REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

SPECIAL VISIT

To United Arab Emirates University

October 23-25, 2018

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

A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, as Relevant, and the Visit

United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) was the first national university founded in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Founded in the oasis city of Al Ain (the fourth largest city in the UAE, and the second largest city in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi) in 1976, it is a very young university by international standards, but it is only five years younger than the United Arab Emirates itself, which was founded as a union of seven historically distinct but neighboring emirates which had been under British suzerainty for the preceding 150 years. The country’s openness to trade and transportation has been matched by a country’s openness to trade and transportation has been matched by a comparable openness to education, with many international universities developing a presence in the UAE. Of the 78 universities now licensed to operate in the country, only three are federal universities, of which UAEU is clearly the most preeminent. Its ambition and trajectory is to be the leading national university and to attain international prominence as a research university. MaintainingWSCUC accreditation is clearly part of this ambition. This step follows successful American-based accreditation of several of its professional programs, Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the Center for Quality Assurance in International Education (CQAIE), in conjunction with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for engineering, business and education respectively.

Situated on 80 hectares (equivalent to nearly 200 acres) the university is comprised of nine colleges (Business and Economics; Education; Engineering; Food and Agriculture; Humanities and Social Sciences; Information Technology; Law; Medicine and Health Sciences; and Science), which offer primarily bachelor degrees and a growing number of graduate degrees, including
30 masters, 3 professional doctorates (business, medicine, and pharmacy), and 8 PhD degrees. As of 2017/2018, total enrollment was 13,810, with 94% of students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs. The top five colleges in student enrollment are: Humanities and Social Sciences; Engineering; Business and Economics; Science; and Law. The university is predominantly female in its student demographics, as 81% of the student body is female (UAEU Facts & Figures, UAEU Website).

The evaluation team was impressed with the level of preparation, attention to detail, as well as the thoroughness of the scheduling and hospitality provided.

**Commendation:**

United Arab Emirates University is to be commended for an unusually well prepared visit, with great attentiveness to detail and responsiveness to every team request.

B. Description of Team’s Review Process

Prior to the onsite visit, the evaluation team reviewed the institutional report, as well as additional material requested. The team also interviewed the international members of the University Council via conference calls. During the visit, the team met with university leadership, faculty, staff, and students. The team also reviewed additional documentation onsite, upon follow up interviews with various groups and individuals.

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

The institutional report responded to each of the issues identified in the Commission action letter of March 2, 2016. Appropriate evidence was included in the appendices of the report. The evaluation team was also provided with additional documentation prior to the visit. The report discussed the many actions that have taken place in response to previous
feedback, as well as outlining plans for future actions. At the same time, in keeping with its desire to become a top 200 international university, it will be important for UAEU to continue to demonstrate the ability to evaluate its progress in a self-critical manner, as it did in its institutional report.

**Commendation:**

United Arab Emirates University is to be commended for exemplary attention to all WSCUC recommendations outlined in the 2016 Commission Action Letter.

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**SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES AS IDENTIFIED IN COMMISSION ACTION LETTER**

A. **Board Governance**

The Commission action letter (March 2, 2016) cited the following issue for further improvement:

“**That UAEU continue the evolution of board governance in keeping with best international practices, as advocated by such organizations as the Association of Governing Boards (AGB).**”

This recommendation, of course, is made with the understanding that UAEU, as the national university of a country with different legal and cultural frameworks from the United States, operates in a particular context that will make any simple adoption of an American-style framework problematic. At the same time, given UAEU’s aspiration to world-class university status, and the importance to the nation of its achieving that status, aspects of that particular context may need to evolve to be more in accord with “best international practices.” However, it must be acknowledged that “best international practices” are not unitary or uniform.

With that preamble, the evaluation team notes that UAEU has worked hard since 2016 on university governance. The University Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for council members which looks
thorough and appropriate. A Council Policy Manual is in the process of development. Most notably, 
_AGB_ has been brought in to assist the University Council in a self-evaluation process. The _AGB_ “Board 
Assessment Report” which was shared with the evaluation team is a thorough, comprehensive, and hard 
hitting analysis. The team commends UAEU both for commissioning this report and for sharing it, and 
these are all signs of an institution committed to improving its governance.

At the same time, however, the report confirms the team’s impression that the University Council is not 
yet a functioning governing board in the spirit of WSCUC principles and best international practices. 
De facto decision-making about the most important matters— for example, finance and the selection of 
the highest-level university officials--is not in the hands of the University Council, who function at best 
as an advisory board on such matters, and not a governing board. The team has several specific 
recommendations to make on the issue of university governance,

and the first three might be framed as describing steps that need to be taken for the University Council to 
be a truly effective advisory board.

The short-term focus ought to be to get the University Council to a higher level of functioning 
within its present scope of actual authority. This is not in lieu of moving towards being a true governing 
board, but it is a logical path in that direction (CFRs 1.7 and 3.9).

A necessary first step is to take the _AGB_ report seriously. It is the team’s understanding that it was 
presented to the University Council but has not been taken up in any substantive way by the Council. 
An action plan will need to be developed to address the issues raised by the study. The next University 
Council meeting might be a full-day retreat with _AGB_ present (perhaps as moderators) in order to figure 
out a path forward on the issues identified in the report.
The second recommendation is that the meeting format be rethought. The Council meets several times a year face-to-face as a whole, but the meetings are quite brief (90 minutes) and are primarily made up of reports to the Council. Although committees have been named, they do not currently meet. Four to six hours of meetings a year does not allow the time for adequate oversight. The committees that have been named need to meet, and if they meet the day before the full Council meeting, then the long trip for international members would seem more validated, and attendance by UAE-resident members may well improve (CFR 3.7).

For the meetings to be more robust, a third recommendation needs to be considered, which is to rethink the relation of the University Council to the university administration. At present, agenda development is the responsibility of the administration, so the Council’s role is primarily reactive. Particularly worth noting in this context, is that the primary interface -- at least with the international members -- is the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). The evaluation team has worked with the ALO for 4-5 years now, and has the highest respect for this individual’s expertise, professionalism, and attention to detail. However, the ALO has a full plate with many other responsibilities. Furthermore, asking the ALO to serve as the board liaison, in essence frames the Council as a subset of the WSCUC accreditation efforts. Even if that is how it started, that isn’t how it should be conceived of on an ongoing basis. A Board Secretary needs to be appointed who reports to the University Council, and that person should work with the Council and the administration on the development of agenda items. This person would work closely with the vice-chancellor and other senior leaders, but would be independent of them (CFRs 1.7, and 3.9).
These steps should enormously enhance the operations of the University Council, but even they don’t touch what is perhaps the core issue. Central to the notion of a governing board is a distinction between a board which provides oversight and direction and a management structure which implements the directions set by the board. The current structure conflates those two in several different ways. First, the University Council is chaired by the Chancellor. Is the Chancellor the equivalent of the president of the university, as the title Chancellor implies, or is the Vice-Chancellor the CEO, with the Chancellor as Chair of the Board? Second, the composition of the University Council includes people from the management structure and employees of the university, so that in a curious sense, part of the university is overseeing itself. Nothing said here should doubt the good will of all involved, but the structure seems problematic.

It is the team’s understanding that the new Chancellor, with a very extensive experience of corporate governance issues, especially in the banking industry, shares these concerns. The team believes that the suggestion that the Chancellor has made, to change the name of the University Council to a Board of Regents or Trustees, makes a good deal of sense, and would go a long way towards framing the role of the University Council as oversight, not management. In that situation, the Chancellor’s title would need to change, as would that of the Vice-Chancellor, who would in this model become a President reporting to the Chair of the Board. The team’s recommendation is to explore with the government the possibility of moving in this direction.

The composition of the Board might also need some reconfiguring given a move in this direction. International board members do provide value, but more needs to be done to maximize their value. The
fact that the new Chancellor comes from the private sector, though he has extensive public sector experience, is significant, and a balance needs to be struck between public sector board members—certainly logical given UAEU’s status as a federal university—and private sector board members from across the UAE. Board composition is something that can evolve across time, as current University Council members rotate off, and the service of all the University Council members is to be celebrated.

The team commends UAEU for the attention paid to university governance since the visit in 2015. However, the team also wishes to identify this issue as the only issue where the team feels the university is at risk of not being in full compliance with WSCUC standards. The team understands, of course, that UAEU operates in a legal framework created by the federal government, so changes in this area will take external approval and time. (CFRs 1.7, and 3.9).

The team further commends the university for its smooth transition in senior leadership. Since the team’s initial visit in 2015, there have been multiple changes in university leadership, with the vice-chancellor becoming the chancellor (with a subsequent change in chancellor), the provost becoming vice-chancellor, and a new provost and numerous other changes. Such changes can lead to a loss of momentum, as new leaders take the institution in new directions, but this does not seem to be the case at UAEU. The new team is effective, working hard, and moving the university forward in the same directions.

Commendations:

United Arab Emirates University is to be commended for
1. commissioning the AGB report and for sharing it, and these are all signs of an institution committed to improving its governance; and
2. the smooth transition in senior leadership of the university (chancellor, vice-chancellor, provost).

**Recommendations:**

The evaluation team recommends that UAEU

1. strengthen governance by making the University Council more effective and by differentiating between its oversight role and that of university administration (CFRs 3.7 and 3.9);
2. take the AGB report under serious consideration, and develop an action plan addressing the issues raised in the report (CFR 3.7); and
3. rethink the format and purpose of board meetings, so that maximum and effective participation of both Emirati and international members is ensured (CFRs 1.7, and 3.7).

**B. Faculty Turnover**

Since the initial visit the university has taken steps to understand and improve the level of annual faculty turnover. The following table illustrates the levels of turnover from 2014-15 through 2017-18:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table B-1 Faculty Turnover</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above illustrates the improvement in turnover rates from the 2014-15 through the 2017-18 academic years. For this time period the turnover rate has improved significantly and illustrates that the institution’s efforts have produced results.
The university conducted an analysis to determine what a reasonable rate of turnover might be and concluded that the lowest level of turnover due solely to retirements should be around 4% annually. Since the university’s most recent calculated rate, from 2017-18 was 5.2%, the university believes its turnover rate is no longer higher than could be reasonably expected. The evaluation team found this conclusion to be reasonable.

To further investigate how the institution was doing, in terms of faculty turnover, the UAEU conducted a brief telephonic survey of two other institutions located in the UAE. The two institutions were Zayed University and the University of Sharjah. The following table summarizes the comparison between UAEU and the two other universities for data that was immediately available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table B-2 Turnover Rates at a Similar Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAEU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zayed University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Sharjah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this analysis the university learned that its turnover was lower than that of Zayed University, and only slightly higher than that of the University of Sharjah in 2015-16.

The university also conducted a detailed analysis of turnover rates by college, by age, faculty rank, and by nationality, along with surveys of why individuals left the university. Significant variations existed between colleges, between faculty ranks, age and nationality. The team
believes that the university should further examine the causes of the differing rates among disaggregated groupings and evaluate whether the differences are expected and healthy.

To address some of the causes for voluntary departures, UAEU has initiated a number of actions:
1) providing incentive-based rewards for teaching, scholarship, and service; 2) reducing teaching loads for all faculty and especially for those faculty engaged in research; 3) having drafted and sent a proposal for increased pay and compensation to the Ministry of Education. Future plans include:

- Up to 50% teaching load reduction for those faculty heavily involved in research;
- PhD and MSc students will serve as teaching assistants for some general education courses; allowing faculty more time for research;
- teaching load to be reduced from 24 credit hours annually to 18 credit hours annually;
- faculty incentive/prizes for publishing and patents;
- appointment of qualified staff to perform more administrative duties; and
- availability for more professional development and sabbatical leaves.

The survey that was conducted revealed that approximately 60% of voluntary departures are for personal or family reasons. The team suggests that the institution further study this area to determine if anything can be done to lower voluntary turnovers for this reason.

It should be noted at this point that policy has already changed to allow for an annual workload reduction from 24 credit hours to 18 credit hours; however, for the most part workload has not actually been reduced. The primary cause for the lack of workload reduction is that 65 faculty vacancies currently exist, down from around 90 in August 2017, while the institution has experienced the highest number of students ever. Because of this, many faculty have been needed to teach additional courses in order to serve the current students. According to
information received from faculty, department chairs, and a number of deans, faculty vacancies persist for a number of reasons: 1) faculty base salaries have not increased for 10 years; 2) the processing time to replace faculty is sometimes long and cumbersome; 3) faculty salaries are now less competitive even than three years ago. Many chairs and deans reported that most of the competition for faculty came from outside the country 3 years ago, but now there is increased competition from other institutions within the UAE. In order to address the situation senior management has developed methods of paying allowances for up to 100% of salary, excellence awards have become more widely used, and to some extent researchers have been allowed to supplement their salaries from grants they have received. While the evaluation team commends the university for addressing the salary issues by taking these measures, it nevertheless is concerned that these temporary fixed won’t address the underlying issue. The team also gathered some anecdotal evidence that these ad hoc approaches are being implemented slightly differently in different colleges, which though understandable may also cause morale problems for faculty in some units. Therefore, the team recommends that the university continue to focus attention on the university’s ability to hire competitively, vis-à-vis other institution both within and outside the UAE. It will be very difficult for the university to continue its trajectory towards research excellence and international prominence without authorization for across the board pay increases from the federal government. In addition, the team recommends that the human resource policies and procedures be carefully evaluated in order to ensure that undue and lengthy delays are avoided. The evaluation team understands that some of the issues in hiring are outside the direct control of the university, but delays in hiring can easily result in the best candidates being lost to other institutions that have the ability to make final offers more quickly (CFRs 3.2, and 3.6).
The evaluation team noted that only 3 out of 9 deans remain from the initial accreditation visit conducted approximately three years ago. The hiring and retention of highly qualified, visionary deans is and will be a necessity in order for the university to achieve its ambitious goals contained in its strategic plan (CFRs. 3.1, and 3.2).

Overall, the University has made significant progress in determining and creating plans to control faculty turnover, but the team views the current workload and salary issues as potential threats to continued progress at the university. Emerging as an issue more than low faculty turnover is the large number of faculty vacancies and the time needed to fill them (CFRs 3.1, and 3.2), an issue that may be attenuated if the recent low rate of faculty turnover persists but is nonetheless somewhat independent of it.

**Commendation:**

United Arab Emirates University is to be commended for detailed analysis of the issue of faculty turnover, including an in-depth disaggregated study and for conducting “leaver” and satisfaction surveys.

**Recommendations:**

The evaluation team recommends that UAEU

1. continue to focus attention on the university’s ability to pay competitive salaries, as salaries especially vis-à-vis other institutions in the UAE are a growing issue (CFRs 3.1, and 3.2);
2. ensure that consistency is maintained as more authority is delegated to deans in terms of salary and teaching load (CFR 3.2); and
3. evaluate (and revise as necessary) human resources administrative policies and procedures which may impede recruitment, hiring, and procurement (CFRs 3.2, and 3.6).
Suggestions:

The evaluation team suggests that UAEU

1. further examine the differences in the turnover rates for Emirati and non-Emirati faculty to determine the causes of the differences and evaluate whether the differences are expected and healthy (CFR 3.2);
2. further examine the differences in the varying turnover rates between colleges (CFR 3.2); and
3. further study the family and or personal area to determine if anything can be done in this area, since it alone was named in almost 60% of the cases surveyed (CFR 3.2).

C. Emiratization Policy

The Commission action letter (March 2, 2016) cited the following issue for further improvement:

“While the team commends UAEU for doing so much to promote the development of Emirati into capable university staff, faculty and administrators, it is recommended that this policy be recognized as an appropriate form of affirmative action aligned with the government policy of ‘emiratization,’ and that this be openly acknowledged as a policy direction of the university.”

This policy “gives preferential hiring status to Emiratis in order to preserve national identity and economic sustainability.” In its report of August 2018, the UAEU described a series of actions they have taken to create and implement a Diversity & Equal Opportunity (DEO) Policy. These actions included identifying the rationale for its intended impact and outcomes as well as the processes used for consultation with stakeholders, approval by necessary authorities, and publication in appropriate policy manuals and the website. This proposed policy is quite comprehensive in its procedures, encompassing admissions, work placement, summer training,
salary, scholarships, career development, succession planning, professional certification, graduate programs, mentoring/coaching, graduate programs, and study leaves (CFR 3.2).

*Emiratization* in the faculty ranks takes the form almost entirely of Teaching Assistantships that lead to sponsored doctoral study either at home or abroad. When those doctoral studies are successfully completed, those Emirati are offered faculty positions at UAEU. This effort is seen as the proverbial win-win situation, whereby the individual benefits, the nation benefits, and faculty Emirati numbers are increased (CFR 3.2).

*Emiratization* has probably had a greater effect—at least numerically—on the composition of the staff than on the faculty, but in place of the well designed and effective Teaching Assistant program, the Emiratization of the staff has not been accompanied by as comprehensive or as intentional a human capital development strategy. The staff are a tremendous asset essential to the success of the university, but the team heard concerns on campus about the training, evaluation and placement of staff. In order to maximize the positive impact of the efforts at Emiratization, individual staff will need to be accurately evaluated and referred for additional training. There may be some reluctance to identify those needs as well as mixed feelings to addressing them since enhanced skills may lead to promotions and the loss of trusted staff support (CFRs 3.2, and 3.3).

**Suggestion:**

The evaluation team suggests that, in order to maximize the positive impact of *Emiratization* efforts, that individual staff be accurately evaluated and referred for additional training (CFR 3.3).
D. Development of the Library

The Commission action letter (March 2, 2016) cited the following issue for further improvement:

“That UAEU further develop the staffing, collections, services, and infrastructure of its Library, to better serve the needs of 21st century students and faculty.”

After the evaluation team’s first visit, it became evident that the Library was at an early stage of development and warranted further attention from the university. Consultants were brought in from a prominent U.S. university to make an assessment and to provide recommendations. The consultant’s report identified major initiatives and priorities which informed the Library’s strategic planning process. Early steps include the recruitment of key positions, including Dean of Libraries; National Medical Library (NML) Director; Head of Content & Scholarly Communication; and Head of Engagement and User Services. With these key individuals in place, the Libraries are now better positioned to embark upon identified initiatives and projects. The transformation of the Library focuses upon change strategies that involve: metrics; ongoing consultation with faculty and students; space planning conjoined with new user engagement initiatives; observational studies; budget planning tied to the Library and UAEU strategic plans; new service delivery models and resources; and a renewed attention to staff development and recruitment. Major initiatives underway include the institutional repository, expansion of group study spaces, repurposing library space for group study and community events, expansion of the Information Literacy program, user engagement and scholarly communication, and the ongoing search for a next generation library system. To ensure university support and funding, the Library strategic plan is now in alignment with the UAEU strategic plan. UAEU has provided augmentation funds (year-end, one-time funding) in order to assist in maintaining the currency of
the book collections (which had been relatively neglected in recent years), as well as to subscribe to necessary electronic resources (CFRs 3.5, and 4.7).

The support of graduate (as well as undergraduate) research requires annual subscriptions by the Library to scholarly e-resources, full-text journal packages (available through aggregator databases), e-books and print resources, software platforms, and productivity tools. While UAEU has provided one-time, end-of-year funding to the Library for such acquisitions, this is not sufficient for long term planning nor committed support. Additional permanent baseline funding is required, so that the Library can appropriately plan for the acquisition of these resources (CFR 3.5).

Both the Main Library and the National Medical Library have new leadership in place since the previous WSCUC visit. However, the evaluation team learned from meetings with Library staff that efforts to recruit positions and procure library resources (e.g., furniture, databases) are met with significant time delays at the university. As such, the Library is hindered in its ability to move forward with its initiatives in alignment with its strategic plan and timeframes. A critical piece for the Library is the quality and composition of its staff. Staff development and recruitment of individuals with the requisite skills, knowledge, and abilities will be necessary for the 21st Century library. The Library currently does not have the appropriate mix of skills and knowledge amongst its staff. The team learned of an initiative to partner with international graduate library school (MLIS) programs, as the Library has identified students and staff who are interested in pursuing careers in library science. Apparently, this initiative is not formally part of
the *Emiratization* program, but could be considered for integration into the program (CFRs 3.2, and 3.5).

An external design firm, AXOS Urban Pty Ltd, was commissioned to review existing facilities, and to provide design concepts for the Main Library. During the visit, the team met with the Library Management Team to review design concepts and desired objectives. Once all the design concepts have been incorporated, the Library will be better poised to support research and scholarship, as well as to substantially raise the level of student and community engagement. Collaborative learning and group study spaces will be created, as well as innovative spaces such as a demonstration kitchen; a performance staircase; maker spaces; projection (outdoor) art; and smart meeting rooms. The Library will no longer be viewed as merely a warehouse of books, but as a gathering place for research and engaging community and campus events. The evaluation team noted numerous positive comments from faculty and students concerning the recent improvements to the Library (CFR 3.5).

**Commendation:**

*United Arab Emirates University is to be commended for its support of Library initiatives, beginning with its recruitment and hiring of key leadership positions, and the funding for the design of detailed space planning that will result in positive changes in the user experience.*

**Recommendations:**

*The evaluation team recommends that UAEU*

1. address the shortfalls in Library resources and staff funding by establishing new permanent baseline funding (CFR 3.5); and
2. evaluate (and revise as necessary) Human Resources administrative policies and procedures which may impede recruitment, hiring, and procurement (CFRs 3.2, and 3.6).

**Suggestion:**

The evaluation team suggests that UAEU consider including the Library’s partnership program with international graduate library schools (that enables Emirati students and staff to pursue library science careers) in the *Emiratization* program (CFR 3.2, and 3.3).

E. Students’ Proficiency in English

The Commission Action Letter (March 2, 2016) cited the following issue for further improvement:

“*That UAEU pay renewed attention to students’ and graduates’ proficiency in English. The Commission recognizes that any change in admission requirements will require a national conversation, both about admission requirements and about English teaching in pre-tertiary education. If such change is not forthcoming, UAEU will probably need to consider curricular changes to ensure that student proficiency in English is adequate for student success.*”

This is an area where there has been a great deal of activity, with more change on the way, and the Ministry of Education has apparently agreed with the team’s advocacy during the 2015 visit for the idea of modifying admission standards. The university has raised the standard for passing the English Language Proficiency exam from 5.0 to 5.5 (using the IELTS range), with no adverse impact on enrollment/admissions. Enrollment in fact has increased. One factor in this increase may be the fact that the institution also now offers the option for students to take the *Emirates Standardized Test (EmSAT)*, a national system of standardized computerized tests,
based on United Arab Emirates national standards, which is free and administered in secondary schools, avoiding the need to register and pay for one of the standard international exams.

It should be noted that the EmSAT test only measures two skills -- English reading, and English grammar, which may reduce confidence in the reliability of its results, but a crosswalk was provided to the team comparing IELTS scores with EmSAT scores, and the new admission standards require a higher proficiency on all such tests.

UAEU does not consider this first step to be sufficient and with Ministry support is about to raise admission standards once again, from 5.5 to 6.0 (with an even sharper increase in the score necessary to obtain admission to the University Preparation program). The evaluation team learned in meetings with various groups that the colleges with the most need for improvement in English language skills were Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, and Law. As the College of Humanities and Social Sciences has the highest enrollment at UAEU, this is some concern on campus that this next change will have a negative effect on enrollments. However, the university has a number of strategies to assist students in improving in this area. It ran a pilot study in two general education courses, as part of its English Across the Curriculum project. Students who took these courses were not told of the extra English tutorial sessions required. Apparently, word spread quickly among the students to avoid these specific courses. A follow up pilot study is underway which is designed to eliminate the flaws in the previous study. The university continues to offer its one-year Foundation program, which helps students transition from high school to university by building up their communication skills (Academic Arabic and English) and math proficiency to levels required by UAEU colleges. The Student Academic
Success Program (SASP) Education Support Unit provides one on one and small group tutorials, workshops and independent learning resources, which also help students to develop English communication skills.

The team noted that, in its various meetings, that there was a wide divergence of opinions on the future impact on enrollment and admissions from the raising of the test standards for English Language Proficiency. Given the team’s support for this in our 2015 report, we do not disagree with the overall policy direction: higher admission standards will promote student success and increase student’s ability to learn. But there are always unintended and unexpected consequences of such policy changes—particularly rapid ones—so the team agrees with the consensus on campus that ongoing assessment of the various impacts (e.g., enrollment, retention, curricular program) was both desired and necessary.

**Recommendation:**

The evaluation team recommends that United Arab Emirates University assess the effects of the increase in English Language Proficiency Standard test scores (CFRs 4.1, and 4.3).

F. Graduate Studies and Research

The Commission Action Letter (March 2, 2016) cited the following issue for further improvement:

“That UAEU consider the commitment of resources necessary to support the move to a more focused emphasis on graduate studies and research, and how this fits with its primary mission of undergraduate education. The Commission understands that this depends at least in part upon a national conversation, and it believes that UAEU has a role to play in that national conversation.”
The National Innovation Strategy launched by the UAE government in 2014 is predicated on the existence of a major research intensive university, i.e., the UAEU. The university has undertaken a great number of initiatives to align its research direction with the nation’s priorities:

- The university Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan have been revised;
- the staff of the College of Graduate Studies has been expanded;
- support for graduate students has been greatly expanded;
- the teaching load policy has been revised;
- support for undergraduate research has been expanded;
- three new research centers have been established;
- access to externally funded research grants;
- enhancing the university research culture by funding grant competitions and sponsoring speakers and conferences;
- establishing partnerships with institutions, organizations, and companies; and
- introducing several awards and incentives to promote research quality.

These initiatives have resulted in an increase in the number and quality of scholarly publications. This metric is tracked by the Research Office at the college, department, and individual level. Annual productivity in this regard ranges from a departmental average of 5+ publications to more than 20 departments with average publication rates of one article down to five departments that have zero publications. The Research Office makes a particular effort to reach out to the leadership and faculty of low productivity departments to offer support and encouragement.

University administration indicated that the current level of extensive research publication is 4% and that the intention is to grow this critical mass of faculty to 12% in the next three years.

There have also been increases in graduate enrollment in both master’s and doctoral programs, which have been divided into specialty areas versus the general PhD program that existed previously. Some graduate programs have been suspended because of low enrollment and new ones (approximately 5 in the past year) have been launched after a thorough process of vetting by faculty and administration. Graduate students report that faculty are very responsive to their
needs and that the library either holds or works to find materials that they need for their work. These students would like more opportunities to serve as teaching assistants as well as spending more of their graduate programs developing and practicing research skills rather than taking years of coursework.

In the future, the university plans to focus on applied research that supports the nation’s priorities. In particular, medicine, transportation, space, and energy and the environment were identified as areas closely aligned with the goals of the nation. The university’s self-study and interviews during the visit described activities that include establishment or expansion of research collaborations, e.g., the Asian Universities Alliance and the University Program for the Advancement of Research (UPAR). The university provides generous internally funded research grants which have been increased in number and size.

Challenges to the university’s vision of research prominence fell into several major categories. One concern expressed by faculty was the difficulty of doing research while carrying a heavy teaching load, which now includes a summer term. As noted earlier in this report in the section on faculty turnover, the policy on teaching load of regular faculty has been reduced from 24 to 18 credit hours per year. However, these policies and guidelines are not fully implemented or at present fully implementable because of the need to cover undergraduate courses in the face of position vacancies. While the university has devised a number of strategies to enhance compensation for faculty (e.g., an excellence allowance and monetary awards for extensive publication), faculty report that these enhancements benefit too few of the faculty. The establishment of a separate foundation to support research is being explored to help address this problem. Lastly, a number of processes were identified as making it difficult to get things done,
e.g., procurement of research materials or the flexibility to use funds on research assistants. Some suggested greater delegation of authority as well as the development of a fast track to take advantage of opportunities.

Overall, the faculty and administration seem aligned in their commitment to expanding research activity at UAEU. Many steps have been taken to add resources and additional ones are planned. Nevertheless, central to the success of these efforts will be the availability of faculty time to do the research and processes to support research ventures that are streamlined and efficient (CFR 2.8).

**Recommendations:**

The evaluation team recommends that United Arab Emirates University

1. streamline procedures for supporting research (CFR 3.7);
2. diversify revenue streams in order to support the goals of increased research and graduate education (CFR 3.4); and
3. address the shortfalls in Library resources and staff funding by establishing new baseline funding (CFR 3.5).

G. Strategic Plan: UAEU Roadmap to the University of the Future

In 2017, the University adopted a formal strategic plan, the UAEU Roadmap to the University of the Future (hereafter “Roadmap”). This constitutes perhaps the single most important development at UAEU since the 2015 evaluation team visit, not just because WSCUC expects institutions to have strategic plans but more importantly because this is an extremely ambitious plan that if implemented is tantamount to a reshaping of many aspects of UAEU.
The very ambitious nature of the plan led to some skepticism concerning the plan on the evaluation team’s part before its arrival on campus. How was a plan lasting more than a decade to stay fresh across that long period? How could a plan with 49 different recommendations, many of which were themselves quite complex, be implemented? How could its implementation be successfully tracked? And was this indeed a plan that the university community felt ownership of? However, the discussions the team had on campus during the site visit answered all of these questions in a positive way.

It is the team’s sense that the process to develop the plan was sufficiently inclusive that there is broad buy-in to or ownership of the plan. This is not a top-down plan, understood by and believed in by just a few. It rather represents the fundamental aspirations and trajectory of the campus. Just as important is that the implementation of every aspect of the plan has been assigned to an entity or more than one entity on campus; that assignment of responsibility is clearly understood, and individual units have developed plans to complete their section of the plan. Most impressive of all is the complex matrix that the Strategy and Future Department (SFD) has developed to track progress towards the plan. Every goal has been quantified, with a clear assignment of responsibility for measuring progress and a clear timeline for when that measurement begins and what targets are to be met. The SFD has a clear responsibility to audit the implementation of the plan, and this clear separation of responsibility for implementation and responsibility to track implementation is conceptually sound and elegantly executed (CFRs 4.3, and 4.6).

One challenge of a plan with a 12-year time frame is that many of its expectations are likely to be disconfirmed in ways that can not yet be imagined. However, this issue has been addressed by the period of the plan being subdivided into three, and only the initial period of 2017-2021
has a highly precise framework of goals with its attendant machinery of quantification and measurement. Two moments of recalibration are built into the plan, so the mixture of a very finely delineated short-term plan with plan with a longer horizon with less definition seems to combine the advantages of a longer-term vision and of a shorter-term plan very successfully. Clearly, the team which will consider UAEU’s case for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2021-2022 will have a good deal more data to consider than is available at this point, but the team is confident that this well-designed and content-rich plan will be a success.

Implementation of many aspects of the plan dovetail with other issues in this report. Issues such as the research trajectory, the growth of graduate programs and enrollment, the improvement of the library, and so on are part of the plan and could be considered under this section rather than as free-standing discussions. This is perhaps another way of saying that the plan successfully captures important currents of change already at work in the university before the promulgation of the plan. Therefore the implementation of the strategic plan will not be a free-standing or isolated activity thus leading to optimism that it will be a success. One challenge is resources. A major part of the plan is building up the research enterprise at UAEU, a goal essential to the achievement of other central goals of the plan, such as improving in international rankings and being a world-class university. Research universities are expensive to operate, as research is resource-intensive and requires a substantial investment in facilities, in operating costs and in human resources. The Roadmap sees the need to reduce reliance just on government support and to develop additional resources streams through such things as tuition revenues from international students and graduate students, through private philanthropy, and private industry support. There is nothing easy or automatic about any of this, as each potential new revenue stream requires infrastructure not yet in place and investments that need themselves to be funded.
Put simply, it takes money to raise money, and it also takes time and attention that may be time and attention taken away from other things. The development of such additional revenue streams is absolutely essential for the success of the Roadmap and for the future of UAEU, but the team also urges the university to be realistic both about the likely time frame needed for the development of these revenue streams and about the cost, both in terms of needed investment and potential opportunity costs. Development in particular is initially much more a matter of planting trees than harvesting fruit.

A final note of caution is that change is always a two-sided coin: as new things emerge, older ones may diminish. The team strongly endorses the increased focus at UAEU on research and graduate education, emphases readily apparent in the Roadmap. However, the team also urges the university to retain its traditional focus on undergraduate education: this does not have to be an either/or choice. The great universities of the world provide world-class graduate and professional education, but undergraduate education remains at the heart of those institutions. The team’s conversations with the students at UAEU revealed that students are convinced that they are getting a great education at UAEU, in large measure because professors are deeply dedicated to their success. The University of the Future will no doubt be different from the university of the past and present, but its success will be predicated on the educational transformation of its young people as its central activity.

**Commendation:**

The evaluation team commends United Arab Emirates University on the development of an ambitious strategic plan which seems to have strong campus buy-in and an impressive tracking system.
SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team has the following commendations and major recommendations for United Arab Emirates University:

Commendations:

United Arab Emirates University is to be commended for

1. an unusually well prepared visit, with great attentiveness to detail and responsiveness to every team request;
2. exemplary attention to all WSCUC recommendations outlined in the 2016 Commission Action Letter;
3. detailed analysis of the issue of faculty turnover, including an in-depth disaggregated study;
4. its support of Library initiatives, beginning with its recruitment and hiring of key leadership positions, and the funding for the design of detailed space planning that will result in positive changes in the user experience;
5. the smooth transition in senior leadership of the university (chancellor, vice-chancellor, provost); and
6. the development of an ambitious strategic plan which seems to have strong campus buy-in and an impressive tracking system.
**Recommendations:**

The evaluation team recommends that UAEU

1. strengthen governance by making the University Council more effective and by differentiating between its oversight role and that of university administration (CFRs 3.7, and 3.9);
2. continue to focus attention on the university’s ability to pay competitive salaries, as salaries especially vis-a-vis other institutions in the UAE are a growing issue (CFRs 3.1, and 3.2);
3. ensure that consistency is maintained as more authority is delegated to deans in terms of salary and teaching load (CFR 3.2);
4. evaluate (and revise as necessary) human resources administrative policies and procedures which may impede recruitment, hiring, and procurement (CFRs 3.2, and 3.6);
5. streamline procedures for supporting research (CFR 3.7);
6. assess the effects of the increase in English Language Proficiency Standard test scores (CFRs 4.1, and 4.3);
7. address the shortfalls in Library resources and staff funding by establishing new permanent baseline funding (CFR 3.5); and
8. diversify revenue streams in order to support the goals of increased research and graduate education (CFR 3.4).