REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
FOR REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION

To:
Sofia University

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

## SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution and Accreditation History ........................................1  
B. Description of Team’s Review Process ................................................................. 2  
C. Institution’s Report and Updates ................................................................. 3  

## SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

A. Component 1: Response to Commission actions ..................................................... 5  
B. Component 2: Compliance with the Standards and federal requirements;  
   Inventory of Educational effectiveness Indicators .............................................. 6  
C. Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, quality and integrity of degrees .......... 7  
D. Component 4: Educational Quality: Student learning, core competencies and  
   standards of performance at graduation ...................................................... 9  
E. Component 5: Ensuring quality and sustainability:  
   Planning, management and quality assurance ................................................. 13  
F. Component 6: Ensuring quality and sustainability:  
   Faculty, staff and Infrastructure .................................................................. 19  

## SECTION III – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations and Recommendations ............................................................... 23  

## SECTION IV –APPENDICES

Compliance Audit Checklist ................................................................................. 28
SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT
A. Description of Institution and Accreditation History

This institution began as the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, a small, private, non-profit institution located in Palo Alto, CA dedicated to graduate education in this specialty of Psychology. The Institute was granted candidacy by WASC in 1992 and achieved initial accreditation in 1997. Between this point of initial accreditation and 2006, the Institute had a special visit (2000) and two reviews: Capacity and Preparatory (2004) and Educational Effectiveness (2006). WASC accreditation was reaffirmed in 2007 with its next comprehensive review scheduled for 2013-2014. At that time, the institution reported having 539 students (520 FTE) with roughly 60% on site and 40% off site studying in a variety of graduate (master’s and doctoral) programs in psychology through residential, online, and blended modalities.

In May 2011 the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology welcomed a new president who introduced significant change in both leadership and strategic direction. In June 2012, under his leadership, the institution changed its name to Sofia University as part of a strategic plan to expand its mission beyond the single discipline of psychology and into undergraduate education. The strategic plan identified a goal of 1000 students in anticipation of which expenditures were made for expanded facilities and additional faculty and staff. At the time of this change, the institution reported having approximately 550 enrolled through residential, online, and blended modalities. The institution received WASC approval for a change in mission to accommodate baccalaureate education.

In anticipation of a scheduled spring reaffirmation visit, the current WASC Team met for an off-site review in November 2013. At that time, the WASC team commended the institution on its clear sense of mission and its efforts at undertaking strategic planning. But, at the same
time, the team noted grave concern about fiscal issues, intellectual rigor, assessment, and the need to continue upgrading its IT capacity. Observing the change in mission, the major changes in leadership and the movement from focused graduate education to the inclusion of undergraduate studies, the Team noted that Sofia University “has been living in a culture of change.”

In December 2013, Sofia University entered a fiscal and administrative crisis which threatened the very survival of the Institution. The turmoil engendered by the crisis prompted a cancelation of the site visit and a triage of efforts involving WASC staff to stabilize the sinking ship. In May 2014, these efforts resulted in WASC approval of a change of ownership and legal status for Sofia University. This step was considered a structural change acknowledging the institution’s proposal that the planned changes would bring fiscal and operational effectiveness and expansion into new academic areas while having minimal impact on the direction, focus and existing programs of the institution. In taking these actions, the Commission called attention to the importance of governance effectiveness, and stability and continuity as the institution moves ahead with its plans.

**B. Description of Team’s Review Process**

The dramatic pattern of change – that has been an integral part of this institution since at least 2011 – interrupted the usual sequence of a reaffirmation review. The OSR occurred after a new administration implemented significant changes to the institution’s mission and operations. Within a month of the OSR, fiscal turmoil and abrupt loss of leadership necessitated that an interim president lead efforts to identify and assess the institution’s options ranging from an organized teach out of its current programs through merger or acquisition.
For this on-site review, in addition to previous WASC information and actions and the institution’s Self Study, the Team utilized a combination of interviews, available institutional data including personnel, marketing, recruitment, enrollment and graduation statistics, program material including their schedule for program reviews, the goals, SLOs, resources, curricula and assessment of faculty and students for each existing academic program, a sample of student performance documents such as theses and dissertations, and fiscal reports and documentation. Interviews, in person and via Skype, occurred individually and in groups with all administrators and board members, faculty heads of all academic programs, staff leadership of IT and Learning Infrastructure including the Writing Center and Student Services. As well, there were discussions with a sample of staff and with groups of faculty teaching residential, online and hybrid courses and, in separate sessions, with their students. The few anonymous complaints received were considered and, as relevant, Internet sources of information were tested for additional information.

All members of the Sofia community were helpful in making their time, information and observations available to us throughout our visit for which we are most grateful.

**C. Institution’s Reaffirmation Report and Update**

Not surprisingly, Sofia’s Self Study did not follow the usual format for a reaccreditation visit. The institution is in the very early stages of the new university it envisions; perhaps it might be thought of as a hybrid at this time in its development – a hybrid of what exists and what is envisioned that is challenged by its fragile fiscal foundation and history and by its goals to integrate two very different intellectual traditions and ways of thinking and doing as embodied in its 40 year history of Transformative Transpersonal Psychology and its new (less than one year) program in Computer Science.
The Self Study was organized into 5 areas of issues related to expansion of mission and change of ownership; those related to changes in academic programs; status of learning infrastructure; issues of diversity; and Strategic Planning. Overall, the document was more descriptive than analytic and reflective of its goals and initial steps and was devoid of much evaluative data. In some areas, the descriptive nature of the report was due to their being in the very initial stages of implementation such as the task of Strategic Planning which is best described as a “planning to plan” report. In other cases, little progress has been made such as in the area of financial planning and the development of its data and reports. In still other areas such as Enrollment Management, much data are being collected but for reasons still unknown they were not available until we were on site and made our requests in person.

In many ways, the Self Study reflects the institution’s unevenness of leadership, program development and quality, financial status, and key planning efforts. It appears likely that there simply was not time in its current state to utilize this accreditation process as an opportunity to engage their community in the kind of rigorous inquiry, effective use of evidence, and community reflection and analysis that are the hallmarks of a good accreditation process. Moreover, in many areas such as their new direction into Computer Science education and its integration with Transpersonal Psychology, insufficient time has elapsed to provide information about the new curriculum offerings, assessment of their quality, rigor, and integration or even the beginnings of developing learning outcomes never mind using them.
SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

A. Component 1: Response to Commission actions

Many significant challenges have been met and important steps taken to save this institution that not too long ago faced turmoil, financial loss, and immediate closing. New presidential leadership is in place, a new vision identified, new capital provided, and a new and highly committed Board, which works in close contact with the president, is evident. Still, there is much to accomplish in a short time.

In light of its history, the Team found the following areas of previous WASC actions to be most relevant to this review:

a. In light of the new administration’s stated commitment to maintain continuity of mission, personnel and programs, the lines of inquiry identified in the OSR that pertained to program assessment, infrastructure, faculty sufficiency, capacity and governance remained pertinent to this review.

b. The WASC structural change review of May, 2014 that approved the recent changes in ownership, board and presidential leadership called our attention to the importance of sustainability, strategic and financial planning, and academic direction for the institution.

c. The structural change process of 2014 provided valuable observations and recommendations to us including the importance of maintaining “good communication, transparency and deep listening” across all constituents of the institution.

d. Finally, the Team judged the Structural Change Team’s recommendation to seek APA accreditation for Sofia’s clinical programs to be premature at this time. In light
of the many changes currently underway, their still fragile financial status and a Strategic Plan not yet realized, attention to such accreditation would divert needed energy, finances, and other resources to an effort unlikely to be successful.

B. Component 2: Compliance with the standards and federal requirements; Inventory of Educational effectiveness Indicators

For all of the reasons presented above, this review did not follow a strict assessment through the standards of accreditation. Rather, we focused on five areas we judged to be crucial to establishing institutional viability and making progress towards achieving a foundation of stability and academic quality necessary to sustain the university through its transition and early development. They are presented below in order of priority:

   a. Campus climate, culture and communication.
   b. The meaning, quality and integrity of degrees.
   c. Collaboratively developed, multi-year Strategic and Financial Planning.
   d. Faculty and staff expertise and capacity.
   e. Infrastructure and space.

Every effort has been made to organize our report according to this conceptual framework and the sequence of accreditation standards. We are aware that at times, issues or themes are repeated across sections. We concluded that this repetition serves to underscore the importance of the issue to many areas of the standards and to recognize the cross-cutting implications of the issue to the institution’s well being.

Finally, we recognize there are gaps resulting from the developmental stage of the institution and from our review strategy. For example, based on available data, we do not think
that the institution meets the criteria that would trigger a Distance Education Review. As Sofia continues to grow, this conclusion may warrant further consideration.

It is unfortunate that the schedule for this visit was not able to align more closely with the development of the institution. It is not anyone’s fault but it presents a challenge for all to accommodate.

In this spirit, we want to acknowledge that we are most impressed with the new and vibrant ideas that form the current and future Sofia University. We believe in the people who are brought together to carry forth its new mission and in their capacity and will to accomplish their goals.

C. Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, quality and integrity of degrees

During the first quarter of 2014 the current President organized a group of investors to financially rescue the institution and commence a resurrection of the school as a for-profit institution with a new and exciting mission devoted to bringing together the traditional transpersonal traditions of Sofia with a new focus on computer science, technology and business offerings. (CFR 1.1) The rationale for change in mission lay in the President’s desire to offer a whole-person education to individuals more likely to be attracted to science and technology. In some ways, it would be an education which brought right- and left-brain functions into intimate relationship. (CFR 1.2) In the words of one of Sofia’s staff, “our task was to create a new culture.” This has turned out to be much more difficult than expected.

The first full year of this innovative approach has confronted several significant challenges, which once again threaten the stability of the school. The administration has found itself in a serious conflict with many of the Transpersonal Psychology core faculty. The conflict seems based in very different views of what constitutes Transformative and Transpersonal
education. It appears to some that, in applying these concepts to technological offerings, the administration has veered off course. (CFR 1.2)

Transformative education as previously practiced at Sofia involved a commitment to personal growth, emotional expansion and broadening awareness – all internal processes. However, as applied by the current administration it seems more related to transformative products and innovations (e.g., software and applications) that are aimed at enhancing one’s external life. (CFR 1.2)

Administration and faculty seem to be talking past each other. In part, the urgency to make the institution fiscally sound and profitable plays a role in the administration’s desire to move faster than traditional transformative models of education work. One administrator captured this for the Team by discussing the institution as primarily a business (and less an educational) institution. Furthermore, it is a business that needs to make quick decisions that would be impeded by the more traditional involvement of faculty in governance. At least at this time, business interests are prioritized over educational interests, which likely leads to the breach of trust that appears to exist between many faculty and administrators. These observations confirm the findings of the Structural Change Team Report (April 2014) which state “decisions about academic programs and academic staffing were made without effective involvement or regard to faculty governance.” Further, it appears that the improvements in faculty governance made during the interim presidency including a faculty senate (as described in the structural change report) are no longer in effect.

As a consequence of this lack of effective communication, many faculty report feeling marginalized and unheard. (CFR 4.5) They describe being disenfranchised and unable to actively participate in the governance of the Institution. (CFR 3.10) Moreover, numerous
interviews across the institution helped shape our picture of a teaching environment in which the
student is not seen as first. (CFR’s 2.10. 2.13) This perception was reinforced by students. They
reported experiencing a lack of support most acutely in the absence of a consistent and
thoughtful mentoring and advisement program. (CFR 3.10)

The lines of communication between administration and faculty now seem fraught with
fear and anxiety, which likely filters into the student body. (CFR 3.7) To this Team, it seems
incumbent on both sides of this conflict to enter into a serious and heartfelt dialogue about their
mutual interests and struggles if they are to see each other as allies rather than enemies. Moving
to a mode of inclusion in the institutional decision making processes and empowering a faculty
body (e.g., an academic senate) as a resource and collaborator rather than an enemy could be
productive.

The atmosphere of paranoia and mistrust that exists needs a way to have an open sharing
of common needs, values and goals. Such communication could begin to explore options to
bring the faculty and administration into a collegial conversation with the goal of building
bridges and developing a common language around achieving their important mission.

D. Component 4: Educational Quality: Student learning, core competencies, and
standards of performance at graduation

Teaching and Learning

Student success is multifaceted, requiring rich learning interfaces and practices that are
high touch and high impact. Faculty and staff are key to delivery of these core educational
functions. In terms of teaching and learning at Sofia University, the longstanding Transpersonal
Psychology graduate programs are rigorous and intensive, delivering appropriate content, and
meeting standards for their degree levels. (CFR 2.1) However, the newly designed graduate
programs in Computer Science and soon-to-be-offered Masters in Business Administration, offering an integration of transpersonal psychology as a core value-added interface, are just emerging. Presently a total of 38 Computer Science students have enrolled in winter (n=8) and spring (n=38) semesters, 2015. The Team concluded that the program is still too early in its implementation to be evaluated in a meaningful way. The remainder of this report focuses on the programs in Transpersonal Psychology, Clinical Psychology, and Psychology.

Sofia has a good and thorough Program Review and Assessment Plan designed in 2010 that it is beginning to implement on a five year cycle to evaluate all of its programs. Review of the recently updated Program Learning Outcomes for all programs indicates improvement especially in the development of Student Learning Outcomes, although programs were uneven in their approach to the review or how they carried it out. For example, there was little evidence in most programs of faculty collaboration to develop the SLOs or of how they used the results to effect change and achieve progress. (CFR 2.3, 2.7, 4.1, 4.4) It is too early in the cycle of implementation to know how it is working. Recently, two programs have suspended new enrollments, the MA in Women’s Spirituality and the MA in Spiritual Guidance. The Team does not challenge the decision to suspend enrollment to these programs but the process and communication by which these steps were taken is unclear to the Team and to several faculty and students with whom we spoke, thereby adding to the communication and campus climate problems discussed throughout this report. (CFR 3.7, 4.1, 4.3)

Students at Sofia who come from across the world report that they do so because of their deep interest in high quality education and transpersonal transformation. Students are impressive and actively engage in learning in this unique environment (CFR 2.5). Moreover, they report
that their educational progress has been advanced by reflection and comprehensive feedback from a small but talented faculty dedicated to transpersonal transformation. (CFR 2.5)

The quality of student research and discovery, as noted by random reviews of the Master’s theses and Doctoral dissertations by the WASC team, exemplifies excellent scholarship. (CFR 2.4) Notably, to date, Sofia graduates have attained high levels of achievement as guided by faculty standards of excellence. (CFR 2.6) These results are consistent with our observations that educational delivery at Sofia University is good and being offered by highly qualified faculty.

In light of this history, it is unfortunate that while scholarship, creative activity and instructional innovation for both students and faculty is clearly evident in existing documents for advanced students, neither faculty nor students report feeling supported or valued for this work. (CFR 2.8) As an example, although faculty evaluations include peer and student evaluations, it is unclear if or how continuous improvement is being supported or advanced now. (CFR 2.9) Students often reported to us that they feel that institution has abandoned student support. They describe that they are perceived as “invisible dollar signs,” while the faculty are perceived as budget deficits. The majority of students with whom we met reported feeling “alone” and “anxious.” (CFR 2.12) Comprehensive student services are not planned, implemented or evaluated at Sofia University. (CFR 2.13)

Overall, the campus climate, as reported by many students, faculty and staff is, at best, anxious and unstable and, at worst, fearful and hostile and is not tracked by the institution. (CFRs 2.10, 4.3)

It is especially unfortunate that all faculty, no matter their level (core, associate core or adjunct) are on one-year contracts at most and poorly paid (e.g., administration reports average
FT, average core faculty salary at Sofia University is $72K in spite of being situated in the high cost California Silicon Valley). The capacity of faculty and staff at Sofia University to meet student needs over the long term is a serious concern at this time. As discussed below in Section II F, this problem may be more of a need to align faculty and staff resources to student needs than the availability of the total faculty/staff headcount in the university. Students fear that there is – or will be – a significant reduction of student services (e.g. advising, mentoring, library services) despite what they see as high tuition costs. (CFR 2.1) Students’ timely progress was especially noted as a problem by those who are ABD and pay an annual fee of $10K to maintain their academic status. (CFR 2.10) It appears that the financial crises and institutional instability may undermine the core infrastructure to a level that will put the meaning, quality and integrity of their degrees in jeopardy. (CFR 2.2)

As discussed in Section II E below, this problem is exacerbated by the lack of a detailed strategic plan for short and long-term capacity building of all areas in the university; a plan that includes indicators, benchmarks, timelines and delegation of accountability. (CFRs 4.5, 4.6) As a result, current faculty, students and staff do not know if the stresses they are experiencing are short term and likely to change as the university stabilizes, in which case they want to and are willing to persist or if additional cuts are coming that will further undermine the quality of their education.

E. Component 5: Ensuring quality and sustainability: Planning, management and quality assurance

Strategic Planning

Sofia University is handicapped by the absence of a fully realized multiyear strategic plan. The 2015 Self Study described numerous meetings of administrators, faculty and staff that
led to the creation of the strategic planning document that was included in the Self Study materials. From these materials it is apparent that the University devoted substantial thought and consultation to identifying its strategic priorities. (CFR 4.6)

Missing from these documents, however, are a multiyear financial plan, other non-financial and academic metrics, and defined milestones for progress in support of the University’s broad strategic objectives as presented as Sofia’s “vision” (see pp. 3-4 of the 2015 Self Study). These objectives, in brief, are:

- Commitment to sustain and grow Sofia’s strengths in transformative, transpersonal education, including commitment to sustaining a core faculty in these disciplines.
- Integrating transpersonal psychology into Sofia’s new programs in Computer Science, Management, Leadership, and Education.
- Offering education that addresses academic, professional, and personal growth
- Engaging specialists in the professional community to enrich Sofia’s educational offerings and the University community.

Without such a plan, Board, faculty and administrative leadership have a limited set of tools to gauge progress toward this vision and to assess improvement in the stability of the institution and its planned and needed growth in quality and capacity. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, and 4.6) The Team was advised that these plan elements are “in progress” and indeed our assessment is that the strategic plan we received is more of a “plan to plan” than a plan in its own right.

The University needs a much more fully realized strategic plan as soon as possible in order to realize the future vision in an ordered and purposeful way. Further, it needs to track progress regularly against the key metrics and milestones set out in that plan. (CFRs 1.7, 3.7,
4.1, 4.2) In the apparent absence of clear, quantified objectives, the Board of Trustees will have little or no agreed-to, transparent criteria for evaluating the performance of the CEO and other institution leaders. (CFR 3.9) Further, without these criteria, these leaders have limited guidance about what high levels of performance, responsibility and accountability are expected for stabilizing and growing Sofia University (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 4.2).

Financial Planning and Management

Sofia continues to operate at a loss, projecting that expense will exceed revenue in the current fiscal year by $1.7 million on a budget of $8.5 million. We learned in on-site interviews with the University’s Interim CFO that the actual shortfall will be somewhat less at the end of the current fiscal year, or about $1.5 million. (CFR 3.4) There are reserves provided by the investors to cover these losses, but the University remains distant from achieving financial stability.

The Self Study advised that an operating budget for the coming fiscal year and the beginning of a multiyear financial plan would be available in June, and thus were not completed at the time of the visit.

Sofia’s strategy for financial stabilization rests almost entirely on enrollment growth and subsequent growth in tuition revenue. This makes enrollment management a critical part of the University’s financial strategy. Under the previous President, Sofia suffered significant financial losses owing in part to enrollments falling well below projections. The current leadership adjusted these targets downward for the following year; enrollments were within ten students of being met. The University based its current year budget on enrollments closer to 350 students.

The Self Study reported the following figures:
Enrollment achievement in the past year has been realized primarily through increases in international student enrollments, which we were told in on site interviews and in materials provided on site, now comprise about 60% of new enrollments. This represents a significant change in student recruiting strategy and movement into a market Sofia believes offers good opportunities for continued enrollment growth.

In the current year Sofia’s enrollment marketing in support of this new strategy focused on web and print communication. In on-site interviews we were advised that it was not successful enough. A newly formed faculty-staff Task Force is charged with developing new approaches; but at this time there is no marketing plan nor is there a manager with specific accountability for enrollment marketing and management (CFR 3.8).

Enrollment growth and development of an effective marketing and enrollment management operation were identified as issues to be monitored in the 2014 WASC Report on Structural Change Site Visit (p.7) and it remains an area of concern for this Team, as well.

This shift in enrollment strategy also portends new and different demands on student services, which are already under some stress. Elsewhere in this report the recent severe reductions in student services and other co-curricular programs have been noted; these steps threaten to put Sofia’s program at risk for good levels of student success serving its new global market (CFRs 2.12, 2.13).

While it is probable there was some excess staff and administrative capacity when new leadership took office in 2014, we believe that Sofia is at this time under resourced, especially with regard to academic and administrative staff. (CFR 3.1) The Team recognizes that “right-
“sizing” the Sofia faculty and administration both in terms of numbers and in terms of specializations is a significant challenge as the institution transitions away from a curriculum entirely focused on transpersonal psychology to the new curricular vision. For example, academic programs key to the new Sofia’s academic and financial future are not yet fully developed (or developed at all) and thus may be difficult to staff at this time. This situation not only impacts planning for staffing, it also significantly impacts enrollment numbers and patterns.

Even keeping these conditions in mind, Sofia appears to be understaffed at this time. Sofia is streamlining and reducing some program and course offerings, reducing faculty size, increasing faculty load, eliminating staff, and consolidating functions in part to support the emerging new curriculum, and in larger part to reduce costs. The Interim CFO advised us in an on-site interview that payroll was 80% of the operating budget when the new management began; it has now been reduced to 56%. (CFRs 1.7, 3.4) While this is a meaningful achievement, it is negatively affecting the campus culture in significant ways. In multiple interviews the Team learned that faculty and students, especially those in the psychology programs, perceive reduced service capacity in library, student services and other functions to a level that is negatively impacting the quality of the instructional and co-curricular programs. Some faculty are expressing burn-out from increased teaching, advising and other loads. (CFRs 2.13, 3.1, 3.8) This situation suggests that more working capital is required for stabilization and progress toward the institutional vision. In short, it seems that leadership is cutting too deeply, and the traditional psychology programs, on which the brand, student and faculty allegiance, academic reputation, and other significant intangibles are based, is stressed and threatens to erode. (CFRs 1.7, 3.4)
Benchmarking with other specialized for-profit universities of similar size such as the services of the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) is one way to determine what an effective staffing model, employee count (FTE), and personnel budget could be for Sofia. (CFR 3.1) This could give leadership and investors further guidance in planning and budgeting. However, without a sufficiently developed strategic plan for the future, it could be difficult to justify further outside investment. (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 3.5)

In addition, at this time, Sofia does not have a full time CFO; a board member, currently serving as CFO of another institution, is providing part time services while the University searches for a new executive. (CFR 3.8)

A detailed multiyear financial plan integrated with all of the areas of the institution and including solidly based enrollment strategies and projections that focus on institutional stabilization and capacity building so as to provide a streamlined roadmap for growth and a strong rationale for further investment of working capital is a major need for the institution. (CFRs 3.7, 4.6)

**Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning and Improvement**

Sofia University’s leadership has made bold plans to embrace the changing education environment. The new vision confronts the challenges to running a sustainable graduate institution devoted to transpersonal psychology by diversifying the offerings. It embraces the campus’ tech-centric environment in Silicon Valley and it capitalizes on strong international student interest in US-based educational offerings in technology and engineering. (CFR 4.7) The substantial challenge Sofia faces is to achieve the cultural transition that this vision calls for and to establish a financially stable, high quality educational program.
To realize this vision and to document its achievement requires a clear plan with measurements and accountability. Yet a supporting culture of evidence and analysis has not been strongly established at Sofia. (CFRs 4.2, 4.3) And without agreed-to milestones, benchmarks and a transparent program of assessment, it is very difficult to create a culture of continuous improvement. (CFRs 3.7, 4.3)

The University’s Self Study materials were missing much of the evidence needed for the WASC review. Requests were made for these materials both in advance of the visit and during the visit. The Team found that the ALO and others had quite a lot of information but it either is not routinely produced and analyzed or the scope of the Team’s information requirements was not understood. (CFR 4.2) To meet the needs of the institution and accreditation now and as it develops, the Institutional Research capabilities will need to be significantly upgraded. (CFR 4.2)

Similarly, some faculty and staff described a lack of consultative decision-making and clear assignment of decision-making responsibility in academic and other areas. (CFRs 3.7, 4.6) While the self-study reported numerous regular formal meetings underway or planned for finance, strategic planning, enrollment marketing, etc., there were few minutes or evidence of formal decisions or action. In on-site interviews some faculty and staff expressed concern that their voices were not heard, often because they were not consulted about substantive decisions concerning their areas of responsibility, especially those involving changes in course and program offerings. This situation is negatively impacting morale and leading to unintentional or inappropriate communication about decisions made and unmade. Ultimately it is impeding the University’s progress in institutional stabilization. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6) This matter was also touched on in the Structural Change Report (2014) in terms of broader and more strategic
communications with faculty, staff and students (p.7). While the University has built stronger constituent communications since that visit, the “deep listening” recommended in that report does not yet appear to have been achieved.

F. Component 6: Ensuring quality and sustainability: Faculty, staff and Infrastructure.

Sofia’s faculty and staffing configuration is quite tenuous and barely capable of supporting the wide array of programs to which they are assigned. This is a complex problem that appears more clearly in the alignment of faculty and staff resources than in their absolute numbers. The University appears to recognize that their staffing is seriously stretched, but understandably feels constrained by the small number of students in many of the programs. As a result, there is heavy reliance on non-core faculty as well as non-full time faculty. This dilemma impacts the level of support and mentorship that students can expect from their faculty. Faculty report feeling the pressure of covering a large number of classes and advising more students than they can realistically support. Department Chairs often teach extra classes and cover for faculty they cannot afford to hire. It appears that Sofia is attempting to support an unrealistic number of diverse programs that are not attracting sufficient students to justify the number of core faculty required to provide high quality graduate education. (CFR 3.1)

While there are adequate performance evaluation documents and procedures purportedly available to assess both faculty and staff, it is too early to know if there are sufficient policies in place to ensure consistent, objective systematic evaluation and assessment, or that those evaluations are used appropriately for retention and reappointment determination. The evaluation material was distributed to department chairs and supervisors just before our visit thus we could not assess the overall efficacy of the performance management training or program
implementation. However, the Power Point material for the performance management training seemed professionally appropriate as an overview although there was no way to determine how effectively it was administered or implemented and who may have been included. While most Department Chairs appeared committed to hiring faculty with persuasive academic credentials, they could not articulate how they used evaluations systematically when making decisions as to who to retain or who to replace. It did not appear as though there were objective criteria in place and being used for this purpose. Rather, consistent with the current environment of mistrust, there was a sense that the process was subjective and perhaps subject to political influence. (CFR 3.2)

Although Sofia faculty is well represented in their respective scholarly publications, that measure was not raised by Department Chairs as a factor in reappointment or salary determination. (CFR 2.9) Average reported core faculty salaries seemed low in comparison to competitors, especially considering the high cost of living in the Palo Alto vicinity. This is likely to adversely affect their ability in the future to attract and retain top faculty with compelling reputations who would facilitate student recruitment, enrollment and ultimately their achievements. (CFR 3.2)

Faculty development appears to be left to individual faculty members, rather than being systematically supported by the University or the departments. (CFR 2.8) For the short term, faculty seem reconciled to the absence of sufficient funds to provide this type of support unless they elect to pay for their own professional development activities. This is especially problematic and discouraging for faculty who are minimally compensated to begin with. If it continues, it is likely to diminish the ability of Sofia University to attract the kind of high caliber faculty who are most likely to be concerned about maintaining professional and academic credentials. As
well, when faculty are not sufficiently supported to attend professional conferences and present
learned papers, the university loses important opportunities to build visibility, reputation and
recruitment. In this way, there may be many adverse implications for both faculty and students.
(CFR 3.3)

Fiscal, Physical, Technical and Learning Resources

Sofia University’s physical plant and grounds are pleasant and attractive. The building, its
classrooms, and offices are interesting, relaxing and generally well suited to their function. They
appear to be student friendly and rather unique and constitute a good learning environment.
Nothing seems ostentatious or excessive, even considering the office spaces for the founder, the
President, and senior administration. IT resources are being slowly upgraded but appear
minimally adequate for current needs. They may not be adequate to support the kind of
Advanced Computational Technology the university’s plans anticipate.

While the library facility is pleasant and inviting, there is only a library manager and a library
technician, assisted by three work-study personnel – a problem for faculty and students alike
recognizing that the role of librarians has changed significantly in recent years. They are now
needed more for their specialized database familiarity and computer research skills, than for help
in locating books and periodicals. (CFR 3.5)

Finally, as discussed in Section II, C above, leadership at Sofia University would benefit
greatly from being more faculties centric and academically oriented. There is little evidence of
effective faculty governance at the present time, or even an understanding of its importance.
Academic leadership and decision-making is currently being exercised by the President, Vice
President, and Dean. These are well-meaning people, with substantial academic credentials, but
they cannot substitute for true faculty governance and faculty decision-making. Among some,
there appears to be administrative discomfort with faculty meetings, a Faculty Senate, or other forms of faculty governance in general; an observation often voiced by faculty. For example, Administration acknowledged that a Faculty Senate was a bureaucratic entity that would serve to slow down decision-making. While that may be accurate in some ways, it fails to acknowledge the extraordinary added academic and communication value that such an entity provides in a university. Regrettably, at present, we must conclude that academic leadership by faculty is compromised within Sofia University. (CFR 3.10)
SECTION III – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

Many significant challenges have been met and important steps taken to save this institution that has faced turmoil, financial loss, and immediate closing. In the process, new people have brought their ideas and expertise to a longstanding and traditional way of thinking and doing things. Creative ways to link seemingly disparate areas of knowledge and skills were put together to forge a new entity, and a new institution devoted to the learning and application of Transpersonal Psychology with computer science, technology and business was formed. Much must be accomplished in a short time, a new community must be formed, new resources found and a new culture developed. And, like any new, big idea, much remains to be done before its promise can be realized and its existence firmly establish. In the spirit of continuing to challenge and build this new and vibrant idea, still fragile in its creation, the Team recommends the following steps so that the University will continue to stabilize and begin to flourish, realizing the potential it seeks and reaping the benefits of what it has begun.

We are impressed by the ideas that form Sofia’s establishment; we believe in the people brought together to carry forth its mission and their capacity and will to do this and in so doing to be a national leader in this effort.

Commendations

Many significant and important steps have been taken to save this institution, establish a new manifestation of its mission, and to begin the formation and implementation of its new culture and programs:
1. We commend the vision that drives Sofia University, its intent to link disparate ways of thinking and doing, its engagement of the strong traditions and cultures of these disciplines, and its innovative reach to the strengths of its surrounding communities. CFRs 1.1, 4.7)

2. We commend the Board for their commitment to the institution’s success as manifest in their wisdom, time, effort, and investment of resources to this fledging institution.

3. We commend the president who has demonstrated the tenacity and willingness to take on the hard work, and often unnoticed and thankless tasks, to demand excellence and to pursue her vision of building new ways to learn and achieve.

4. We commend the people of Sofia, its faculty, staff and students who are highly capable, long serving and loyal to its purpose and willing to take the plunge to achieve its future.

Recommendations

1. As Sofia University works to realize new purpose, it must find common ground and manage the tension of opposites inherent in the new mission of integrating Transpersonal Psychology and technical fields. These tasks include an understanding of their respective histories and traditions, an appreciation of their differences and building a culture of trust. Now that the first stage of the trauma has been confronted, the very real and more difficult stage of how to exist together must be forged. This will require talking to – rather than past – one another about sometimes strong and personally held beliefs, about how to achieve important outcomes often with short deadlines, about the allocation of resources and the distribution of rewards, and about such fundamental issues as what the institution is to be, how its faculty will participate in its development, and what its students will learn and achieve. (CFRs 1.1, 1.2, 3.4, 3.7, 4.5)
2. Student success – the ultimate task of the institution – is a multifaceted goal requiring rich learning interfaces and practices that are as multidimensional as they are transformational, requiring experiences that are both high touch and high impact. This domain includes such ephemeral concepts but real experiences as “campus climate” that, as reported by students, staff and faculty alike, is at best anxious and unstable and at worst as fearful and hostile. Neither fosters creativity nor supports learning. On a more concrete level, the meaning, quality and integrity of the Sofia degree is in danger as the financial crises and ensuing instability have begun to erode its core infrastructure. Compounding this problem is the lack of information – or sometimes the existence of misinformation – among the faculty, staff and students about how to understand these issues, what to expect and how long the existing situation might last. Over the past two years, needed student services such as advising, mentoring, library services have been fragmented and unplanned and, if deployed, not assessed to provide needed data for future improvement. Collaborations, planned and spontaneous, across and among faculty, students and staff are neither encouraged nor supported. Yet, it is often these connections that spawn the scholarship, creative activity, instructional innovation and administrative solutions so necessary for learning and success. These connections are the core of a rich and robust environment for learning, research and growth. (CFRs 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.12, 2.13)

3. Sofia University is handicapped by the absence of a fully realized, multiyear, strategic plan that reaches broadly and digs deeply across its academic, fiscal and infrastructure areas. The resources and organizational structures needed to ensure the quality and sustainability of the institution are either weak, planned but not implemented, or go
unnoticed. We appreciate that the University has devoted time and effort to identifying immediate strategic priorities and can point to meetings started to discuss its development. We regret that, to date, Sofia has not yet created a sophisticated and detailed Strategic Plan able to guide the institution through the considerable challenges ahead. In recognizing this problem, we also realize that such plans are the result of collaborative work at all levels of the institution. A good Strategic Plan serves many goals. These include: thinking together, learning about each other, building trust as well as setting direction, identifying actions, establishing time lines, creating benchmarks for evaluation and assessing outcomes to determine next steps, short and long term. Without such a Strategic Plan, the institution is weakened in many ways, big and small. A Plan resulting from a truly collaborative and consultative model will build ownership, legitimize actions, and establish accountability. This is a best practice for all academic institutions and a sure path for realizing their vision. It is essential to the viability, stability and eventual growth of the institution that a Plan be developed well and that it be accomplished immediately. CFRs 3.4, 3.6, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6)

4. But, a Plan alone is not sufficient; it must be matched by the people and infrastructure to carry out its actions. Presently, Sofia’s faculty and staff configuration is tenuous, barely capable of supporting its many needs. The Team recognizes that this situation is complicated. It requires finding creative ways to harvest the strengths of a diverse faculty and staff while recognizing their limits to assuming multiple roles for extended periods of time. The institution must find ways to prudently manage its human capital. Careful attention and hard decisions will be needed to better match the number of programs that can be offered with the resources, human and otherwise, needed to
implement them to the high standards the institution holds and expects. Likewise, policies and procedures are needed to permit effective and objective systematic evaluation and assessment of faculty and staff; use of these data in determining rewards such as salary raises and for creating relevant professional development are needed if the task is to be communicated and its potential outcomes realized. (CFRs 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5)

5. Sofia is fortunate to live in a space that is attractive, welcoming and well suited to its present functions and philosophical foundations. Yet, infrastructure and support systems are lagging behind what is necessary to achieve their vision even in its infancy. (CFR 3.5)

In closing, the visiting team observes that the people of Sofia University have faced the turmoil of the past 18 months and the challenges of keeping their doors open. They are finding new and creative ways to meet the learning needs of key professionals in the 21st century and of building an education that brings right and left brain consciousness into intimate relationship. These are exciting and commendable accomplishments.

SECTION IV – APPENDICES

Compliance Audit Checklist (attached)
## Compliance Audit Checklist

### 2013 Standards and CFRs

As this is a special

**Name of Institution:** Sofia University  
**Date of Visit:** April 29 – May 1, 2015  
**Report by:** March 4, 2015

**Status:** √ Means “Reviewed”; X Means “From original ITP dba Sofia University”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD AND CRITERIA FOR REVIEW (CFR)</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STANDARD I: DEFINING INSTITUTIONAL PURPOSES and ENSURING EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Formally approved and appropriate statements of institutional purpose that define its values and character</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Clear objectives; indicators of achievement at institutional, program and course level; systems to measure student achievement; achievement data made public</td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>1.3 Academic freedom: policies and practice</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>1.4 Diversity: policies, programs and practices</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>1.5 Education as purpose; autonomy from external entities</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.6 Truthful representation to students/public; timely completion; fair and equitable policies</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>1.7 Operational integrity; sound business practices; timely and fair complaint handling; evaluation of performance</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.8 Honest, open communication with WASC; inform WASC of material matters; implement WASC policies</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Programs appropriate in content, standards, degree level; sufficient qualified faculty</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Clearly defined degrees re admission and level of achievement for graduation</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Undergraduate degree requirements, including general education &amp; competencies</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>b. Graduate degree requirements stated and appropriate</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Student learning outcomes (SLOs) and expectations for student learning at all levels; reflected in policies, advising, information resources, etc.</td>
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<td>2.4 Faculty’s collective responsibility for attainment of expectations for student learning</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 Students actively involved in learning and challenged; feedback on learning provided</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.6 Graduates achieve stated levels of attainment; Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) embedded in faculty standards for assessing student work</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.7 Systematic program review includes SLOs, data on retention and graduation; includes reference to external evidence and evaluators</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>2.8 Scholarship, creativity, curricular and instructional innovation for both students and faculty valued and supported by institutional policy</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>2.9 Faculty evaluation links scholarship, teaching, student learning, and service</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.10 Collection, analysis of disaggregated student data; measures of achievement, satisfaction and climate tracked, evaluated; student needs identified and supported</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.11 Co-curricular programs aligned with goals and assessed</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.12 Timely, useful program information and advising provided to students</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.13 Appropriate student support services planned, deployed, and evaluated</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.14 Appropriate information to, and treatment of, transfer students (if applicable)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>STANDARD AND CRITERIA FOR REVIEW (CFR)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STANDARD III: DEVELOPING and APPLYING RESOURCES and ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES TO ENSURE QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Sufficient qualified, diverse faculty and staff committed to institution to support programs</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Faculty policies, practices, and evaluation well developed and applied</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3 Faculty and staff development planned and evaluated</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4 Financial stability, clean audits, sufficient resources; realistic plans for any deficits; budgeting, enrollment and diversified revenue sources</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5 Sufficient information resources/library, aligned and adequate; technology supported</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>3.6 High performance, responsibility, and accountability of the leadership system</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.7 Clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes; priority given to institutional academic goals</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.8 Full-time CEO and a full-time CFO; sufficient administrators and staff</td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>3.9 Independent governing board with proper oversight; CEO hiring and evaluation</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.10 Faculty exercise effective academic leadership</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STANDARD IV: CREATING AN ORGANIZATION COMMITTED TO QUALITY ASSURANCE, INSITUTIONAL LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Quality assurance processes; assessment and tracking; comparative data; use of results to revise/improve</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Institutional research capacity; used to assess effectiveness/student learning; review of IR effectiveness</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3 Leadership and faculty committed to improvement; faculty assesses teaching and learning; climate and co-curricular objectives assessed</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4 Inquiry into teaching and learning leads to improvement in curricula, pedagogy, and assessment</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>4.5 Stakeholder involvement in regular assessment of institutional effectiveness</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.6 Reflection and planning with multiple constituents; strategic plans address key priorities and future direction; aligned with purposes; plan monitored and revised</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.7 Anticipating, responding to, the changing higher education environment</td>
<td>√</td>
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