

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT

To CLAREMONT LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

Date of Visit

March 25-27, 2020

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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, Accreditation History, and Visit

Claremont Lincoln University (CLU), located in a newly constructed facility in Claremont, California, is a small, nonprofit graduate university that offers socially conscious master's degree programs. CLU's mission, to prepare students to accomplish positive social change in their diverse contexts, is supported by an innovative set of core courses called the Claremont Core, which teaches the skills of mindfulness, dialogue, collaboration, and change. The university currently offers six master's programs, all exclusively online, including: Organizational Leadership, Peace & Social Justice, Social Impact, Human Resources Management (approved in 2019), Healthcare Administration (approved in 2019), and Sustainability Leadership (approved in 2019). Enrollment as of fall 2019 reached approximately 230 students.

The university formed in May 2011, with a founding gift from David and Joan Lincoln, and was granted initial accreditation on March 2, 2016 for a period of six years. At the same time, the Commission Action Letter (CAL) requested a Special Visit in fall 2018 to address three issues, including progress in sustaining and diversifying revenue streams; progress towards, or completion of, the planned program review; and continued development of the Capstone Action Projects and the related centers. After the fall 2018 Special Visit, at the recommendation of the team, the February 2019 CAL issued a Notice of Concern and requested another Special Visit in spring 2020. The purpose of the spring 2020 Special Visit was to assess the extent to which CLU has achieved the following:

- a. Demonstrate institutional capacity to achieve and maintain ambitious projected enrollment and advancement targets (CFR 3.8)
- b. Develop multi-year financial projections that consider enrollment, reflect cash needs, and ensure long-term financial sustainability (CFR 3.4)

- c. Develop a sustainable multiyear financial model that balances revenues and expenses while maintaining academic quality and integrity (CFR 4.3, 4.7)
- d. Establish and continuously monitor program quality metrics. (CFR 2.6, 2.7)
- e. Assess progress on the search for a new president and the board expectations for achievement of key milestones in the first year (CFR 3.8)

For purposes of this report, issues (b) and (c) are combined and addressed in one section, as the team considered the issues to be necessarily intertwined.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

The team reviewed the Special Visit institutional report and related documents and conferred telephonically in preparation for the Special Visit. As a result of shelter-in-place and social distancing requirements put in place in early spring 2020 due to the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID 19), it was mutually agreed that the team would visit the CLU campus remotely, via video conferencing. The team convened remotely on March 24, 2020, and visited the CLU campus via video conferencing from March 25-27.

The visit included meetings with CLU's new president/CEO, the executive vice president/COO, members of the board of directors, the vice president for university advancement (VPUA), the vice president for academic affairs/ALO, the chief financial officer, the director of administrative services/CHRO, faculty and other key staff.

C. Institution's Special Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

CLU's institutional report addressed each of the issues to be reviewed in a clear and concise

manner. The institution presented adequate evidence to support the report's conclusions, including retention data and enrollment forecasts, financial projections, and program quality assessments; however, in some instances, particularly in the area of enrollment and retention, data analysis and reporting lacked sophistication. The report remained optimistic about the progress CLU has made in the last two years, despite apparent ongoing struggles to meet goals in the areas of development and enrollment.

CLU's preparation for the Special Visit was led by their internal WSCUC Steering Committee alongside the ALO; however, the institution emphasized in both the report and on the visit that the staff and faculty were involved and informed throughout the process. The board approved the draft report.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Issue: Institutional capacity to achieve and maintain ambitious projected enrollment and advancement targets (CFR 3.4, 3.8)

The first issue reviewed by the team was whether CLU has made progress towards financial sustainability by preparing for and achieving aggressive enrollment and advancement targets. The team reviewed several documents relating to this issue, including an enrollment growth tracker and forecast, term retention report, the 2020 Fundraising Plan, and a number of Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with outside institutions. The team also met separately with leadership in both enrollment and advancement, as well as the staff in each area. The team spent considerable time weighing the reasonableness of enrollment growth predictions and fundraising goals as these directly impacted the multi-year financial projections used by the institution.

The institution has relied extensively on the founding gift from David Lincoln; in fact, through FY 2018, his contributions provided the vast majority of total revenues. However, the gift is fully recorded as revenue at the end of FY 2018 and while it provides a strong net asset position, to thrive beyond the Lincoln gift, the institution will need to diversify its revenue sources in order to become self-sustaining (CFR 3.4). This goal requires a rapid and aggressive increase in enrollment growth in its master's programs, as well as a substantial increase in gifts from non-Lincoln related sources. CLU appears well aware of the necessity of these increases and has actively sought out processes, strategies, and staff to achieve the stated goals. As a result, the president and other senior level administrators consistently expressed confidence in the projected enrollment and advancement growth based upon the successes to date.

Enrollment

CLU produced evidence of a number of changes designed to promote enrollment growth, including the addition of three new programs, the successful signing of MOUs with almost 30 organizations, more frequent enrollment start dates, the addition of student service personnel, implementation of a resource planning system, new email nurturing strategy and updated website, and an increase in the number of states where CLU is authorized to conduct online education. All of these changes appear to be well suited to achieve CLU's ambitious goals for new and sustained enrollment. CLU has achieved early success in that regard. Enrollment has grown in one year from winter 2019 with 158 students to fall 2019 with 229. Approximately 10% of these students came from MOUs. In addition, in-term retention continues to exceed stated goals, reaching almost 97% during July 2019.

At the same time, it remains unknown what the impact on CLU's ability to sustain rapid enrollment growth will be with the first-ever tuition increase; the decrease of the discount rate; an increasingly competitive online market; institutional retention and student persistence performance,

associated with more frequent starts; and a number of other factors (CFR 4.7). In addition, given that the aforementioned enrollment strategy of more frequent starts is relatively new, an extant lack of historical data makes it hard to predict whether the aggressive enrollment increases are sustainable over a longer period of time. Therefore, the team encourages greater sophistication in enrollment and retention reporting to allow for a more accurate and nuanced view of trends and predictors; for example, while in-term retention rates reported are quite good, more detailed consideration of yearly retention, leaves of absence (and returns), reenrollments (previously voluntary withdrawals), and graduates would yield a more comprehensive accounting of incoming and outgoing enrollments. In addition, the team suggests more detailed scenario planning in case targeted enrollment goals are not met—that is, what would be the effect on staffing needs, under-enrolled programs, planned expenses, and advancement goals, among many other considerations, if enrollment growth slowed in any or all of the next three years.

Advancement

In the area of philanthropy, the team noted a number of promising developments. Advancement continues to have strong leadership and recently added two new members to the team. Furthermore, within the last year, CLU added a board member with a strong fundraising background and hired a president who is fully committed to, and works well with, the board and the VPUA's advancement efforts (CFR 3.8, 3.9). A yearly fundraising plan has been developed that reflects appropriately optimistic cultivation strategies and donor contribution levels, and continues to strive for targets of \$500,000 for FY 2019, \$700,000 for FY 2020 and \$1,000,000 for FY 2021. Some concrete success has already been achieved; for example, the advancement team largely met the 2019 goal for individual and family foundation giving.

At the same time, CLU acknowledges certain challenges in the area of advancement, particularly as a young institution; until recently, the division has been understaffed and has had to build, from the ground up, a reliable donor database. There have also been additional challenges, particularly in the area of attracting support from foundations; in fact, positive projections notwithstanding, in 2019 the advancement team was unable to secure any funding from institutional foundations and only minor support from corporate funders. Thus, despite an overall significant increase in giving over the last year, advancement will be challenged to reach the stretch goals for FY 2020 and FY 2021.

The team received assurance from CLU that regular advancement updates are communicated to senior leadership and are used in multi-year financial planning and projections (CFR 3.4). As in enrollment, the team encourages strong scenario planning with these more realistic advancement numbers in case the more ambitious goals are not met. By doing so, the team is confident that advancement is well positioned to achieve CLU's longer term goal of financial sustainability.

B. Issue: Development of multi-year financial projections that consider enrollment, reflect cash needs, and ensure long-term financial sustainability while maintaining academic quality and integrity (CFR 3.4, 4.3, 4.7)

Senior leaders, in collaboration with the board of directors, have implemented and effectively utilized multi-year financial modeling and key performance indicators for decision making. The multi-year forecasting model captures program specific pro-formas and supporting enrollment data. It also reflects key historic and forecasted activity from the Statement of Financial Position including assets, liabilities and net assets. The model also includes Statement of Activities historic and forecasted revenues, expenses and resulting net assets. Lastly, the model includes a number of financial ratios that are used to evaluate financial performance. Ratio analysis includes the return on net assets ratio, net

operating revenue ratio, net tuition and fees contribution ratio, physical asset reinvestment ratio and primary reserve ratio.

The model has been populated with audited financial statement data and projection data provided by the institution for current and future periods. Enrollment and fundraising projections were well-stated and the results are consistent with the CLU's understanding that enrollment growth and philanthropy are key to the long-term financial sustainability of the institution. The model also anticipates expense activity in accordance with anticipated enrollment growth. Directionally, the institution has sufficient cash to absorb projected in-year deficits through FY 2023 while they build enrollment and advance philanthropic strategies.

The multi-year finance model is supported by more detailed key performance indicators that are prepared and reviewed by senior leadership on a monthly basis. The "Monthly Summary" captures key performance indicators by month for enrollment, operational and financial categories. The enrollment key performance indicators include ratios such as full and part-time enrollments for new and continuing students, rate change, and drop adjustments. However, as noted in the previous section of this report, the team recommends more nuanced enrollment reporting. The operational performance indicators include ratios such as cost per lead, cost per enrollment, student to faculty ratio and cost of instruction ratio. Financial information is reported at summary and detail on a monthly and annual basis. Actual results are reported in comparison to budget, and results are broken down on a departmental basis. In addition, investment and building project results are reported monthly.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the usage of financial reporting packages to drive data-informed decisions was evidenced in board minutes and in interviews with board members and senior staff members.

C. Issue: Establish and continuously monitor program quality metrics (CFR 2.6, 2.7)

Another issue reviewed by the team was program review progress and the Program Quality Metrics identified in CLU's Special Visit institutional report and evidentiary data as presented in the Appendix Items (CFR 2.6, 2.7). During the virtual visit, the team requested a curriculum map for a new program in Master in Health Care Administration (MHA) which was recently approved by the WSCUC Commission. CLU's institutional report detailed the institution's progress towards program review completion as well as identified important components of the program review cycle and the program quality metrics used to evaluate program quality and sustainability.

Program Review Process

CLU has adopted an ongoing five-step approach to integrate its program review with its annual program assessment, strategic review, and course review processes:

1. **Institution-wide Dashboards:** Provides for constant "red flag" alerts when data indicates any area requiring attention. There are bi-weekly meetings with faculty to discuss any "hot-button" issues, bi-monthly reports by faculty to address student performance and other issues in courses, and student input on any pressing issue;
2. **Strategic Review:** Occurs every 2-4 years. It is market and externally driven, includes conversations with national and international experts, identifies trends in program discipline, new competencies needed, and new issues to be addressed, uses market research as artifact of evidence;
3. **Curriculum Lab and Course Review.** This brings all of the stakeholders together to identify and address specific curriculum and teaching issues including assignments, readings, and research;

4. **Annual Reviews:** Consisting of four main reports, including the Annual Program Review of the Claremont Core, the signature *raison d'être* of CLU. The annual review and course review benefit from the participation of CLU faculty and external subject matter experts (SMEs), and use course evaluations and learning data as the artifacts of evidence;
5. **Comprehensive Program Review:** Review of master's programs done every four years. This five-step program review cycle is "a cyclical process for evaluating and continuously enhancing the currency of programs" (*WSCUC Program Review Resource Guide*, page 5).

According to the self-study report and program review appendix item, the primary goals of program review are: (1) to enhance the academic quality by assessing program strengths and challenges; (2) to align academic program needs and institutional priorities with the planning and instructional design process; (3) to assure that the learning objectives within the program are consistent with the University's mission and strategic directions.

From the self-study report and the exhibits, it is evident that CLU embraces the use of evidence to make improvement in its processes and programs. The team examined institutional engagement and quality assurance processes in a number of areas including student evaluation and student achievement (CFR 2.6), and program review (CFR 2.7). The team also interviewed the academic leadership team and the assessment team responsible for overseeing program review and program quality metrics by which the programs are evaluated. CLU faculty, staff, and administrators perceive assessment as an essential component of quality instruction, and affirm that only through relevant data can the institution determine what is, and what is not working, in the dynamic world of online adult learning (CFR 2.4, 2.6). The following table represents the team's findings based on WSCUC's program review rubric and its application to the CLU program reviews.

WSCUC Program Review Rubric and the Program Quality Metrics

Criteria	Findings
Required Elements of the Self-Study	CLU's criteria for program review are <i>Developed</i> under this criterion. All three existing programs have been reviewed. The self-study elements included program quality metrics such as completion and enrollment ratios, retention data, student-faculty ratios, graduation rates, time to degree, alumni and student satisfaction survey results, faculty surveys, budgeting including costs per credit or degree, market research, findings and "closing-the-loop" strategies.
Process of Review	In the three program reviews presented, performance under this criterion appeared to be <i>Developed</i> . The review team consisted of internal and external reviewers. Whereas in the two program reviews conducted before the last site visit, where it was not clear whether external reviewers were really "external," given their close involvement with CLU, it seems that the external reviewers for the recently completed program review of the MA in Social Impact, appear to be truly "external" to the program.
Planning and Budgeting	<i>Developed</i> . CLU has integrated planning and budgeting with its program review process. The budget projections for enrollment need to be more realistic. From Attachments A.1, 3.4 and 11, it is evident that CLU's program enrollment projections are not meeting the goals. CLU is encouraged to develop three budgeting scenarios with lower, modest, and higher enrollment goals. It should rely on the lower enrollment projections to cover the "what if" scenario.
Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts	<i>Developed</i> , with a plan to provide feedback on the quality of outcomes, assessment plans and assessment studies. This serves an important function of sustaining educational effectiveness efforts, as departments will use this feedback to improve their work.
The Student Experience	<i>Developed to highly developed</i> . As part of the program review process, the internal and external reviewers examined the samples of student work. The artifacts of evidence included student participation in online discussions, student assessments of course content and the instructors. Students were invited to offer poster-sessions on their work and their online coursework demonstrates how they use rubrics to self-assess and provide evaluative feedback.

The CLU ongoing inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning (CFR 2.6, 2.7) has been deliberative and iterative. With regard to course reviews, the CLU faculty engaged with questions that focused on the currency and relevancy of the course learning objectives, the mapping of the

assignments to the CLOs and the currency of the assignments, the opportunities in the curriculum to develop career related skills, and whether the curriculum content in the course was appropriate to the discipline.

CLU reports that faculty deliberations on these questions and the survey data led to a number of actionable outcomes, including the renaming of the degrees and concentration additions to the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership (formerly MEL), as well as the realization that the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) needed to be revised and that new markets needed to be explored to materialize aggressive enrollment projections.

The faculty has actively reconsidered the sequencing of courses, both within and outside formal program review. Faculty has used a variety of measures, including faculty and student surveys, program reviews, and institutional data to confirm that courses are provided in an appropriately scaffold sequence. Faculty work closely with student and academic support units to ensure the changes are implemented with minimal effect to students. At the time of the visit, the institution had completed all three of its three academic program reviews (CFR 2.6).

Changes that emerge from reviews are tracked through a structured action plan process, including changes to curriculum and services to students. Changes are recommended by the faculty and student services team, resourced by the administration, and implemented by faculty and staff. These action plans help provide accountability to ensure improvements are carried out, and help close the assessment loop. Information on how changes affect student learning and persistence is collected, and the changes themselves are then also assessed to ensure they achieved the desired outcomes (CFR 2.6, 2.7). The curriculum maps are now closely aligned with the institutional learning outcomes as represented by the Claremont Core (Mindfulness, Dialogue, Collaboration, and Change).

Having completed an impressive amount of work on bolstering and fulfilling program reviews, there are still some areas for continued improvement:

1. The Institutional Learning Objectives (ILOs), the PLOs, and the CLOs need to be aligned at the course level. All course syllabi need to reflect this alignment and how these learning outcomes are assessed at the course level. From the program review attachment 2.7, it is not evident that this is accomplished as yet.
2. Enrollment projections for the existing programs continue to be of concern.
3. The Claremont Core courses that numbered four separate courses previously, have been reduced to one course with four different foci. CLU states that the content of these four different courses will also be spread across the curriculum. It remains to be seen whether CLU can accomplish successful delivery of the core content in this new format.
4. The reduction in teaching faculty pay, while justified to realign CLU with peer institutions, coupled with the possible heightening of demand on faculty time with the increase of student enrollment, may have an adverse effect on faculty morale and student retention. Consequently, CLU needs to closely monitor faculty workload and morale and accordingly adjust its strategy.

Overall, the team found that CLU is willing to test new approaches and initiatives based on data in order to improve instructional quality and student success. Data are used to make positive changes, and the short course cycle provides easier and more frequent opportunities for change. CLU is to be commended for so effectively externalizing the evidence of its quality assurance systems, which had the added benefit of fostering organizational learning. The team found this display of assessment tools, student work samples and findings to date to be a highly engaging way to examine evidence of educational effectiveness.

With regard to academic leadership, during the visit, the vice president for academic affairs informed the team that he would soon be vacating the position. The team confirmed the impending vacancy with President Digiovanni, who further informed the team that Dr. Lynn Priddy will serve as

interim VPAA. Dr. Priddy participated in the visit as a CLU board member, and at the time of the visit, was noted on the board roster as a member of the board's Program & Learning Committee.

D. Issue: Progress on the search for a new president and the board expectations for achievement of key milestones in the first year (CFR 3.8)

The Nominating & Governance Committee of the CLU board of trustees approved the appointment of Tony Digiovanni as interim president/CEO effective December 6, 2018, "for a term yet to be determined pending the recruitment of a new president." At the time of his interim appointment, Mr. Digiovanni had served on the board since 2016 and was chair of the Finance & Investment Committee. The board concurrently elected another board member to replace Mr. Digiovanni in that chair role, thereby complying with its conflict of interest policy (CFR 3.8).

In January 2019, the board engaged an executive search firm to support their presidential search efforts. The firm developed a Presidential Position Specification document that was vetted with the board and approved by unanimous written consent. Over the course of six months the Nominating & Governance Committee interviewed candidates, and subsequently recommended at the board's August 23, 2019 meeting that Mr. Digiovanni be hired as CLU's president/CEO. The board unanimously accepted the committee's recommendation. Mr. Digiovanni began his role as CLU's third president/CEO on September 1, 2019 (CFR 3.8).

The board established key performance indicators (KPIs), making explicit institutional- and individual-focused performance expectations. Each KPI is aligned with the institution's 2019 Operating Plan, and has been categorized by the team in the following categories:

1. Enrollment – new, continuing, retention
2. New Academic Programs
3. Revenue and Expense Management
4. Board Expansion

5. Advancement and Partnerships

In the 2019 fall term, CLU implemented monthly starts and transitioned from 10-week to 8-week terms. Target performance was nearly achieved in new enrollment (230 of 240, 95.8%). Together, the planned and achieved launch of three new academic programs and more frequent starts have ostensibly contributed to the attainment of new enrollment goals. In-term retention was above target (96% vs. 90%) and end-of-year enrollment of continuing students was below target (225 vs. 250, 90%). On one side, revenue was reported under budget by 31%. On the other side, institutional efforts to contain expenses is being facilitated by closer oversight and nuanced monitoring. Notably, CLU completed and moved into its new building—from which the institution is generating some rents to offset utility and maintenance expenses. The target for bringing on new board members was not been fully achieved (4 of 7, 57%). In terms of advancement, individual giving goals were nearly achieved (\$347K of \$350K, 99%). However, corporate (\$7.5K of \$50K, 15%) and foundation (\$0 of \$100K, 0%) targets were far below performance goals. Finally, partnerships intended to yield diversified revenue streams and augment enrollment are advancing with some noted success, for example, 10% of fall 2019 new enrollments resulted from newly established partnerships (CFR 3.4, 3.5, 3.9).

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS

None

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was a privilege to participate in the WSCUC Special Visit of CLU. The collective commitment, optimism, and hard work of the CLU community was experienced throughout the visit, and was supported by notable progress in the crucial areas of enrollment, advancement, new academic programs, and board membership and involvement. At the same time, the team noted continued

challenges in the areas of institutional sustainability, which is largely dependent on scalability. The visiting team is confident, that by CLU embracing both the findings and conclusions within the report, the institution will be well positioned to address the team's recommendations and build on current successes.

Commendations

1. The board of directors hired a President/CEO with notable experience in higher education, and particular expertise in leading institutions with strong distance education offerings.
2. The advancement team is working in close partnership with the President/CEO and board of directors to meet the institution's philanthropic goals, most recently having achieved the 2019 individual giving goal.
3. Senior leaders have implemented and effectively utilized scenario planning to strengthen nuanced enrollment performance monitoring and data-informed decisions.
4. Senior leaders, in collaboration with the board of directors, have implemented and effectively utilized multi-year financial modeling and key performance indicators for decision making.
5. Focused investments, in staff and systems, have been made to increase institutional capacity to achieve ambitious enrollment and advancement goals.

Recommendations

1. Develop a formalized contingency plan to complement financial forecasting scenarios, should enrollment and/or advancement goals not be achieved.
2. Ensure transparency and involvement of key institutional stakeholders in the hiring of the Vice President of Academic Affairs.
3. Ensure the alignment of curricular and enrollment planning with the institutionalized promotion and implementation of the Claremont Core ©, with particular focus on learning outcomes.

4. Continue to ensure appropriate staffing and academic support in alignment with new program development and enrollment growth.
5. Monitor the impact of monthly starts on academic quality, retention, and time to completion.