REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

To Vanguard University of Southern California

February 27th – March 2nd, 2017

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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 and Reaccreditation Process

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

In Fall, 2016, VUSC enrolled 2077 “degree-seeking” students, 1,764 of which are undergraduates. VUSC was awarded a Developing Hispanic Serving Institution – Title V Grant by the U.S. Department of Education, serving a Hispanic student population of approximately 34%, increasing to 37% in the Fall of 2015; more that 60% of this student population is first generation. Vanguard cites two illustrative examples, the Global Center for Women and Justice (GCWJ) and outreach programs coordinated through the Office of Global Education and Outreach (GEO), as the means of living its commitment to the public good.

*Institution’s Recent Reaccreditation History:* The most recent phase of reaccreditation for VUSC began at the last Capacity and Preparatory Review in 2006 and the Educational
Effectiveness Review in 2008. The EER Team report noted several areas of concern: institutional integrity, governance, and finance. The seriousness of the situation triggered a Special Visit the following year (May, 2009) and the Commission Letter of 2009 concluded that

“the University had been brought to the edge of insolvency by more than a decade of mismanagement, inaccurate and inadequate financial reporting, lack of appropriate and effective governing board oversight, ineffective administration at the senior level spanning two presidential terms, conflicts of interest, inadequate audit reports, and deep financial shortfalls.”

The Commission letter noted 8 areas that needed improvement: grasp of the magnitude and severity of the problem by University leadership; restructuring of the Board of Trustees; presentation of a detailed financial plan; sharing of results, findings and responses to the forensic audit; demonstration of qualified and stable leadership; demonstration of accuracy and integrity of communications; demonstration of progress on educational effectiveness; and clarification of the University’s commitment to diversity. The Commission acted to place the institution on formal probation, requiring a subsequent Special Visit in 2010.

When the Commission reviewed the team report from the Special Visit, it noted in its letter of July 2010 that substantial progress had been made in the interim. The remaining areas of concern included financial stability and governance systems. The following actions were taken: remove VUSC from Probation; reaffirm accreditation and issue a formal Notice of Concern; schedule a Capacity and Preparatory Review for fall 2015 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2017; request an Interim Report due in fall 2011.

In 2011, VUSC submitted and received approval for multiple sub-change proposals and a structural change proposal. The Interim Report submitted in 2011 provided required information detailing responses to continuing concerns about financial sustainability, organizational
The Interim Report Committee responded in 2012 by retaining the Notice of Concern and requesting another Interim report due at the end of 2012, reporting progress on “key performance indicators, board governance and financial reporting, evaluation processes for the board and president, and updates of faculty senate effectiveness (reconstructed from the VUSC Accreditation History [link to document] provided by WSCUC representative).

Following submission of the 2012 report, the Interim Report Committee took the following actions in 2013: continue the Notice of Concern; request a special visit in spring 2014 focusing on financial sustainability; defer examination of remaining board issues, strategic plan implementation and progress in faculty shared governance to the comprehensive review scheduled for fall 2015 (link to VUSC Accreditation History).

In October 2013, the WSCUC staff changed VUSC’s accreditation review schedule to reflect the new process of an off-site review followed by an accreditation visit. The Special Visit in 2014 resulted in the Commission actions: receive the team report, continue accreditation and remove Notice of Concern; request an interim report in 2015 to address team recommendations to employ qualified personnel, continue improvement of financial health and sustainability, and align enrollment planning with strategic and financial planning; and continue with scheduled Offsite Review in fall 2016.

From the report in 2015, the Commission noted that progress had been made in three areas: employment of qualified personnel; continued improvement of financial health and sustainability; alignment of enrollment planning with strategic and financial planning. Recommendations were to review each of these areas of concern during the accreditation review in 2016-17. For the concern of employing qualified personnel, the panel identified two concerns: 1) Vanguard’s promotion from within should ensure sufficient personnel, and 2) hiring from
within might also limit the breadth of other institutional experience and insights among those in leadership positions.

In terms of the concern for financial health and sustainability, the panel recommended revisiting VUSC’s increasing dependence on tuition, fees, room and board (up from 92% to 94% in 2014), particularly to explore whether VUSC had worked on “creating and growing alternative sources of revenue” (e.g., alumni gifts, etc.). Budgets also had not seemed to account for increasing costs, such as faculty salaries. The panel recommended that these concerns should be examined again for evidence of “developing sound financial strategies to support its stability and long-term financial sustainability, including setting specific milestones and timelines.”

The final area of concern to be addressed was the alignment of enrollment planning with strategic and financial planning. The panel recommended that VUSC “continue to evolve its strategic program and financial planning to include estimated costs for implementing the initiatives envisioned in the plan and the expected sources and amounts of required funding.” Additionally, VUSC should work to ensure the expanded strategic plans were closely integrated with its enrollment and retention efforts. Progress on these recommendations are reported in the first component of the institutional self-study and will be responded to later in this report.

VUSC’s distance education programs were reviewed for this report; these included the Associate’s and Bachelor’s degree programs in Early Childhood Education, the Master’s program in Leadership Studies, and the Bachelor’s in Religion. Please see Appendix B for the complete report.

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

The VUSC Accreditation Visit Team reviewed thoroughly the materials uploaded by the institution, including the institutional report, all supporting documents for the self-study,
VUSC website, the additional documents submitted in response to the Offsite Review Lines of Inquiry, materials offered onsite, and messages received through the confidential email account. The team members were assigned various areas of responsibilities as both primary and secondary readers, which were confirmed by all during an initial phone call. Team members prepared worksheets reviewing each of the components, standards, federal required policies, the Inventory of Institutional Effectiveness Indicators, and any special materials related to distance education.

As preparation for the Offsite Review (OSR), the team conducted a conference call to review the completed worksheets. At the OSR, the team developed Lines of Inquiry that identified key issues for further exploration and helped to develop questions to be asked during the accreditation interviews. During the accreditation visit (AV), the team conducted interviews with the Board of Trustees, a broad array of administrators (president, provost, ALO, vice presidents and deans, other administrative directors), faculty members, students, and staff members.

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

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

Generally, the VUSC institutional self-study and its accompanying appendices offered a candid, organized and comprehensive view of the university. The report provided a snapshot of
the current state of the institution along with a history of its mission, vision, and academic commitments. Each of the required components, standards, federal policies, and inventory were addressed with supporting evidence, although reflections required additional lines of inquiry probes and on-site review for clarification. The production of the self-study appeared to be a campus-wide initiative with a representative WSCUC Steering Committee. Several external consultants and trainers, including Ralph Wolff and Melanie Booth, assisted the committee and campus community in preparation for this review. The report preparation consisted of multiple writing groups and content contributors; the List of Writing Participants and the Report Preparation Timeline -were included as Self-Study appended exhibits. By its conclusion, the Steering Committee had engaged with multiple groups and constituencies, including the Board of Trustees, the president and senior administrative leadership, faculty senate, numerous faculty committees, undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies administrators and faculty, numerous student support service groups, and students and the student government association in preparing and reviewing various drafts of the final report.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

Component 1: Response to previous Commission actions

Through its institutional report, VUSC commented on the three issues that were raised in the Commission’s letter of July 7, 2014 and further assessed by the Interim Report Committee in its letter of June 23, 2015. These issues included concerns that VUSC employ qualified personnel, continue to improve its financial health and sustainability, and align its enrollment planning and recruitment with strategic and financial planning. Below is a summary of the institution’s work in these areas.
**Employ Qualified Personnel:** In its July 19, 2016 institutional report, VUSC described how it has been able to recruit and retain qualified employees through an emerging comprehensive human sustainability strategy based on best practices. Examples of success included the hiring and retention of several qualified Cabinet level staff and full-time faculty. The institutional report also described some ongoing challenges related to budgetary constraints including increasing staff turnover, sufficiency of tenured/tenure track faculty in some academic programs, sufficiency of staff in some university departments and academic programs, and lower than median faculty and staff salary levels when compared to a peer group of Southern California faith-based schools. Finally, the institutional report described ongoing efforts to ensure quality hiring, retention, and performance of its faculty and staff.

**Continue to Improve Financial Health and Sustainability:** The 2016 institutional report described the significant progress VUSC has made in improving its financial health and sustainability. Examples of progress included lower debt levels, improved financial ratios, and increased unrestricted net assets. The institutional report also described strategies to lower institutional dependence on student revenues as well as ongoing diversification of its academic offerings with successes including increased denominational support, the award of a Title V Grant, and the development of online versions of two programs, the BA in Religion and the MA in Leadership Studies.

**Align Enrollment Planning and Recruitment with Strategic and Financial Planning:**

As described in its 2016 institutional report, VUSC adopted the comprehensive Paterson model for strategic and operational planning (“StratOP”) in 2014. This model has allowed the university to develop, monitor, and adjust a strategic plan with six “vision” priorities that are focused on core mission related issues with nine objectives that focus on what is important now
Examples of the ongoing use of StratOp planning included annual “action initiative profiles” for 2014-2015 through 2016-2017 that highlighted the six vision priorities and summarized the status of the nine strategic WIN objectives. The profiles also show the modification and addition of WIN objectives over time.

In sum, VUSC has worked diligently to address the three issues that were identified by the Commission in 2014 and by the Interim Report Committee in 2015. VUSC has made progress in each area, but the lack of progress in diversifying revenue streams, growing enrollment, providing increased university support for faculty and staff, and further growing endowment continue to be of concern, as the university lacks funds to fully implement its strategic objectives.

**Component 2: Compliance with the Standards and federal requirements; Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators**

The WSCUC standards, federal requirements, and the inventory of educational effectiveness indicators provide common ground across institutions ensure that “quality, integrity, accountability, and transparency” will be represented throughout a student-centered focus on learning (2013 WSCUC Handbook of Accreditation, p. 10).

**Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives:**

The team’s finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that the institution has demonstrated sufficient evidence of compliance with Standard 1.

*Institutional Purposes.* Vanguard University has a clear mission statement that describes its purpose and values (CFR 1.1): “to pursue knowledge, cultivate character, deepen faith, and equip each student for a Spirit-empowered life of Christ-centered leadership and service”. All academic, co-curricular, and service units are highly aligned with the mission, vision, and values,
as could be seen in the goals and learning outcomes on all webpages for programs and service units and in syllabi for courses (CFR 1.1). Faculty on the Assessment Committee and the co-Directors of Educational Effectiveness explained how VUSC uses faculty orientations, workshops, and templates to ensure that curricula and program learning outcomes are aligned with the mission and the institutional learning outcomes (CFRs 1.2, 2.2). Student achievement data is regularly assessed, internally disseminated, and discussed by administration, faculty, and student support staff (CFRs 1.2, 2.10). The information on student achievement of educational objectives, however, may be hard for parents and other community stakeholders to locate on the website and to understand in its current form (CFRs 1.2; 2.10).

**Integrity and Transparency.** Vanguard University is an autonomous, liberal arts institution committed to transparency, integrity, and academic freedom, as indicated in the information on the university website, the outline of rights and responsibilities in the *Faculty Handbook*, and the open, honest discussion of challenges in the Institutional Report (CFRs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5). While diversity is in their core values, there has been some concern in previous reports about VUSC’s ability to hire and retain a diverse faculty (CFRs, 1.4, 3.1). Vanguard has done considerable work to diversify their community. During the visit, the Chief Diversity Officer discussed VUSC’s commitment to a diverse student body, faculty and staff and her work with departments to develop a more multicultural perspective in the students. With the support of the Provost, the Chief Diversity Officer is meeting with search committees during the hiring process (CFR 3.1) and working with programs about assessing and teaching cultural competence (CFR 2.11). The university received a Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Title V) grant that is allowing VSCU to expand its student support services for students and created the Institute for Faculty Development to support the development of cultural competence in faculty
and students. The Jesse Miranda Center is committed to developing Hispanic leaders in the community (CFR 1.4). The university has clearly stated policies and procedures on the website and in the Student Handbooks and has been transparent regarding its programs, services, and costs on the website and in their marketing materials (CFR 1.6, 1.7). Regarding the students' complaints and disputes, multiple processes exist but not all of these are efficiently tracked and monitored (CFR 1.7). The university is regularly audited (CFR 1.7). VUSC has communicated with WSCUC in an open and honest manner and followed its policies and procedures (CFR 1.8).

**Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions.** The team’s finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that the institution has demonstrated sufficient evidence of compliance with Standard 2.

**Teaching and Learning.** VUSC is to be commended for its assessment and review processes. Academic programs are systematically reviewed and yearly assessment processes are in place for the core curriculum, and undergraduate and graduate programs (CFRs 2.1-2.7). Programs of every level (traditional undergraduate, professional studies, and graduate) and type (in-seat, hybrid, and online) have clearly stated learning outcomes (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6). In establishing the meaning, quality and integrity of the degree, undergraduate and graduate levels of learning outcomes were differentiated, assessed, and analyzed for results (CFR 2.2a-b). Pilot assessment programs have been initiated for the newly approved fully online programs to differentiate student performance across modality types. Student learning in the core curriculum is tracked by assessing core outcomes and these are aligned with the institutional learning outcomes (CFR 2.2a). Assessment of outcomes by the faculty makes use of multiple measures, including developmental rubrics with levels of achievement analyzed for entry levels through graduation (CFRs 2.2, 2.4, 2.6).
Scholarship and Creativity. At VUSC, faculty are generally expected to engage in scholarship activities. Faculty attend conferences in their disciplines only as they are able and discussed working on research projects, primarily during the summer, when workloads were lighter (CFR 2.8). Increasing the sufficiency of faculty and staff should help to alleviate this workload problem; additionally, the administrative leadership identified targeting increases in faculty salaries as a priority over the next several years (CFR 2.1). Faculty expressed difficulty in applying for and receiving fewer individual funds for development support, but they also frequently mentioned the Faculty Development Institute and Faculty Fellows program as new and innovative ways to support faculty (CFR 2.9). Several explicitly identified undergraduate research projects as one successful means of engaging faculty and students.

Student Learning and Success. Generally, VUSC provides comprehensive analyses of retention and graduation disaggregated by various student cohorts so that these can be tracked separately for their progress in remaining at the institution and graduating in a timely manner (CFR 2.10). As a broad commendation for VUSC, an overview of retention and graduation trends since 2010 reveal that there is generally upward progress. Students receive timely information from the website, individual advising with faculty and administrative staff, and through use of a new software, called ADVISE, to help them track detailed progress toward their degrees (CFRs 2.11, 2.12). It appears that the processes students have available for registering their complaints and disputes are less well known, and could be communicated more effectively (CFR 2.12). New centers, such as the Academic Resource Center and the Faculty Development Institute, provide academic support for both students and faculty. Multiple forms of support also exist for students in hybrid and online courses; for example, there are writing tutors who are trained to work in online environments (CFR 2.13).
Transfer student information, admissions requirements, and transfer policy are clearly posted on the VUSC website. Administrative staff who recruit transfer students also provide advising on an individual basis so that students will know the courses which will articulate to VUSC and those that will not. Because there have been a number of complaints about the additional course requirements, particularly in terms of the number of religion courses required, faculty and staff have worked to modify the policy to assist the transfer students by creating a tiered system that decreases the number of requirements in proportion to the number of transfer units a student brings into the institution (CFR 2.14).

**Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability.** The team’s finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that the institution has demonstrated sufficient evidence of compliance with Standard 3.

**Faculty and Staff:** The institutional report and its supporting exhibits indicate an enthusiastic, engaged, qualified, and somewhat diverse faculty with relatively low turnover rates; but with low morale, and dissatisfaction over pay, benefits, and institutional support. These sources also indicate that faculty are concerned that their workloads are increasing, that some academic programs have less than a desired number of tenured/tenure track faculty, and that tenured/tenure track faculty have lower than median salary when compared to a peer group of Southern California faith-based schools (CFR 3.1 and 3.2). Finally, these sources indicate that there are well developed and applied policies and practices for faculty, including faculty evaluation, with some opportunities for university supported faculty development and scholarship (CFR 3.3).

Although the institutional report and its supporting exhibits provided somewhat less information about the staff at VUSC, they did indicate a staff that is qualified; but has low
morale, increasing turnover rates, concerns over lack of resources and support, and lower than median salary when compared to a peer group of Southern California faith-based schools. These sources also indicate that there are well developed and applied policies and practices for staff, including staff evaluation, and some existing and evolving university-wide opportunities for staff development (CFR 3.3).

Interviews with faculty, staff, and senior administrators confirmed the issues raised in the institutional report and exhibits and reflected frustration over a perceived lack of sufficient progress in addressing identified issues. A lack of resources was often described as the rationale for lack of progress, although it appeared that information about objectives underway and planned to address identified issues were not widely known. Also, the status of proposals to address identified issues were not widely known, including resource requests resulting from academic program reviews.

**Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources:** VUSC has experienced significant improvement in its overall financial condition over the last five fiscal years ending June 30, 2016 as evidenced by the steady growth in its unrestricted net assets from -$0.6 million on June 30, 2011 to $17.1 million on June 30, 2016. During the same period, VUSC’s total liabilities (debt) decreased from $36.0 million to $27.3 million. These trends have also positively impacted VUSC’s key financial ratios (CFR 3.4).

This improvement occurred even though total enrollment (2,184 FY 2016) has returned to its level of five years ago (2,197 fall 2011), despite some enrollment growth during the intervening years. Also, net student tuition and fee revenue, excluding auxiliary revenues (e.g. room and board), has continued to represent approximately 70% to 80% (79.4% in FY 2016) of total unrestricted revenues during the last five fiscal years, making VUSC vulnerable to financial
stress when enrollment related revenue goals are not met. This seems to have been the case for the last several fiscal years and was reflected in the institutional report, exhibits, and interviews with members of the VUSC community (CFR 3.4).

VUSC received “clean” audit opinions over the last five fiscal years ending June 30, 2016. Recent audit opinions were accompanied by a series of recommendations from the independent auditor to strengthen internal controls and improve operational efficiency. Interviews with the independent auditor and senior staff members indicate that these recommendations have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented (CFR 3.4).

The property and facilities on the VUSC campus appear to be adequate for the institution’s current operational needs. Interviews with faculty, staff, and students indicated the need to continue to improve and/or expand select campus facilities and noted fundraising successes and plans in support of campus facilities including recent efforts to develop an updated campus master plan as reflected in the strategic objectives for 2016-2017. Interviews also indicated the general adequacy of technology resources and the need to continue to coordinate, improve, and leverage technology resources as reflected in the strategic objectives for 2016-2017 that are focused on technology (CFR 3.5).

Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes: Although half of the senior administration (president, provost, and chief financial officer) has been hired since 2014, they appear to be qualified, engaged, and have the confidence of the Board of Trustees (CFR 3.6 and 3.8). It also appears that the senior administration has been using data and shared governance structures to inform the development and implementation of the strategic and operational planning model adopted by the university in 2014; although they are still in the process of integrating the model with budgeting processes and forecasts as evidenced by interviews with
senior administrators, faculty, and staff and by a strategic objective for 2016-2017 that is focused on further integration (CFR 3.7).

Minutes from the Board of Trustee’s meetings as well as interviews with members of the Board indicate an independent, engaged, and committed group of trustees. Evidence of presidential evaluation by the Board was also provided, with plans underway for a new comprehensive 360-degree evaluation process (CFR 3.9).

Interviews with faculty and a review of the faculty handbook and of the shared governance structure at VUSC provided evidence of academic leadership by the faculty. Their willingness to collaborate on curricular innovations was evident to the review team, and it was apparent that faculty understood and accepted their responsibilities to develop course-level assessment and academic program review processes (CFR 3.10).

**Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement.** The team’s finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that the institution has demonstrated sufficient evidence of compliance with Standard 4.

**Quality Assurance Processes.** The University uses a variety of quality assurance practices (CFR 4.1). Student learning is regularly assessed through the program review process. Most academic programs and co-curricular areas also engage in regular annual assessments, which then result in changes and improvements to the institution (CFR 4.1, 4.3). For example, feedback from commuter students regarding a lack of space for commuters to congregate resulted in the refurbishing of an area to create “The Cove”, a 24-hour a day lounge for commuters to use as needed. Student Life has also worked to ensure their learning outcomes
align with the ILOs, helping ensure curricular and co-curricular activities all help students engage and learn those things Vanguard has identified as important for its students.

The Office of Institutional Research helps the academic and co-curricular areas with their data and information needs (CFR 4.2). However, it should be noted that the Office is understaffed with only 1.125 FTE employees. As noted in Standard 2, the institution should consider investing in additional resources into the institutional research staffing to help ensure the University can continue its assessment and quality improvement work (CFR 4.3).

**Institutional Learning and Improvement.** The assessment committee, co-directors of educational effectiveness, and faculty work to ensure that the academic program assessments continue on a regular schedule (CFR 4.4). Program assessments are conducted regularly, which include suggestions for curricular and operational improvements (CFR 4.3). However, the institution does not always close the communication loop and provide programs with responses to requests for resources. Improving this communication loop may help ensure sustainability of the review process and increase morale on campus.

The institution does communicate with various stakeholders during the assessment process (CFR 4.5). For example, when the Athletics Department conducted its large-scale assessment, it involved coaches, athletics’ administrators, student-athletes, faculty, and external readers to provide a well-rounded and balanced approach to the athletics’ assessment data. This assessment work allowed the Athletics Department to make changes that improved students’ experiences on campus.

Vanguard also continues to make changes to respond to ongoing changes within the higher education landscape (CFR 4.7). Renewed focus on online education, advanced student advising techniques, and culturally sensitive pedagogy are a few of the examples that Vanguard
is using to provide students with an experience that matches the current higher education environment. The University also works to ensure it is offering new programs that align appropriately with future students’ needs by conducting market research as a part of the new program development process.

Federal Compliance with Required Policies

The institution provided evidence of the required policies through submission of the appended Exhibit 2-02 and FCC-01-09, and on relevant website locations. The policies were confirmed in onsite interviews. Please refer to the Appendices in this Team Report for the full Checklist Reviews on each of the four policies.

Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators

The Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI) is comprehensive with most programs having gone through program review recently or have submitted yearly assessments (CFRs 2.7, 4.1). Faculty indicated, however, that the yearly assessment and program review processes are not linked to resources and feedback from the administration is not always timely (CFRs 4.2, 4.3).

Final determination of compliance with the Standards rests with the Commission.

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

Vanguard University provides its students with broad, integrative, holistic liberal arts education rooted in its mission to educate students “to pursue knowledge, cultivate character, deepen faith” and “to equip each student for a Spirit-empowered life of Christ-centered leadership and service”. The university has explored, assessed, and ensured the meaning, quality, and integrity of their degree (MQID; CFR 2.2) in several ways, including the collection and analysis of competency data for their graduating seniors (CFR 2.6) and assessment of the
academic and co-curricular programs (CRF 2.11, 4.1). Discussions with the assessment committee and co-directors of educational effectiveness showed that departments also reviewed and revised curricula based on reviews of standards provided by professional societies for both undergraduate and graduate level programs (CFR 2.1, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.6).

VUSC has been engaging in campus wide conversations about their degree since their last review (CFR 4.3, 4.4). There are six Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs): Integration of Faith and Learning; Cultural Competency and Citizenship; Communication; Critical Thinking; Holistic Living; Information Competency. From 2014 to 2016, the faculty developed and adopted the S.P.I.R.I.T. model to describe how VUSC’s mission and vision are linked to the university’s academic life, including the ILOs, academic program curricula and professional preparation, local and global engagement, and scholarly work and application (CFR 1.2; 2.3, 2.6, 2.8). The components of the S.P.I.R.I.T. model are: scholarly, practical, involved, relational, inspired, and total person training. Traditional undergraduate students (TUG) students begin this education of the whole person with the Core Curriculum, continue it within their major, and then apply it as alumni and life-long VUSC community members (CFR 2.3, 2.6). Graduate and professional studies (PS) students begin this education with the professional coursework, continue it in advance application in their disciplines, and also apply it as alumni and community members (CFR 2.3, 2.6). VUSC has indirect evidence in surveys of graduating seniors, faculty, and staff that suggests the model does reflect the aspects of the VUSC learning community (CFR 4.1). Discussions with faculty, administrative staff, and students, however, suggest that this model is not widely known. The university community may need to continue discussing and promoting the model for it to be institutionalized and truly provide the framework outlined above.
In 2015, the VUSC community engaged in a series of MQID discussions and reflected on Vanguard’s mission and learning outcomes (CFR 4.3, 4.4). The conversations included current and former faculty, staff, and students (CFR 4.5). A word cloud exercise revealed key words such as “students”, “excellence”, “Christian”, “ethical”, “learning”, and “professional”. These words could be heard repeated during discussions with leadership, faculty, staff, and students (CFR 1.2; 2.2). In addition, team constantly heard the word “community” throughout the onsite visit. MQID statements and links to institutional and program learning outcomes can be seen on program websites and in course syllabi and heard during conversations about academic and co-curricular programs (CFR 2.2). VUSC’s concern for life-long learning can be seen in the alumni mentoring program area, in Career Services involvement in the introductory Cornerstone courses, and in conversations with faculty about how they are educating students to be well-rounded individuals that continue to learn after leaving Vanguard (CFR 4.4).

Vanguard University has many practices designed to ensure that the Vanguard degree has integrity. As mentioned above, faculty use professional standards and guidelines to distinguish between levels of degrees, and these differences can be seen through different program learning outcomes (CFR 2.3). Quality of student learning is assessed though a program review process and yearly assessment of outcomes (CRFs 2.7, 4.1). According to the Assessment Committee, new and adjunct faculty are introduced to assessment during university orientations and department workshops (CFR 2.4). Curricular mapping and use of templates have ensured proper alignment in the curricula (CFR 2.3). Graduating senior survey data are reviewed and the latest results showed high student satisfaction with teaching and mentoring (CFR 2.6).
Component 4: Educational Quality: Student learning, core competencies, and standards of performance at graduation

VUSC has metWSCUC requirements in reporting specific, credible assessment efforts for the five competencies by using standard measures coupled by curricular tests of student learning. In 2009, a Core Curriculum task force and the Core Curriculum Committee worked with the entire VUSC faculty to consolidate its learning outcomes into six core outcomes (CFRs 2.3, 2.4); these were established as the institutional learning outcomes (ILO) as noted in the previous section. The Core Curriculum Committee developed the “Program Student Learning Outcome Matrix,” which aligned the Core learning outcomes with the WSCUC core competencies as identified in Standard 2 (CFR 2.2a). As VUSC pointed out, it was fortunate for them that the two sets were well-aligned, since they had been assessing VUSC’s core outcomes since 2009. One of their outcomes is communication, which includes both oral and written components. Their critical thinking outcome includes quantitative and qualitative processes, which embed quantitative reasoning. Information literacy is measured along with technology, and additional component of one of the VUSC core outcomes.

Working with the Core Curriculum Committee, the Assessment Committee created and implemented multiple methods in assessing each core outcome, which included: 1) direct and indirect assessments, and 2) course-embedded assignments vs. standardized, externally-benchmarked methods. For written communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning, VUSC used the ETS Proficiency Profile as a way of benchmarking students’ general levels of performance on these measures. Beyond national indicators, appropriate course assignments were identified, collected and scored in both lower and upper division courses (CFRs 2.2, 4.1). Oral communication and information literacy were assessed using course embedded assignments. Additionally, as an indirect indicator, appropriate scores from the NSSE provided
first-year and senior perceptions about their experiences with communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning.

VUSC’s approach to assessing the five competencies helped to establish student learning performance levels for their undergraduates at beginning and exiting levels (CFR 2.6). It also allowed them to determine whatever gaps might exist so that appropriate actions could be taken. For example, reports to the assessment committee showed that students generally perform at national levels for written communication when they enter but outperform national standards by the time students have graduated. VUSC further interpreted the findings by evidence from curricular assignments and NSSE indirect data. For written communication, VUSC offers multiple opportunities to students to learn and practice through a writing-intensive curriculum (e.g., cornerstone and capstone courses), other varied non-curricular based opportunities (e.g., writing for the student newspaper or through Career Services) and assistance through the Writing Center. Though it will continue to be periodically monitored, written communication is evidenced at appropriate levels before graduation.

Assessment of the core competencies has allowed VUSC to conduct gap analyses. For example, oral communication was assessed based on student presentation performance in upper division courses. Even though assessments evidenced higher levels across a number of different disciplines, VUSC concluded that larger, more varied samples were needed to reach conclusive results. In terms of critical thinking, VUSC’s first-year students score on the ETS Proficiency Test at comparable levels with national standards, but these all are at the lower end of the scale. To improve critical thinking skills, the English department worked to embed practice of critical thinking skills along with information literacy skills in students’ writing assignments. More advanced and discipline-specific tests of students’ skills levels are forthcoming as next steps.
VUSC provided evidence that it continually “closes the loop” by using assessment results to improve its teaching and learning methods. For example, evidence from the ETS Proficiency Test indicates that VUSC first-year students are at the same level as their comparison groups for “analyzing numerical and statistical information,” but responses from seniors on the NSSE indicate that students report having fewer opportunities to develop these skills in their classes. As noted in their self-study, the faculty recognize student performance is higher in the humanities and arts than in mathematics and the sciences. New plans include the Core Curriculum Committee working with the faculty who teach in courses where students learn quantitative reasoning to develop authentic assignments and assessments for this competency. Moreover, a portion of the new Title V grant will help to develop support for student learning in mathematics and the sciences.

There is a general university-wide commitment to educational quality and standards of performance in reviewing and improving upon the core curriculum as its own academic program (CFRs 2.2, 2.7, 4.3). Processes are in place to evaluate student learning at entry and exit levels for undergraduates. Additionally, annual assessments of graduate programs allow for applying advanced levels of the core competencies so that several skills areas identified in the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) have been explored and evaluated (CFR 2.2b). Initial analyses of graduate-level writing, for example, led to direct interventions in Organizational Psychology, whose students are now performing above expected levels. Assessments beyond the basic competencies ensure tracking student performance across all 6 of Vanguard’s ILOs to further ensure educational quality. It should be noted that faculty compensation and avoidance of burnout through workload reductions were points of discussion during our on-campus interviews that could impact future assessments.
Component 5: Student Success: Student learning, retention, and graduation

The institution has taken important steps towards the assessment and improvement of students’ success (CFR 4.1). The University has developed a task force that focuses on student success (CFR 4.7), using data related to students’ retention and completion rates (CFR 2.10). The information is appropriately disaggregated to ensure specific populations of students are all appropriately supported and made publicly available on the University’s website (CFR 1.2).

The Office of Institutional Research can provide this information by having established a highly cooperative, distributed model on campus (CFR 4.2). Although the institution acknowledges a need for increased institutional research capacity, having distributed report creation, state and federal reporting, and other typical institutional research functions throughout the institution has allowed the Office of Institutional Research to focus its scope of practice down to those projects it is possible for 1.125 FTE positions to complete. However, institutional staff acknowledged that for the University to continue to grow its enrollments and programmatic offerings, moving towards a more centralized model of institutional research functions will likely be necessary.

Although institutional research capacity is currently limited, the institution has identified seven key predictors of traditional undergraduate attrition: commuter, high school grade point average below 3.0, first-generation status, male, SAT verbal scores between 400 and 450, SAT math scores below 400, and being a student of color. The institution selected several of these factors for specialized interventions, which have largely helped to increase students’ retention. The notable exception to the retention increases is Hispanic students, which experienced an uncharacteristic one-year drop of 5%, from 84.4% to 79.4%. The institution continues to investigate the predictive model appropriate for the professional studies and graduate students
and the team suggests that the development of those models continue to be high priorities for the institution.

Although the University has found that Hispanic-student retention rates are an area of concern and is proactively seeking to improve the one-year dip in that retention, the completion rate for Hispanic students shows a sustained decline, falling more than 20% and then holding steady for the past 5 years. The Hispanic completion rate also consistently runs 5%+ lower than the overall University-completion rate, and all historically underrepresented groups consistently perform at lower rates than Asian and White students. Given the large increases in Hispanic-student enrollment, resulting in Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) status, the previous decline in Hispanic-student completion warrants ongoing attention.

One key development for student retention and success is the development and initial implementation of the Advise system. Funded by the Title V grant the institution received from its HSI status, the system has been programmed to consider the seven key indicators of student attrition and provides each student with an individual score that predicts the student’s likelihood to persist. Students who fall below a certain threshold are highlighted by the system for advisors to perform a variety of high-touch engagement activities to help increase the likelihood of retention. The institution does acknowledge that use of the Advise system will require ongoing review and adjustment to ensure the predictive model accurately represents and predicts current students, which will require ongoing research and technology resources.

The resourcing of these efforts remains a concern for the institution. Given the current political climate, the institution has established a variety of contingency plans on what will or will not continue forward if the HSI funding were to be withdrawn. Unfortunately, the institution would be required to significantly cut back the services that have helped students,
because institutional finances are still insufficient to significantly contribute or continue current efforts.

Even without the Title V grant funding, some departments continue to work on developing systems to benefit historically underrepresented student groups at Vanguard. Student affairs also continues to develop opportunities for cultural sensitivity and growth (CFR 2.13). Student affairs provides student leaders with opportunities to receive diversity training, as well as engage with community leaders of various racial and ethnic backgrounds through breakfast meetings. All students, including those from historically underrepresented groups, can also join the Black Student Union and El Puente club on campus. The student affairs leadership also works to ensure that the student workers hired for the department represent the racial and ethnic mix of the student body.

The institution has assessed co-curricular programs to support its students (CFRs 2.11, 2.13). The institution recently assessed and Office of Spiritual Formation and the Athletics Department. Based on the review, the Athletics Department increased their staffing levels and added women’s beach volleyball and competitive stunt. Athletics also performs regular annual surveys of their student-athletes, which recently led to an increase in the budget for student workers to assist during events. It is important to note that major co-curricular assessments are not currently scheduled on a regular rotation like curricular programs.

Although the co-curricular assessment processes are still in development, students expressed strong support and appreciation for them and most all aspects of Vanguard. Students consistently expressed appreciation for the dedication of the faculty and staff, repeatedly citing their hard work and dedication to student success. Students from the Student Government Association expressed near the end of the meeting that the areas of significant operational
concern were already under discussion with the appropriate institutional department. Although it is encouraging to know that the areas of concern are being proactively addressed and students advocated for by their Student Government, this lack of broader awareness underscored the team’s experience of on-campus communication processes not meeting institutional needs.

Although some operational areas could benefit from improved communication processes, students do have access to the information they need to graduate, such as course and minimum GPA requirements (CFR 2.12). The University provides the relevant information in the University’s catalog, which is available on the institution’s website. Transfer credit is also handled in a consistent and timely manner that allows students to quickly and accurately understand what credits will transfer into their program (CFR 2.14).

**Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program review, assessment, use of data and evidence**

Since 2008, Vanguard has moved steadily toward a culture of assessment and evidence-based decision-making through their development and implement of a systematic program review and yearly assessment process (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3). The Assessment Committee has spent considerable time and effort creating a clear process, developing templates, training faculty, and providing feedback to departments. The two co-directors of educational effectiveness are motivated, knowledgeable individuals with a realistic understanding of the challenges the departments are facing (e.g., the sciences have been slower to adopt yearly assessment, some departments have more experience with qualitative data and need training in quantitative methods). Most of the programs complete yearly assessments and have been reviewed within the last five years (CFR 2.3, 2.7, 4.1). Some departments are still struggling with assessment, according to the assessment committee; however, the committee and co-directors are aware of their issues and have plans to assist them (CFR 2.4, 4.4).
The team met with two groups that recent went through the program review process: The Communication Department, an early adopter in academic programs, and Athletics, a recent adopter in the co-curricular area. Both groups talked about how beneficial the process was for understanding the strengths and challenges of their units (CFR 4.3). Both had already implemented changes in their programs based on the findings while they wait for responses to their resource requests to the administration (CFR 4.1). Communication and Athletics are examples of successful implementation of Vanguard’s review process that could be used as examples for the rest of the campus (CFR 2.7). The faculty and staff showed the team that a successful review at Vanguard means a thorough understanding of the value of self-reflection, data-driven decision-making, and yearly assessment of student learning (CFRs 2.2, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4).

An obstacle to sustainability of program review is the current weak link between review results and administrative decision-making involving the allocation of university resources (CFR 4.5, 4.6). Vanguard was honest in the Institutional Report about this challenge with the closing the loop process. During the site visit, the team found action plans and budget requests from department to administration officials in the program review materials that were made available during the visit. The materials did not include documented agreements with administrators regarding the allocation of resources (CFR 4.3, 4.5). Although the Action Plans suggested a possible agreement, it was lacking a formal process for administration to respond the Plan. Faculty commented in several meetings during the onsite visit that it was not clear if departmental requests based on program reviews would be considered during the planning and budgeting process. Some faculty indicated that uncertainty around the role of program review in the decision-making process made them wonder if the work was worth the time and effort. Communicating in timely manner about requests for resources after program review and
documenting agreements between the administration and the department would help stabilize the program review process (CFR 3.7).

Vanguard also indicated in their Institutional Report they did not have a fully developed culture of assessment yet (CFR 4.4). According to the report and the faculty, a second obstacle to sustainability of the review and assessment process is the impact of assessment activities on faculty workload (CFR 3.1). The team talked to the Assessment Committee during the onsite visit about ways to address this challenge. Committee members discussed strategies, including ensuring that annual assessments of student learning were working in tandem with program review. Program review requires such extensive self-reflection and self-analysis that it may be advantageous to consider suspension of yearly assessment activities during the self-study and resume upon completion. The team heard from multiple members of the community about how the templates and rubrics greatly helped their assessment work. More work might be done to streamline tasks for faculty and for staff. For instance, while university-wide surveys and tests have greatly helped the departments with their reviews, the Institutional Research Director is already considering ways to reduce the burden of conducting tests and surveys every year (CFR 4.2). The Assessment Committee and the co-directors of Educational Effectiveness are aware of the workload problems around assessment and are working on ways to address this challenge so that more departments will have fully developed assessment plans and processes (CFR 2.4, 4.1, 4.3).

**Component 7: Sustainability: Financial viability, preparing for the changing higher education environment**

*Financial Sustainability:* The status of VUSC finances is much improved from five years ago, with a significant increase in unrestricted net assets, a significant reduction in liabilities, and improved key financial ratios as detailed in an earlier section (Component 2) of
this report. A significant action that supported the university’s improved financial position was the adoption of a comprehensive strategic and operational planning model in 2014. This planning model was then used to inform the development of strategic objectives that included refinancing of university debt, a successful $7.0 million capital campaign focused on debt reduction and facility improvements, management and reduction of operating expenses, increased advancement efforts, increased participation in faculty and staff giving, the award of a five-year $2.57 million Title V grant, and endowment growth to $4.7 million as of June 30, 2016.

Several other strategic objectives to further improve the current and long-term financial sustainability of the university have been less successful to date. These include objectives to improve the diversification of revenue streams, grow enrollment, provide increased university support for faculty and staff, and to further advance endowment growth. Lack of current success for these strategic objectives is evidenced by student tuition and fees still comprising approximately 80% of annual unrestricted operating revenues (79.4% in FY 2016), total enrollment remaining relatively flat (2,197 fall 2011 and 2,184 fall 2016), persistent faculty and staff concern about institutional support, and continued endowment growth, as VUSC’s endowment (FY 2016 $4.7 million) remains significantly lower than VUSC’s peer institutions (FY 2015 peer group average of $62.5 million). Interviews with members of the Board and senior administrators confirmed continued efforts to achieve these and other strategic objectives. The interviews also revealed the several evolving timelines for implementation and completion of these objectives.

The continued lack of progress to improve the diversification of revenue streams, to grow enrollment, to provide increased university support for faculty and staff, and to further grow
endowment may prevent the university from effectively pursuing its mission considering the changing nature of the higher education environment in the decade ahead (CFR 3.1, 3.5, and 4.7).

**Alignment with Institutional Priorities:** VUSC is a mission-driven institution and appears to be very clear about its mission, vision, and values (CFR 1.1). This clarity is evidenced by the use of a comprehensive strategic planning and operational model that helps VUSC align its mission, commitments, and resources. The model also appears to be aiding VUSC in the development and prioritization of strategic objectives included within annual action initiative profiles.

VUSC also has a very clear commitment to its students that is focused on quality improvement and educational effectiveness. This clarity is evidenced through the development of the S.P.R.I.T. learning model and ongoing discussions by the faculty of the meaning, quality, and integrity of the university’s degrees.

The clarity of purpose and commitment, as well as the planning and review practices noted above, should help assure that VUSC aligns its resources with its institutional priorities so that educational effectiveness and institutional capacity are advanced (CFR 3.7).

Interviews with various members of the VUSC campus community and a review of strategic objectives for academic program, financial, and facility functions indicate alignment with the stated mission, vision, and values of the institution. It is expected that the strategic planning and operational model will continue to act as a framework for VUSC as it further refines and prioritizes its strategic objectives within the bounds of its staffing and financial resource limitations (CFR 3.4 and 3.7).
**Higher Education Environment and Institutional Response:** The strategic and operational planning model adopted by VUSC in 2014 is a six-phase continuous planning process that begins with a perspective phase that assesses the external environment and identifies opportunities and threats that could impact the institution and its mission. The perspective phase informs the subsequent planning, action, and review stages that allow VUSC to formulate, monitor, and modify a list of annual core issues and related strategic objectives designed to effectively advance the institution’s mission while functioning in an ever-changing higher education environment.

Interviews with Board members, members of the senior administration, faculty, staff and students indicate that the planning process has been somewhat effective, but has yet to be fully implemented and integrated with financial and budgetary planning (CFR 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6, and 4.7). The inclusion of two strategic objectives (5a and 6a) in the action initiative profile for 2016-2017 that are focused on refining, operationalizing, and measuring strategic planning efforts, are evidence of necessary ongoing integration efforts.

**Component 9: Reflection and plans for improvement**

VUSC concluded their self-study with a broad reflection on the gains made through the process of self-reflection. They identified three primary areas of growth: 1) community growth through collaboration and a commitment to the public good; 2) assessment and review data analysis that has led to evidence-based planning for student learning and success; and 3) institutional sustainability framed as a holistic model, consisting of financial sustainability, human sustainability, and sustainability of educational quality. Many of these areas of growth appear in the team’s notations throughout the report on each of the components, and in its set of commendations in the final section.
As a prelude to the findings reported in the self-study, VUSC noted all previous concerns and actions of the Commission and provided detailed responses to and progress reports for each of these. In each of the component essays from 1 to 7, VUSC identified specific gains made, noted areas needing improvements, and articulated next steps. These were understood as the institution’s “plans for improvement.”

The conclusion in Component 9 did not include a restatement of all areas noted that need improvement throughout the self-study in specific sections, nor did they provide an articulated plan for identifying priorities and communicating these to its key stakeholders. Therefore, the team has included in its recommendations encouragements to VUSC to better align major planning processes, and set targets and timelines for each plan to enable the institution to benchmark its specific progress. Because members of the campus community have weathered periods of instability and upheaval, it is critically important for the leadership to become even more transparent to all community members through clear communication of these planning strategies.

SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vanguard’s self-study, response to the team’s Lines of Inquiry, and its organization of the site visit made it very clear that the institution had prepared a careful and thoughtful reflection for this accreditation review. The self-study responded to each of the prior WSCUC Commission actions, showing steady progress, and the interviews included broad participation by the administration, faculty, staff, and students. Because of several Special Visits, Vanguard appears to have a clear sense of the challenges it faces ahead and the will to meet these directly. The team found no areas of non-compliance with the standards, federal policy requirements, nor the
Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators. As an encouragement for future directions, the team offers sets of commendations and recommendations below:

**Commendations**

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

1. Clearly articulated and aligned mission, vision, and values in support of student success (CFR 1.1);
2. An independent, engaged, and committed Board of Trustees and the employment of a qualified, experienced senior administrative team (CFRs 3.6, 3.9);
3. A collaborative, dedicated, and qualified faculty and staff (CFR 3.1), who have supported the university as it has experienced financial stresses and have fully engaged in advancing the mission, vision, and values of Vanguard (CFR 3.1 and 3.10);
4. The adoption of a strategic and continuous planning model aligned with the University’s mission, vision, and values and focused on assisting Vanguard in responding to a changing higher education environment in the decade ahead (CFR 4.6 and 4.7);
5. The improvement of Vanguard’s financial status over the past five years including a significant increase in unrestricted net assets, a significant reduction in liabilities, and improved key financial ratios (CFR 3.4);
6. An improvement in the overall retention rate since 2010-11, using methods such as targeted interventions for at-risk students (CFR 2.10);
7. The development and implementation of a systematic review and yearly assessment process, completed specific, credible assessments for the five competencies, and articulated levels of performance at graduation (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3).
Recommendations

1. To complete the alignment of enrollment planning and recruitment with strategic, operational, and financial planning (CFRs 3.4, 4.6, 4.7).

2. To better assure the university’s long term financial viability, VUSC should advance the timelines for each of its strategic objectives to improve the diversification of revenue streams, grow enrollment, and further advance endowment growth (CFR 3.4).

3. To accelerate the timelines for the full integration and implementation of strategic and operational plans that are built upon the strategic and continuous planning model (CFRs 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7).

4. To increase and support the number of faculty and staff sufficient to support students’ and programmatic needs (CFR 3.1).

5. To address the reported and observed morale issues of faculty and staff (CFR 3.3).

6. To develop standard University-wide methods of tracking, monitoring, and responding to student complaints and disputes (CFRs 1.7, 2.10, 2.13).

7. To ensure that the program review process is stabilized, the disposition of resource needs requested through program review should be documented and communicated clearly and in a timely manner (CFR 3.7).
APPENDICES

On the remaining pages, the report includes the following appendices:

A. Federal Compliance Forms
   1. Credit Hour Review
   2. Marketing and Recruitment Review
   3. Student Complaint Review
   4. Transfer Policy Review

B. Distance Education

APPENDIX A.1. CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Reviewed</th>
<th>Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy on credit hour</td>
<td>Is this policy easily accessible? ☑ YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where is the policy located? The Credit Hour policy is published in the Vanguard University catalog in the traditional undergraduate section, each graduate program, as well as the Professional Studies section of the catalog.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: Vanguard has created uniform credit hour templates for on-ground, hybrid, and online courses. These were sometimes directly embedded in syllabi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour</td>
<td>Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)? ☑ YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the institution adhere to this procedure? ☑ YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: Vanguard has both a new course approval process that reviews credit hour policy requirements and periodic program review. Additionally, when interviewed on site, the dean and the program coordinator for professional studies stated that they reviewed credit hour policies with faculty in their programs and coordinated with Registrar’s to ensure that all courses in the schedule conformed to credit hour requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet</td>
<td>Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: Schedule shows standard hours per week for the span of the semester.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</th>
<th>How many syllabi were reviewed?</th>
<th>1 to 6 per area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)?</td>
<td>Online and hybrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What degree level(s)?</td>
<td>Bachelor’s and Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What discipline(s)?</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education, Religion, Nursing, Organizational Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded?</td>
<td>X YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: Vanguard has specified out course content and activity equivalents for credit hours in each type of course (e.g., online and hybrid); for example, NURS 526 identified portion of the course online and portion on-ground, and included a table that specified portions of course content and activities illustrating how these related to the 1-hour in class to 2-hours outside of class ratios; these are continuing to be developed and reviewed for consistency.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated) Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</th>
<th>How many syllabi were reviewed?</th>
<th>2-6 per area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What kinds of courses?</td>
<td>Labs, practicum, accelerated online courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What degree level(s)?</td>
<td>Bachelor’s and Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What discipline(s)?</td>
<td>Chemistry, Psychology, Nursing, Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded?</td>
<td>X YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: Vanguard’s hybrid and online programs operate with both accelerated and traditional timeframes. For accelerated programs, credit hour equivalents are established for content and course activities.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)</th>
<th>How many programs were reviewed?</th>
<th>10 undergraduate majors; 3 professional studies programs; 3 graduate programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What kinds of programs were reviewed?</td>
<td>On-ground, hybrid, online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What degree level(s)?</td>
<td>Associate (Early Childhood Education); Bachelor’s; Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What discipline(s)?</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education (AA &amp; BA), Biology, Business (Org. Management), Chemistry, Communication, Kinesiology, Marketing, Mathematics, Music Education, Nursing, Psychology, Political Science, Religion (some of these programs have undergraduate and graduate degrees).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length?</td>
<td>X YES ☐ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: Course program material is clearly represented in the University Catalog for undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies programs. The Credit Hour Policy is published on p. 40 of the University Catalog, and is consistent with the appended materials submitted with the Institutional Self-Study: one hour (minimum 50 minutes) of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks or one semester, or an equivalent quantity of work over a term of different length (intensive, accelerated, online courses, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A.2. MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW

Under federal regulation*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s recruiting and admissions practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Reviewed</th>
<th>Questions and Comments: Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this table as appropriate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Federal regulations** | Does the institution follow federal regulations on recruiting students?  
X YES ☐ NO  
Comments: The University follows HEA Section 487 (a) (20) and NACAC SPGP regarding compensation of employees. |

| Degree completion and cost | Does the institution provide information about the typical length of time to degree?  
X YES ☐ NO  
Does the institution provide information about the overall cost of the degree?  
X YES ☐ NO  
Comments: Information is available in the University Catalog and online. |

| Careers and employment | Does the institution provide information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable?  
X YES ☐ NO  
Does the institution provide information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable?  
X YES ☐ NO  
Comments: Information is available in the University Catalog and online on the Career Services webpage. |

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*§602.16(a)(1)(vii)

**Section 487 (a) (20) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) prohibits Title IV eligible institutions from providing incentive compensation to employees or third party entities for their success in securing student enrollments. Incentive compensation includes commissions, bonus payments, merit salary adjustments, and promotion decisions based solely on success in enrolling students. These regulations do not apply to the recruitment of international students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal financial aid.
APPENDIX A.3. STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW

Under federal regulation*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s student complaints policies, procedures, and records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Reviewed</th>
<th>Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Policy on student complaints | Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints? X YES ☐ NO  
If so, Is the policy or procedure easily accessible? Where? Yes, University Catalog  
Comments: |
| Process(es)/procedure | Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? X YES ☐ NO  
If so, please describe briefly: Process varies depending on type and department.  
If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? X YES ☐ NO  
Comments: |
| Records | Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? X YES ☐ NO  
If so, where? Records are distributed across the institution.  
Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? ☐ YES X NO  
If so, please describe briefly: Because the records are initiated and retained in multiple areas across the institution, it is not currently possible for the institution to effectively track and monitor student complaints over time.  
Comments:  
Institution indicated in their submitted documentation that the ability to track complaints is short-coming and one which they are working on remediating. |

*§602-16(1)(1)(ix)
See also WASC Senior College and University Commission’s Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.
**APPENDIX A.4. TRANSFER CREDIT POLICY REVIEW**

Under federal regulations*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s recruiting and admissions practices accordingly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Reviewed</th>
<th>Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Credit Policy(s)</td>
<td>Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for receiving transfer credit? Yes ☑ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the policy publicly available? Yes ☑ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If so, where? It is published in the University Catalog and on the website on the Registrar’s pages.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Does the policy(s) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education? Yes ☑ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: In transferring credit, Vanguard distinguishes between regionally-accredited institutions and those who are not in terms of articulation agreements. Students transferring from community colleges in California can transfer many courses from UC’s IGETC pattern and the CSU breadth requirements for general education. Religion requirements are more intensive and the current subject of discussions about revision downward (from 5- to 4-class requirement with minimum unit-transfer).</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*§602.24(e): Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that--

1. Are publicly disclosed in accordance with 668.43(a)(11); and

2. Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission’s Transfer of Credit Policy.

Review Completed by: Carole L. Huston
Date: 03/01/2017

**APPENDIX B. DISTANCE EDUCATION REVIEW-TEAM REPORT**

Institution: Vanguard University of Southern California (VUSC)
Type of Visit: Accreditation Visit
Name of reviewer/s: Shirley McGuire
Date/s of review: February 27th - March 2nd, 2017
A completed copy of this form should be appended to the team report for all comprehensive visits to institutions that offer distance education programs¹ and for other visits as applicable. Teams can use the institutional report to begin their investigation, then, use the visit to confirm claims and further surface possible concerns. Teams are not required to include a narrative about this in the team report but may include recommendations, as appropriate, in the Findings and Recommendations section of the team report. (If the institution offers only online courses, the team may use this form for reference but need not submit it as the team report is expected to cover distance education in depth in the body of the report.)

1. Programs and courses reviewed (please list)
   - Reviewed program and online courses for AA and BA in Early Childhood Education
     - ECED 100: Cornerstone for ECE (fall 2016)
     - ECED 460: Advanced Practicum I (spring 2017)
     - ECED 299/499: Capstone for ECE (fall 2016)
   - Reviewed program and online courses for MA in Leadership Studies
     - CLSG 670: The Character of Christian Love (spring 2017)
     - CLSG 646 Leadership and Character Development (spring 2017)
   - Reviewed program for BA in Religion

2. Background Information (number of programs offered by distance education; degree levels; FTE enrollment in distance education courses/programs; history of offering distance education; percentage growth in distance education offerings and enrollment; platform, formats, and/or delivery method)

VUSC’s distance education offerings have grown since they were approved for their first online program in 2011. The university offers four programs in a fully online format: two in early childhood education and two in religion. These programs also include hybrid and on ground options. The BA and AA in Early Childhood Education programs were approved in 2011. The BA in Religion was granted interim approval and the MA in Leadership Studies was approved in 2016. There are online courses that meet the VUSC General Education requirement. Graduate and Professional Studies now offer hybrid and compressed hybrid programs, such as the RN to BSN and the MS in Organizational Psychology.

The FTE enrollments for the BA and AA in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs stated below target in the Substantive Change proposals (49% and 20% of target, respectively). Target enrollments were adjusted and have risen since then. Retention for the BA in ECE has also been increasing with 48% for the 2013-2014, 61% for 2014-2015, and 71% for 2015-2016. FTE Enrollments are closer to the more modest targets for the two new online programs in religion and retention data is not yet available. FTE

¹ See Protocol for Review of Distance Education to determine whether programs are subject to this process. In general, only programs that are more than 50% online require review and reporting.
enrollments for hybrid programs in the Graduate and Profession Studies are at or above their targets. Discussions with the Interim Dean of Graduate Programs and the Directors of the ECE, Religion, and Leadership Studies programs confirmed that VUSC is aware of and monitoring the enrollments and retention and creating strategies to address problems. They are also collecting at least qualitative data on the curriculum and providing faculty will support and training. A new Director of Educational Technology was hired during our visit and will work with the new Institute of Faculty Development.

VUSC uses Canvas as a platform, with most instruction asynchronous, though some instructors do live recordings for their courses. The students have to go through a secure login process, exams are proctored locally and instructors use a roll call and other check-in methods to verify student participant identification.

3. Nature of the review (material examined and persons/committees interviewed)
- Reviewed WSCUC Institutional Report
- Reviewed Strategic Operations Plan 2016-2020
- Reviewed enrollment and retention information from Registrar and IR
- Reviewed information on the Vanguard University website about program requirements, admissions requirements, tuition, and student services and resources
- Reviewed program review binder for BA and AA in Early Childhood Education
- Entered online courses listed above and reviewed course materials and student work, including syllabi, modules, additional instructions about campus resources, roll calls, and discussion group threads
- Interviewed Dean Wilson, Interim Dean Wickman, Program Directors Chun-Burbank, Heuser, and Peterson, Director of Educational Technology Stachowiak, Co-Directors of Educational Effectiveness Wickman and Avans, and the Assessment Committee during the site visit

Observations and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines of Inquiry (refer to relevant CFRs to assure comprehensive consideration)</th>
<th>Observations and Findings</th>
<th>Follow-up Required (identify the issues)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fit with Mission.</strong> How does the institution conceive of distance learning relative to its mission, operations, and administrative structure? How are distance education offerings planned, funded, and operationalized?</td>
<td>The Strategic Operations Plan 2016-2020 states that “Standardize and optimize online delivery systems” are a strategic priority as part of reaching out beyond Orange County and to respect to demands of the 21st Century. The new distance education programs in the Religion Department are based on the</td>
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model used in 2011 to develop the Early Childhood Education program. Development was funded by VUSC’s sponsoring denomination the Southern California Network of the Assemblies of God. Discussions with Board of Trustees members, the deans, and the directors of the distance learning programs showed that VUSC is committed to distance education in order to tap into the adult learner population. There is a new process for faculty to submit new program proposals and administration funds feasibility studies.

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<th><strong>Connection to the Institution.</strong> How are distance education students integrated into the life and culture of the institution?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Early Childhood Education BA and AA programs have a Cornerstone course that introduces new students to distance learning at VUSC. The BA in Religion and MA in Leadership Studies instructors discuss ways to connect with the VUSC community in their syllabus and encourage student discussion about their lives and needs. Students in hybrid programs have access to on campus options. During the student session, students participating in distance education programs said they felt part of the VUSC community.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Quality of the DE Infrastructure.</strong> Are the learning platform and academic infrastructure of the site conducive to learning and interaction between faculty and students and among students? Is the technology adequately supported? Are there back-ups?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Canvas is used as a platform and active discussion groups were evident in all courses reviewed. Some instructors supplement with live presentations, which Canvas can support. Examples of faculty input from how to navigate the site to how to be professional on practicum sites to feedback about academic materials were founds across the courses. Students survey data suggest they are satisfied with the online learning environment. Discussions with technology staff suggest that backups are sufficient.</td>
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**Student Support Services**: What is the institution’s capacity for providing advising, counseling, library, computing services, academic support and other services appropriate to distance modality? What do data show about the effectiveness of the services?

All of the courses reviewed have links to academic resources at the end of the syllabus or in the course shell. Online student satisfaction and course evaluations suggest that student satisfaction is high, though some same sizes were small. It is not clear from the online course materials how students’ needs are met if they cannot come to campus. VUSC has hired off-campus staff to assist with writing support and the Institution Report states that the “mechanisms for ensuring student success in online programs are still being developed.” A Director of Educational Technology has been hired.

**Faculty.** Who teaches the courses, e.g., full-time, part-time, adjunct? Do they teach only online courses? In what ways does the institution ensure that distance learning faculty are oriented, supported, and integrated appropriately into the academic life of the institution? How are faculty involved in curriculum development and assessment of student learning? How are faculty trained and supported to teach in this modality?

Almost all (90%) of the instructors in ECE program are adjunct faculty members and half (50%) of the instructors in the religion programs are full time faculty members. The faculty members in the religion programs also teach on ground courses. All distance education faculty are trained though a Canvas course. Program directors have access to course and can monitor and assist instructors. It is not clear if all faculty participate in assessment and curriculum design. The faculty for the ECE, for instance, meets once a semester and may not have the ability to contribute. A new Director of Educational Technology will be working with the new Institute of Faculty Development. It is anticipated that the new director will ensure that distance education faculty receive more training and participate more in curricular development.

**Curriculum and Delivery.** Who designs the distance education programs and courses? How are they approved and evaluated? Are the programs and courses comparable in content, outcomes and quality to on-ground offerings? (Submit credit hour report.)

VUSC has a curriculum approval process that includes approval by the Faculty Senate. All courses include student learning outcomes and assignments are aligned with those outcomes. The directors of the programs discussed how they collect at least qualitative data to compare the student learning across different modalities. Examples of student survey data showed
<table>
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<th><strong>Retention and Graduation.</strong> What data on retention and graduation are collected on students taking online courses and programs? What do these data show? What disparities are evident? Are rates comparable to on-ground programs and to other institutions’ online offerings? If any concerns exist, how are these being addressed?</th>
<th>Retention started low for the BA in Early Childhood Education when the program started in 2012. It has increase since that time, but retention for fully online programs is still lower than for hybrid and on ground programs. A Director of Educational Technology has been hired and should help to locate places where services will be useful. Directors will be monitoring retention.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Learning.</strong> How does the institution assess student learning for online programs and courses? Is this process comparable to that used in on-ground courses? What are the results of student learning assessment? How do these compare with learning results of on-ground students, if applicable, or with other online offerings?</td>
<td>Indirect data has been collected on student learning using student satisfaction survey and it suggests that students are having a high quality learning experience. Qualitative data collected by directors of the programs suggest that learning is equivalent across the modalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contracts with Vendors.</strong> Are there any arrangements with outside vendors concerning the infrastructure, delivery, development, or instruction of courses? If so, do these comport with the policy on <strong>Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations?</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality Assurance Processes:</strong> How are the institution’s quality assurance processes designed or modified to cover distance education? What evidence is provided that distance education programs and courses are educationally effective?</td>
<td>The same assessment procedures are used, but data is primarily indirect at this point. Again, qualitative data collected by directors of the programs suggest that learning is equivalent across the modalities.</td>
<td>none</td>
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