complementary Operating Plans detail action items associated with six (6) strategic initiatives and calendars

marketing and communications support for recruitment and development events. Key staff interviewed convincingly evidenced awareness, collaborative contributions and use of the Operating Plans. Moreover, DSPT key administrators evidence a cogent understanding and clear articulation of the connections between the Operating Plans and 5-year Strategic Plan. Although still a work in progress, the team finds DSPT efforts in strategic planning to be commendable and concludes that the institution has adequately addressed the Commission's concerns in this area. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

**Concerns:** DSPT should continue institutional efforts to shift its management paradigm to mid- and long-term strategic thinking and planning rather than short term crisis management and control that have necessarily been a dominant mode of operating until recently. Making the recommended shift in organization and practice is a cultural transition that may take several years to fully realize. (CFRs 1.1, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

## **2) Financial Planning and Sustainability**

**Issues:** The Commission noted in its July 5, 2011 action letter that DSPT “continues to borrow from its endowment” and therefore needs “to take steps toward greater self-sustainability such as appointing an advancement officer to enhance fundraising and developing stronger enrollment management capabilities to ensure viable enrollment numbers and desirable balance of lay students and friars.” Further, the Commission noted concern regarding the diminishing number of friars “being trained” at DSPT in conjunction with the financial impact of a persistent dependence on the Province “to cover regular operational deficits.” (CFRs 3.5, 4.2, 4.3)

**Observations and Conclusions:** According to the Management Letter which prefaced the audit for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2013, the unrestricted current funds deficit increased from \$655,000 on June 30, 2012 to approximately \$710,000 on June 30, 2013. As of June 30, 2013 the Unrestricted Current Fund had borrowed approximately \$676,000 over a number of years from the Endowment Funds to cover these deficits leaving about \$1 million remaining in the endowment. The amount borrowed includes all of the available temporarily restricted funds and some permanently restricted funds as well. “At a minimum,” the auditors note, “to ensure that the value of the endowment fund endures, the School should develop a plan to repay the

interfund balance amount that affects these assets.” During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013, the School appropriated and spent the amount that had been budgeted for the endowment draw but this amount was \$6,286 in excess of the calculation according to the School’s endowment spending policy. (CFR 3.4)

The team interviewed the Chief Financial Officer, who has been at the DSPT for one year and brings broad financial experience from the for-profit sector to the position. He appears knowledgeable, committed to the mission of the DSPT, and skilled in the areas of budgeting and financial management. He has oversight of a lean budget and a “bottom up” budgeting process. To partially address the DSPT’s financial challenges, tuition has been increased from \$650 per unit in FY13 to \$675 per unit in FY14. According to the 5-year Financial Plan, DSPT plans to increase tuition 3% per annum to the rate of \$750 per unit in FY19. The projected rate of tuition increases is comparable to those of other schools in the GTU. The annual \$50,000 draw from the endowment was made in August and the CFO anticipates having to make \$50,000 draws in December and again in the spring. The CFO has instituted monthly cash flow reports and meets weekly with the president and chief development officer to track donations and other revenue. (CFRs 1.7, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.8, 4.6)

The School’s Special Visit Report indicates that DSPT has taken numerous steps to address its new enrollment (i.e., recruitment and admissions) challenges. Recently, a DSPT alumna has been appointed to a redesigned Director of Admissions position that will place greater emphasis on recruitment than has been the case in the past. The newly appointed director was interviewed during the Special Visit and appears to be capable, energetic, and engaging. In response to the trend decline in Province-supported Dominican students, and in a counter initiative to recruit more lay students, the director has planned recruitment activities which include visits to key recruitment events, to DSPT feeder schools, and to campus ministry sites staffed by priests of the Province. (CFRs 3.1, 3.3)

According to the 5-year Strategic Plan, efforts will be made to increase the profile of the DSPT locally/regionally, nationally, and on the web. To that end, the Directors of Marketing and Communications are working collaboratively with the Director of Admissions and an outside consultant to create a more engaging website to attract new students and donors. Further, a clear

process for earlier prospect engagement and follow through to application and enrollment is being developed. To augment her recruitment skills, the Director of Admissions has joined and is active in local graduate admissions professional organizations (e.g., Bay Area Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals – BAGAP). (CFR 3.4)

DSPT is highly tuition dependent; therefore, the School relies heavily on student enrollment to sustain financial stability. The current FTE enrollment of 56 students is down from 69 in 2013-14 and down from 72 in 2012-13. Shortly before the commencement of the Special Visit, the Team Chair received a letter from the DSPT president indicating that FTE for 2014-15 fell short of the budgeted projection of 65 students by 9 students. This enrollment shortage resulted in a \$145,800 deficit in budgeted tuition income for 2014-15. (CFR 3.4)

According to the 5-year Strategic Plan, “DSPT’s development efforts need to make great strides in procuring more contributed revenue to mitigate its current financial challenges and bring it closer in line with comparable giving levels and endowment holdings reported by peer schools.” Unrestricted and temporarily restricted gifts and grants totaled \$356,226 in FY12, \$460,642 in FY13, and \$452,022 in FY14. The budgeted goal for FY15 (a goal which assumed an FTE enrollment of 65) is \$537,500, a 19% increase over last year. The budget deficit created by the shortfall in FTE enrollment means additional revenue will have to be raised or secured from some other source. (CFR 3.4)

The team met with the Director of Advancement and Donor Relations. He has been at the DSPT for three years, and like all senior staff, is capable, committed to the mission of the DSPT, and engaging in his presentation of the case for support. He is focusing his efforts on a small group of major donors and on regular solicitation of the DSPT’s 2,000 or so current donors. Essentially a “one person shop,” he is intent on increasing the giving of those who already know the DSPT. He will also work to increase the amount of money (presently about \$70,000) raised at the DSPT’s annual fundraising dinner. He has put in place a plan which identifies potential sources for the budgeted need of \$537,500, and says that the president is receptive to his guidance about cultivating and soliciting potential major donors. He is also reaching out to donors who have already contributed funds to endow scholarships and is asking them to consider increasing the size of their endowments. On top of everything else, he is mindful of the importance of

cultivating planned gifts, and he said that at a later time he will consider conducting acquisition mailings to broaden the donor base. (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 4.6)

The team's final interview was with the Provincial of the Western Dominican Province. The DSPT, in his words, "is an essential ministry of the Dominican Province." The Province is overseen by a Board of Corporate Members, another name for the Provincial Council. The Provincial Council is responsible for appointing the president and dean of the DSPT. The Provincial is aware of the recruitment and development challenges the DSPT is facing and to improve communications the Provincial intends to organize two joint meetings of the DSPT Board of Trustees and the Board of Corporate Members each year. The Province currently provides a \$180,000 subsidy each year to the DSPT and virtually free rent (\$1 per year) for the DSPT's campus. (CFR 3.4)

**Concerns:** The DSPT must raise significant funds if it is to eliminate its cumulative deficit, repay its endowment, and begin to operate on a break-even basis. In a time of budget shortfalls, and in the interest of husbanding scarce financial resources, the institution may be tempted to devote insufficient resources to the critical areas of fundraising and student recruitment. The DSPT must strive to avoid a "penny-wise, pound foolish" approach to its challenges and make every effort to adequately staff and fund the pursuit of donations and students. (CFR 3.4)

The team believes that DSPT is making positive strides in its use and analysis of financial and marketing data to better inform recruitment strategies. Going forward, however, advancing DSPT's institutional capacity for making data-driven decisions requires strong commitment from executive leadership, adequate technical resources, and sufficient staff with analytical expertise. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 4.1)

Some students who are interested in the DSPT and are qualified for admission opt to go elsewhere because of the generous financial assistance offered by other institutions. Thus, strong efforts will be needed by the Director of Advancement and Donor Relations to raise more funds for scholarships. The changing demographics of DSPT, with fewer Dominican friars and a consequent need for more lay students, calls for heightened fundraising and increased financial aid to improve DSPT's ability to compete with other schools in attracting lay students. (CFR 3.4)

Based on interviews with the CFO and Academic Dean, the team concludes that DSPT views maintaining strong institutional and program enrollment as a shared responsibility, across various organizational units and staff respectively. Ultimately, however, one office is accountable for securing projected enrollments. As the senior leader with oversight over admissions, the Academic Dean has responsibility for achieving enrollment goals, and therefore must have aligned authority to inform all institution decisions that impact enrollment. (CFRs 3.6, 3.7)

It is critically important that DSPT begin developing a comprehensive enrollment management plan that is grounded by the 5-year Strategic Plan, tightly integrated with the 5-year Financial Plan, builds on and extends the Operating Plans, and serves as an institutional guide to best ensure student success. Executive leadership needs to champion an inclusive, comprehensive and coherent initiative to develop a comprehensive enrollment management plan comprised of sub-plans for marketing, recruitment and retention. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

### **3) Board Development**

**Issues:** In its July 5, 2011 action letter, the Commission urged DSPT's diligent "action on initiatives to enhance the board's effectiveness," including:

- Engaging the board in the creation of DSPT's comprehensive strategic plan
- Encouraging the board to play an active role in fundraising
- Identifying a clearer delineation of responsibilities of the Board of the Corporation operated by the Province and the Board of Trustees

**Observations and Conclusions:** The team met with four members of the Board of Trustees and was impressed by their commitment to the DSPT. Board engagement with the challenges facing the DSPT seems high. DSPT reports that the development committee of the Board has been reactivated. A Board policy manual has been prepared and implemented. The Board approves and reviews the annual strategic plan of the School. A committee structure which is well aligned with the Strategic Plan has been put into place and progress on the plan is being monitored.

These developments are noteworthy since up until 2007 or so the DSPT was governed by the Province and no Board of Trustees specific to the DSPT existed. (CFR 3.9)

The DSPT president is knowledgeable about, and deeply committed to, the mission of the institution. He has an understanding of the DSPT's place in the world of Catholic graduate level education and the ability to convince others of the importance of the DSPT's work. He is aware of the challenges facing the School and has assigned staff and allocated resources (to the extent that the available resources permit) in ways which are intended to meet the challenges. He has also worked to increase Board involvement in governance and oversight, particularly with regard to strategic planning and budgeting (especially the latter). (CFRs 3.6, 3.8)

The president has communicated his intention to retire to both the Board and senior staff. A search for a successor is underway. The president has promised to remain in office until a successor has been chosen from among the priests in the Province and a reasonable transition—including introduction of the new president to major donors—has taken place. A Presidential search committee consisting of two trustees, two faculty, and two members of the governing board of the Province has been formed and seems to be proceeding in a deliberate and well organized way. With input from all stakeholders, a position description emphasizing student recruitment, development, and strong administrative skills has been drawn up. Candidates must be friars from the Province and the Board chair noted that several candidates have applied or been nominated. The application/nomination period is about to conclude and the process will continue with interviews of the candidates conducted by the faculty, trustees, and the Provincial Council. (CFRs 3.8, 3.9)

**Concerns:** The appointment of a president is always one of the most important responsibilities of a board of trustees and is especially so when an institution is facing the kinds of challenges the DSPT is facing. The board must continue to guide this process carefully and deliberately, bring it to a satisfactory conclusion, and, once a new president has been selected, ensure that a smooth transition takes place and that the new president proactively leads the effort to secure more students and revenue. (CFRs 3.6, 3.8, 3.9)

#### 4) Student Learning Outcomes

**Issues:** The Commission noted in its July 5, 2011 action letter that DSPT’s portfolio system, which is the “primary means of assessing student learning in the program,” should be thoroughly developed and the results used to inform and make improvements in learning outcomes.” (CFR 2.7)

**Observations and Conclusions:** The team reviewed evidence and conducted interviews to determine whether the initiatives and processes related to the evaluation of student learning outcomes had begun to provide meaningful information to inform curricular and programmatic improvements. The team reviewed the following documents: Student Outcomes MA Theology Pilot Summary, Student Outcomes MA Theology Score Pilot Master, Program Review Student Survey Results, MA Philosophy Colloquium Syllabus, MA Thesis Tools Workshop Survey 2014, MDiv Program Updates, MA Theology Goals Revision Proposal 2014, Portfolio Review Research Readiness Paper Thesis Data Summary, and the Portfolio Review Goals Outcomes Summary. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 4.3, 4.4)

Additionally the team met with the Portfolio Review Committee. In an effort to augment and enhance its evaluation of student learning outcomes, DSPT made changes to the midway conversation with students in order to increase the likelihood of making midcourse corrections for both students and program needs. The Portfolio Review Committee, at the direction of the Academic Dean, has engaged in more refined and focused analyses of data involved in student portfolios. This analysis resulted in findings related to lower than expected scores in Academic Writing and Collaborative Learning. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 4.3, 4.4)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that as a result of analyses of the portfolio system faculty have taken steps to update institutional goals, adopt a single grading scale for more reliable grading of student work, realigned the Research Readiness Paper and Thesis Review forms so that they are more comparable, and have engaged in more meaningful analysis of the level of alignment between program learning objectives and course objectives (as evidenced in the MA Theology Goals Revision Document). (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 4.3, 4.4)

These efforts in overall assessment of student portfolios are commendable. It will be helpful to continue to refine this work in two important areas. First it will be useful to engage the faculty widely to make certain that the program learning objectives are fully linked vertically to both the institutional objectives and course objectives. It is clear that this is becoming a more intentional process and should continue. Secondly it is important to keep closing the loop as insights into the program's learning objectives are surfaced. This completion of the improvement learning cycle has begun to bear fruit. It will be helpful moving forward to make certain that discoveries are both well documented and that the Regular Faculty are kept involved in regular discussions and plans for improvement (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.3, 4.4).

**Concerns:** Based on a review of Special Visit Report, written documents, and visit interviews the team has no significant concerns about DSPT's response to the Commission's concerns about the School's portfolio system development and use in terms of informing and making improvements in learning outcomes. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 4.3, 4.4)

## 5) Program Review

**Issues:** The Commission noted in its July 5, 2011 action letter that DSPT should "have a formal program review process implemented, with a regular schedule of program reviews in place and at least once initial program review completed." (CFR 2.7)

**Observations and Conclusions:** The team reviewed documents and conducted interviews to determine whether DSPT faculty has instituted a comprehensive and substantive program review process. The team met with the following individuals and groups: the Dean, the Portfolio Review Committee, and selected MA students. In response to the Commission action letter, DSPT formalized a new Program Review Process as evidenced in the General Plan of the Review Cycle for Academic Programs Document. The Academic Programs Document outlines who is responsible for program review, the schedule of reviews as well as prescribing the essential elements of the review documents that are to be prepared. The plan is thoughtful, reasonable and

well documented. The School's Special Visit Report outlines the outcomes and results of the program reviews for the MA Philosophy, MA Theology and MDiv degrees. (CFR 2.7)

The results of the programmatic reviews were illuminating. Among the findings related to the MA Philosophy that were highlighted by DSPT were these: the need for clarity in course sequencing, improving student research skills, and the possibility of program expansion.

Noteworthy findings relating to the MA Theology and MDiv include both a need for revision of the institutional and program goals as well as more refinement in the Research Readiness Paper and Thesis Review Forms. The first issue, goal revision, is an important finding arising from the review process as it highlights the need for more precision in the structure and content of the language DSPT uses to define and describe its goals and objectives. This should prove to be an important ongoing part of the review and program improvement process. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

**Concerns:** Based on a review of Special Visit Report, written documents, and visit interviews the team has no significant concerns about DSPT's response to the Commission's concerns about the implementation of a formal program review process implemented, evidence of a regular schedule of program reviews, and completion of at least once initial program review. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7)

### **SECTION III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1) Strategic Planning (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)**

DSPT has developed several strategic plan components in areas of academic programming and student life, student recruitment and alumni outreach, marketing and communications, development and governance. In addition, DSPT has developed multi-year budgetary projections. The 5-year Strategic Plan adequately focuses on advancing essential functions of the institution. What is still missing, however, is a comprehensive enrollment management plan and

vision of how marketing, communications and admissions functions will work together to realize enrollment and, hence, financial goals. The Operating Plans that complement the 5-year Strategic Plan address some factors of unit collaboration and coordination. However, those plans do not serve the focused purpose and strategic direction of a comprehensive enrollment management plan with strong enrollment forecasting and financial aid leveraging components. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

## **2) Financial Planning and Sustainability (CFR 3.5)**

A consistent application of strong financial planning practices, stable enrollment performance, a well-organized and aggressive development effort, and the continued support of the Province are needed to best ensure DSPT's financial sustainability. DSPT faces significant challenges in the areas of student recruitment and fundraising. Revenues have fallen short of expenses for some time and more students and donations are needed to help address this problem. Enrollment must be increased at a time when fewer Dominican friars are enrolling in the DSPT. Consequently, the School must recruit more laypersons to stabilize and increase student enrollment. Additional tuition revenue must be supplemented with a proactive effort to increase the amount of money raised by the School if it is ever to be in a position to offer competitive financial aid to its students, eliminate its operating deficits, and begin to repay the endowment funds it has borrowed over the years. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5)

## **3) Board Development (CFR 3.9)**

The DSPT community has made noticeable strides in both internal processes of shared governance and in the development of an effective structure for Board of Trustee governance. The team is impressed with the progress, the energy, and the enthusiasm the Board has demonstrated in its planning and development, its activities and its accomplishments during the past three years. (CFRs 3.6, 3.8, 3.9)

#### **4) Student Learning Outcomes (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 4.6, 4.7)**

DSPT has made noticeable improvements in establishing standards and reporting to support an institutional commitment to continuous improvement of student learning outcomes, such as program reviews with clear linkages to learning assessment. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 4.1, 4.6, 4.7)

#### **5) Program Review (CFR 2.7)**

DSPT has made significant progress in using program review and learning assessment to ensure program quality and enhance student learning. Substantial evidence was reviewed as part of the Special Visit, largely the work of a committed and engaged Academic Dean and faculty that documented curriculum organization and review, program reviews and methodology, and learning assessments, evaluations completed in specific programs, faculty deliberations and student course evaluations. Meetings with faculty confirmed their active engagement in and responsibility for the program review and learning assessment at DSPT. Overall, there is a clear connection between the range of evaluation activities and the design, practices and implementation of improvements in teaching and learning at DSPT. (CFRs 2.7, 4.1)

Based on the Special Visit report, meetings held, and submitted evidence reviewed before and during the visit, the team's conclusions are framed in the following commendations and recommendations for DSPT.

### **COMMENDATIONS**

The team commends The Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology for:

1. Conducting a presidential search in a deliberate and collaborative way. (CFR 3.9)
2. Aligning the newly created Board of Trustees subcommittees with the strategic plan. The Board regularly reviews the strategic plan and is actively involved in assessing progress

toward achieving the five (5) goals and six (6) strategic initiatives established by the School. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

3. Hiring a chief financial officer with strong skills and expertise who works collaboratively with the director of development to assure regularized financial reports are being shared and reviewed by the President, Board of Trustees and Board of Corporate Members. (CFR 3.8)
4. Appointing capable and committed individuals, in a time of limited resources, to key administrative positions and putting in place organizational and management structures that will help those individuals be successful. (CFR 3.1)
5. Developing a tactical operating plan and 5-year Financial Plan with the potential to make the strategic plan more actionable and measurable. The tactical operating plan details action items associated with six (6) strategic initiatives and calendars marketing support for recruitment and development events. The 5-year Financial Plan evidences the School's progress toward becoming more sophisticated in projecting, monitoring, and evaluating financial performance. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
6. Identifying the School website as a strategic recruitment and development asset that if effectively enhanced could be leveraged to achieve financial stability, by way of increased enrollment and fundraising. The School made the prudent decision to outsource the technical aspects of the website redesign to a vendor with search engine optimization expertise and experience developing websites for faith-based institutions. The directors of marketing and communication are working collaboratively with the directors of recruitment and development to best ensure the website attracts and engages prospective students and donors. (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 3.5)
7. Making improvements in evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes and Program Review processes. The Academic Dean, Portfolio Review Committee and faculty have engaged in more systematic evaluation of relevant portfolio and program review data. Further, the evaluation has already begun to show results in terms of greater alignment between

course objectives, program learning objectives and institutional objectives as well as overall programmatic improvements. (CFR 2.3, 2.7, 3.10)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The team recommends that DSPT:

1. Identify methods and implement procedures to more accurately predict FTE, accounting for new students, exiting students (e.g., leave, withdrawal, and graduation) and returning students. (CFRs 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
2. Consider allocating resources to assist the Director of Admissions and Director of Advancement and Donor Relations with administrative tasks, thereby enabling those individuals to focus on more strategic initiatives and position responsibilities. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4)
  - Consider hiring an admissions assistant, or perhaps partially defraying the tuition costs of a current student, to manage the office and coordinate the admissions process so that the Director can focus her efforts on student recruitment.
  - Consider hiring a development assistant to help with prospect research, analytics, and grant writing.
3. Consider allocating resources to advance analytical expertise toward achieving maximum benefit from recent website enhancements, particularly in terms of cultivating prospective student and donor interest in applying and giving to DSPT respectively. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2)
4. Consider exploring no- to low-cost networking and professional development opportunities in the Bay Area that can augment institutional expertise, particularly in the areas of enrollment forecasting, marketing and recruitment. (CFR 3.3)