

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

To: Marymount California University

Date of Visit: September 21-24, 2021

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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 Accreditation History

Marymount California University (MCU) is an independent, Catholic university whose mission is inspired by the charism and tradition of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM). Marymount California University (formerly Marymount College) transferred accreditation from WASC-ACCJC to the WASC-ACSCU Senior Commission in 2010 when it obtained approval to launch BA degree programs, a significant development after having been a 2-year institution serving outbound transfer students since 1968. Marymount launched BA degree programs in the fall of 2010 and changed its name from Marymount College to Marymount California University (MCU) in 2013. Today, MCU offers BA degree programs (Biology, Business, Criminal Justice, Psychology and Multidisciplinary Studies), BS degree programs (Accounting, Biology, Digital Communication Media, Management, Marketing) and an MBA that has both on-ground and distance education approvals from WSCUC. The university has WSCUC approval for two additional distance education graduate programs: an MS in Community Psychology and an MS in Leadership. The university also confers Associate of Arts degrees leading to the bachelor's degree.

MCU ranked in the top 50 performers on social mobility in the 2020 US News and World Report rankings in the National Liberal Arts Colleges category. MCU is located in Rancho Palos Verdes in Southern California. The 24-acre academic campus overlooks the Pacific Ocean and is situated in a residential neighborhood. This "Oceanview campus" is zoned by the city to enroll a maximum of 793 full-time equivalent day students, and 150 evening/weekend students. While the university targets future enrollment at 900+, it has in recent years experienced declining incoming classes and enrollments. Fall 2019 enrollments were 647 with an incoming class of 207 students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, academic instruction was delivered online for fall 2020. MCU's fall 2020 enrollment at census was 583 with an incoming class of 199 new students.

Student athletes are significant with 40% of MCU's undergraduates in this category. MCU is a member of the CalPac conference of the NAIA. MCU fields teams in 16 sports: baseball, men's and women's cross-country, e-sports, men's and women's golf, men's and women's soccer, softball, surf, men's and women's tennis, men's and women's track and field, women's volleyball, and women's beach volleyball.

MCU's residential campus, "the Villas", is located several miles away in San Pedro. It is a gated community of 2- or 3-bedroom, 2-bath townhouses arranged around a central outdoor pavilion. It consists of 82 townhomes, 198 bedrooms, 24/7 security, parking, simple food service, a pool, sand volleyball court, basketball court and a gym. Each townhome also has a kitchen, garage, and laundry facility. The university operates a shuttle service coordinated with class times at the Oceanview campus.

The 2009-2015 period saw a period of significant investment in programs, facilities, services, technology, and staff as the college transitioned to a 4-year institution. However, enrollment and revenues did not grow as expected, requiring the university to make difficult retrenching decisions and take related expense-cutting measures in FY 2016-2017. Today, the university regards itself as a more focused and efficient institution. Revenue continues to be a challenge, and enrollment and fiscal management are a high priority when making strategic investments and decisions.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

Members of the team began their evaluation work with the Offsite Review (OSR) on March 2, 2021, by reviewing the MCU Institutional Report and multiple associated documents provided by the institution. The team analyzed the materials available, and completed worksheets to summarize relevant information, while identifying specific questions for further inquiry and needs for information relative to the WSCUC report components and Standards. The completed worksheets assisted the team in focusing on previous recommendations and critical elements of MCU's Institutional Report in preparation for the Offsite Review. The Offsite Review concluded with a Zoom meeting with key MCU administrators in which the team shared areas for further exploration codified through specific Lines of Inquiry that would be the focus of the accreditation visit. The Offsite Review (OSR) Summary of Lines of Inquiry Guide was formally provided to MCU on March 11, 2021. MCU responded to the team's request for additional documents by July 28, 2021.

Prior to the Accreditation Visit (AV), the team prepared a worksheet for the pre-visit accreditation conference call that summarized a review of evidence from the Lines of Inquiry and identified specific questions and areas for further inquiry suggesting specific roles or groups to interview. During a pre-visit Zoom call on August 17, 2021, the team once again reviewed and discussed the materials the institution provided at the team's request, then finalizing the visit schedule and the assignment of team members to specific sessions. A final draft visit schedule was prepared by MCU's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) and sent to the team shortly before the actual visit.

A confidential email account was established to allow for greater and more confidential participation from the campus community. This email account was monitored by the assistant chair and email content shared with team members at the conclusion of the site visit.

The Accreditation Visit began with a team planning session on Tuesday, September 21, 2021 at which time the team reviewed the final visit schedule, team member assignments, and identified specific open-ended questions aligned with the Lines of Inquiry to be asked during each group or individual meeting. The team also identified a meeting lead from the team members who would be responsible for opening the meeting, introductions, and the role of facilitating the time and cadence of each meeting. The

AV formally started on Wednesday, September 22, 2021 utilizing Zoom technology for all meetings. The first meeting was with the ALO for final logistics, followed by the introduction of the team and a conversation with the MCU President, and subsequently the President's Cabinet. In the period of two days, the team continued to meet with a range of constituencies and individuals in order to gain understanding, context, and data about the institution, the organizational structure, mission and values, and the input of faculty, staff, and students. The AV ended on September 24, 2021 with a public exit meeting during which the final commendations and recommendations were read.

The visit was extremely well-organized, and each session was productive and positive. The team was positively impressed by the level of participant commitment in meetings and appreciated the willingness to participate and transparency everyone displayed.

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

The Self-Study Report was organized by components. The report was concise and included an introductory chapter and a section on reflections and future plans. The report included supporting documents in appendices. The report included all required components and provided a foundation prior to the visit. The team viewed the report as an accurate reflection of the challenges faced by MCU and the commitment of MCU to provide a high-level of quality to its students. Report content reflected MCU's academic and administrative capacities and their ongoing institutional commitment to mission, vision, and values.

To prepare for the Accreditation Visit, the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) organized meetings with MCU stakeholders, which included the faculty, students, academic departments, student support services, members of the governing board, relevant committees, such as the strategic planning committee, faculty committees, and program review committees, as well as campus administrators.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

Component 1: Response to previous Commission actions

MCU received reaffirmation of accreditation in 2016 for six years, with a Special Visit required in 2018. From the 2016 visit MCU received nine recommendations, (1) the deficit; (2) the Marymount 2020 Plan and enrollment/financial targets; (3) evaluation of multiple initiatives taken to expand enrollment; (4) long term viability of Lakeside campus; (5) three-year budget plan reflecting realistic enrollment scenarios; (6) development of comprehensive three-year undergraduate and graduate admission and marketing plan; (7) assessment process and culture of evidence-based decision-making; (8)

faculty-led review of terms of employment and alignment with vision and strategic plan; and (9) strategy for international recruitment.

The 2018 Special Visit came at a time when the institution was undergoing key administrative changes and, as the institution stated in their report, the visiting team "...found a community suffering from campus climate concerns in the wake of recent events" (pg.6). Therefore, recommendations from the 2018 Special Visit focused on work needed to address the current climate. These recommendations were to:

1. Define, refine and implement a clear model of participatory governance that includes the Board, faculty, administration, and staff. (CFRs 3.7, 3.10)
2. Take steps to identify and address issues of faculty and staff morale, including a baseline climate survey to be administered soon, and a second survey administered prior to next accreditation visit. (CFRs 1.7, 4.5)
3. Create a new institutional strategic plan that is developed through participatory governance, responds to external trends, and creates a clear identity for MCU. (CFR 4.6)
4. Within the strategic plan, develop a comprehensive three-year undergraduate and graduate admissions and marketing plan aligned with the institution's strategic plan. (CFRs 3.4 and 4.7)
5. Better align the university with state and federal guidelines and employ higher education best practices drawing on external organizations and other resources and expertise. (CFR 1.7)
6. Closely evaluate reductions in infrastructure, particularly IT, to ensure basic faculty development and student needs are met. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5)
7. Develop an effective communications model that includes internal communication and crisis management. (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 4.3)

Additionally, a Special Visit was scheduled and hosted in fall 2019, which began to show progress for MCU on all previous Commission recommendations. Based on the 2019 Special Visit, the Commission required MCU to respond to the following issues at the time of the 2021 Accreditation Visit:

1. Financial Sustainability. Continue to employ assertive actions to cover operating deficits and to achieve balanced annual and multi-year financial/budget planning – essential for institutional viability and long-term sustainability. (CFR 3.4)
2. Enrollment Growth. Continue urgent and aggressive actions to address the institution's highest priority for enrollment growth/management that is at the core of its long-term financial sustainability. (CFR 3.4)
3. Strategic Planning Implementation. Implement fully the strategic plan, integrated with enrollment and marketing plans; demonstrate progress toward achievement of strategic priorities through assessment data/metrics. (CFR 4.6)
4. Academic Planning. Continue to engage in strategic academic planning focused on raising MCU's academic reputation and visibility with branding that emphasizes MCU's academic distinction to attract and retain students. (CFRs 3.4, 3.10)
5. Explore Long Term Strategies for Sustainability. Explore long term strategies for sustainability such as potential affiliations. (CFR 3.4)

Through the self-study and visit the team saw that MCU did progress on these recommendations, and it was evident the institution had taken all Commission recommendations seriously.

Component 2: Compliance: Review under WSCUC Standards and compliance with federal requirements.

Component 2 Standard 1:

Institutional Purposes

MCU has a clearly articulated mission statement, and the team felt it was apparent that all constituents were familiar with and embraced it. From students and faculty to staff, leadership and the board of trustees, there was evidence of a strong identity of being a diverse, student-centric institution that fosters a safe, intellectually stimulating and generous environment. (CFR 1.1, 1.4) Additionally, the team found various learning objectives at all levels (institutional, programmatic and course) were available in many forms including MCU's website, handbooks, syllabi and published resources. (CFR 1.2) Through its "Real World Learning" initiative, its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee and Internship/Mentoring programs, MCU has made it a priority to prepare students for the world they will enter upon graduation. (CFR 1.4) Faculty indicated an appreciation for the academic freedom they are given to teach in manners that best serve their students while still adhering to the standards dictated by the curriculum. (CFR 1.3)

Integrity and Transparency

Throughout this visit, the visiting team was afforded the opportunity to have open and direct conversations with representatives from all constituencies, allowing the team to obtain a broad and consistent impression of the school's plans and outlooks. Parties are appropriately informed of matters that have direct impact on their decision-making, which was apparent in all meetings the team held. (CFRs 1.5, 1.7, 1.8) Students are also given the opportunity to be heard and to have concerns, grievances or complaints handled in a professional manner. The process for student grievances and complaints is clearly outlined in the Student Handbook and University Catalog. Responses to grievances were made available to the team and depicted a well thought-out approach that allows for flexible and student-focused resolutions while still maintaining objectivity and consistency in the application of remedies. (CFR 1.6)

Component 2 Standard 2

Teaching and Learning

MCU awards degrees in 9 disciplines at the associate's and bachelor's degree levels. Bachelor's degrees are designed around a 120-unit course plan which includes both breadth requirements focused on core competencies and more complex field-specific courses. (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2a) Currently, the institution offers one graduate program, an MBA, which is designed to allow for a +1 model for current MCU undergraduate students. (CFR 2.2b) Degree requirements, course sequences, and learning outcomes are clearly outlined for each degree program in the university catalog. (CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.12) The institution maintains guiding documents for the development of new programs and courses as well as a curriculum committee for review of all new courses. All programs undergo program review on a 5-year cycle and include an external review component. The most recent reviews were conducted in 2020. (CFR 2.7) In addition to the periodic program review, all departments—both academic and administrative—produce annual reports outlining successes and areas for improvement and attention.

The team found that MCU has invested significant time and attention to the creation of clear curricular mapping of ILOs/PLOs and core competencies as well as attention to key content and skill requirements specific to disciplines (e.g., APA standards, CPA requirements). Opportunities for development of competencies are built into key courses across the curriculum and their assessment is integrated through the identification of specific assignments evaluated through standard rubrics. (CFR 2.6) There is active faculty engagement in discussion and review of the curriculum as well as processes for the assessment of student performance. (CFRs 2.4, 2.6) In meetings with the team, several faculty members described discussions of previous SLO assessment results with students and the resultant increased engagement those classes had with the course content and assignments as a result. (CFR 2.5)

As a smaller institution, MCU balances full time faculty lines with adjuncts to balance stability in core faculty and programs with fluctuations in student interest and demand for specific content areas. The team found this approach appeared to be working, as survey results suggest students find faculty to be approachable, available, and caring. While attention is paid to recruiting faculty with terminal degrees (at the encouragement of the board) to meet external metrics for quality (such as rankings), MCU also places significant emphasis on hiring practitioner faculty with significant industry experience in order to support the “real world learning” focus of the curriculum. (CFR 2.1)

Scholarship and Creative Activity

The university has engaged in discussions around their shared governance model, and the resultant “governance wheel” appeared to clarify areas of responsibility and ensure faculty input and decision making in critical areas of curriculum and faculty review processes. As a teaching focused

institution, faculty noted that there is less emphasis on traditional research, but that many faculties focus on scholarship of teaching and learning or assessment in their discipline. Conversations with faculty revealed that direct institutional support for research and scholarship, as well as professional development, is limited due to financial constraints. However, they praised the institution for capitalizing on internal experts to deliver training experiences (for example on transitioning to online instruction with COVID). It would be beneficial for the university to provide broader support for scholarly activities in the future. (CFR 2.8)

The team found that MCU engages in a regular cycle of faculty review. In addition to the common course-based student evaluation of instruction, the program chairs produce an annual feedback form for each faculty member which integrates a variety of information sources including course evaluations, the faculty member's professional development report/plan and self-evaluation, review of course materials in the LMS, along with classroom observations. Every three years faculty engage in a more extended portfolio review. (CFR 2.9)

Student Learning and Success

MCU supplied evidence of providing a variety of student support services, including academic advising, financial aid, career services, disability services, libraries, health care, and tutoring. Recent student survey data suggests that students are generally satisfied with the quality of services received. (CFRs 2.12, 2.13) Student satisfaction and engagement are regularly assessed through a variety of data collection methods including an advising survey, Mariner Success Initiative, Library and Learning Support survey, and the University Survey. (CFR 2.10)

There was evidence of strong integration of co-curricular programs and support services with academic goals. (CFR 2.11) Particularly notable was the intentional integration of internships to enhance learning. Career services staff work aggressively in the local community to identify potential internship opportunities, and in any particular year approximately 25% of students engage in internships, ensuring that approximately 60% have done an internship by the time of graduation. While these numbers were depressed by COVID restrictions, the campus remains committed to continuing these opportunities in the future. The ability of faculty to work with student life to secure funding for co-curricular activities that align with their course objectives also enhances these partnerships.

MCU was clear about the nature of its institutional aims which were identified in its published mission statement as a commitment to “empower[s] its students through an educational program that develops principled thinkers in the Catholic liberal arts tradition.” The team applauds MCU for the establishment of a variety of initiatives to support a diverse learning community consistent with its mission and values and the changing nature of its campus.

The team found that MCU has a strong general education program centered in each of the undergraduate programs and a program review process that has been successfully streamlined. (CFRs 2.2, 2.7) The team observed faculty members meaningfully engaged with, and assuming responsibility for, assessment of ILOs and SLOs across the institution. (CFR 2.4)

Component 2 Standard 3

Standard 3 concerns the ability of an institution to sustain its operations and support the achievement of its educational objectives through:

- investments in human, physical, fiscal, technological, and information resources, and
- an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures.

Given that MCU has faced several years of deteriorating financial outcomes, the MCU leadership team, along with faculty and staff, have accomplished much to stay viable and make good on the promise to provide a solid educational experience for its students. This, however, has come through the implementation of difficult decisions, such as selling physical assets, reducing staff, and ending less popular program offerings. With that said, the review team was able to observe the willingness of the whole MCU family to step up, do more with less, and become creative in finding more efficient ways to accomplish the institution's goals.

Faculty and Staff

With the support of the board, the provost proactively moved towards increasing MCU's full-time faculty to adjunct instructor ratio, ensuring that each academic program had at least one dedicated full-time faculty lead. Additionally, the hiring plan emphasized hiring faculty with professional experience, which bolstered the credibility of the "Real World Learning" initiative. Many faculty members have long tenure with the university, increasing stability and collaboration, and providing confidence to students. (CFR 3.1 and 3.2) Unfortunately, staff positions have been eliminated, putting additional strain on the remaining personnel. (CFR 3.2) Although the overall perspective was one of dedication to the cause, the team felt there was a potential for burnout and fatigue, especially when added to the external stress of COVID.

Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources

Although the institution has received unqualified independent financial audits throughout the years, the financial trajectory is deteriorating, as shown with three years of net losses. The 2021 unaudited results showed an improvement, primarily due to taking advantage of federal COVID relief programs. While the team felt these tactics were appropriate and well executed to the full advantage of

the situation, they do not provide the long-term financial stability necessary to begin reinvesting in resources. MCU's overall investment balance has decreased by approximately 50%, with additional reductions expected in 2022. Overall, the long-term standalone financial outlook is bleak, with a turnaround potentially reliant on the sale of prime property or with MCU being acquired/merged with another institution. (CFR 3.4)

The team felt MCU has not taken full advantage of its unique statuses, such as being a 501c(3), non-profit organization or being a minority-serving institution, in terms of fundraising. Although there is a Director of Development on staff and a Board Development Committee, the efforts did not appear to the team to have been successful. This may have been in part due to the pandemic, but past efforts did not appear productive either. While the numbers have not been positive, the team found the MCU team has stayed committed and creative in ensuring students meet the learning outcomes expected of them. (CFR 3.5)

Organizational Structures and Decision-Making:

Throughout the review process, it was clear that this institution has a highly dedicated, high performing team who exhibited accountability and integrity in all facets of their responsibilities. If anything, many team members often appeared to take on more responsibilities than would normally be expected or necessary. The faculty and staff were seen to be responsive and committed to the students and motivated to succeed. (CFR 3.6)

Based on discussions with various members of all levels of the organization, it was clear that people felt heard and considered in most decision-making. There was an air of transparency about all aspects of the university, including about the difficult financial circumstances. The faculty and staff were collaborative and cohesive, presenting for the most part as a group of people with a shared vision. (CFR 3.7)

The president of the university has a reputation of being committed, approachable, and willing to "roll up his sleeves" with the team. The CFO is now considered a permanent member of the leadership rather than "interim" and appeared to be working diligently to improve the financial structure of the university. Although the team is smaller than in the past, there are adequate administrators to provide effective educational leadership and management. (CFR 3.8)

The board of trustees have strategically maintained a lower number of members in the last few years, rather than recruiting new members, while the university is considering future scenarios for sustainability. The current members have 3 to 22 years of experience on the board and appear committed to providing interactive support to the president and other institutional leaders. The team felt the effectiveness of the board might be enhanced by additional experience in areas such as fundraising and

development. In addition, it was observed that the longevity of some members may cause other members to be less vocal, thereby potentially thwarting innovation and diversity of ideas. The board could also be more representative in terms of racial and ethnic diversity of the university's stakeholders, specifically the student and alumni populations, to ensure a broader understanding of the needs of these constituents.

(CFR 3.9)

Overall, the team felt the institution had created a governance structure that allowed for a variety of internal voices to be heard, and was well versed in the direction, goals and outcome expectations. The culture appeared collegial and respectful, while at the same time willing to change for the good of the student. (CFR 3.10)

Component 2 Standard 4

The team observed that the faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees of MCU were intensely committed to student success which was demonstrated through their clear and integrated learning outcomes framework (including strong assessment and program review processes) and use of data from the Institutional Research Office. (CFRs 4.1 – 4.6)

As the institutional report indicated, program reviews have allowed MCU to incorporate feedback and engagement from faculty, students, and alumni. (CFRs 4.5 - 4.7) The team's conversations with faculty supported MCU's commitments to reflecting on teaching practices and adapting to a changing environment for student learning. The team also understood that its programs have fully completed an assessment cycle and commends their assessment process that has demonstrated continued commitment to educational effectiveness. (CFRs 2.4, 2.7)

The team appreciates the creation of checklists for new online courses and program development, as well as their use with current programs and courses. (CFRs 4.6, 4.7) The team felt that MCU was fully engaged in trying to anticipate and address the many changes it will confront over the next couple of years, including enrollment challenges. MCU was found to be aware of the changing higher education context and has been pursuing online/hybrid delivery modalities and, in doing so, enlarging the potential geographic reach of the institution for enrollment.

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

MCU defined *accessibility* and *relevance* as key components that characterize what it means to hold a degree from the institution. MCU has four Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) which are 1) communication, 2) analysis for decision-making, 3) real world learning, and 4) perspectives. These ILOs are nested into Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and undergraduate core competencies and set the

direction for ensuring quality and integrity of their degrees. The MCU ILOs and PLOs help guide the emphasis on liberal arts skills and perspectives while preparing its students for real world encounters.

As stated in the self-study and evidenced through visit conversations, MCU degree programs highlight both career-connected learning and a relevant student experience that includes mentoring and opportunities for achievement. MCU's full-time faculty are responsible for degree quality and relevance. The faculty develop the PLOs and apply real-world learning to the curriculum. Additionally, MCU utilizes rubrics for assessing written communication, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy and critical reasoning, ethical reasoning, Catholic history and thought, and global/cross-cultural competency. Faculty use these rubrics to assess the PLOs and intend to further use them as instructional and formative feedback tools.

As with the quality of the degrees, MCU faculty also work to ensure degree integrity. MCU has established processes to help ensure integrity of its degrees. These include specific processes for faculty, as well as various academic processes. The team found that MCU faculty were involved in assessment at both the course and program level. Since the 2015 reaffirmation visit, the assessment process has been streamlined to help with a culture of assessment on the campus. The overall process includes establishing and reviewing learning outcomes, integrating and assessing core competency rubrics, developing department annual reports, and having a cycle of program reviews that garner department and institutional level discussions of outcomes and findings.

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

MCU offers associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. The curriculum for each of these degrees is patterned after similar programs in other institutions. MCU has identified 4 broad learning outcomes that they refer to as Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) that are:

- Communication: Written and oral
- Analysis and decision-making: Quantitative reasoning, information literacy and critical thinking
- Real-world learning: Self-efficacy, technology and career-related project
- Perspectives: Catholic, global, nature, creative and ethical

The team observed that MCU has a robust delineation and mapping of learning outcomes from the course to the institutional level. Each major has several identified courses and assignments through which outcomes are assessed, with some occurring early in the curriculum (associate's level) and some near to 4-year degree completion. In addition to program learning outcomes, core competencies are also well integrated into the curriculum and regularly assessed for achievement. While not all core

competencies had been assessed at the time of the team visit, there was a clear timeline for the integration of the remaining competencies in future years. (CFR 2.2a)

Achievement of learning outcomes is assessed at both formative and summative points, through rubrics designed collaboratively by faculty and applied to specific course assignments that have been identified as appropriate for demonstrating the outcomes. The institution employs a common reporting methodology for rubric scoring—an easily understandable stacked bar—which facilitates easy comprehension of results and a common foundation for discussion of potential areas for improvement. Evidence suggests that at the time of summative assessment, the majority of students are in the “exceptional” and “proficient” ranges for most outcomes. (CFRs 2.4, 2.6)

Results of rubric assessment are regularly discussed in departmental meetings, and refinements are implemented based on the discussion. The program chairs are responsible for directing the effort and compiling data in their programs, which helps to ensure robust engagement. However, the team felt more technical support from an integrated LMS or other data architecture might assist in reducing the burden of compilation and preparation placed on the chairs.

Component 5: Student Success: Student learning, retention, and graduation

The team was impressed by MCU’s adaptability and commitment to success. As the campus assesses a potential shift in institutional control, student success is a key issue that is central to maintaining MCU’s core values of tradition, openness, integrity and service. The number of on-going initiatives (e.g., increasing contact hours and unit redemption rate, service agreements, etc.) deserves praise as a sign of a campus committed to addressing issues and committed to innovative programming.

Although, MCU’s programs are subject to systematic review through regular and ongoing assessment of student achievement (CFR 2.7), the institution must keep a close eye on their retention and graduation rate challenges. (CFR 2.10) Currently, the institution’s baccalaureate retention and graduation rates are low at 22% for 6 years and 35% for 8 years. Initiatives are now underway in an effort to address retention and graduation challenges. Although MCU has given itself ambitious goals for these measures, the challenge remains in getting these numbers to increase. The next step will be a campus-wide effort to assess the initiatives to measure the expected impact or identify if additional change is needed to continue supporting student success.

In response to situations where academics might become a challenge for students (and likely to impact retention), programs like the First-Gen Student Support Group, led by the Student Wellness Center, work to help improve student engagement, performance and build a sense of community. (CFR 4.1) The team felt that MCU was strongly committed to finding alternative ways to build connections

between students and faculty, especially as they offer associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. (CFR 2.3)

Low retention rates are a concern for MCU, and the team felt that the institution seemed overly ready to place the blame for the issue on an international recruiting agency (which is no longer in place), rather than substantively identifying potential other causes for this issue. The team also felt that much emphasis was placed on student athlete retention as a vehicle for increasing retention overall, and that while athletes represent about 40% of the undergraduate population, this strategy should not overshadow a more complete and comprehensive focus on the entire population and diversity of MCU's enrolled students.

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

MCU has streamlined its assessment process, enabling program reviews to now provide a basis for assessing student learning aligned to the ILOs. The implementation of this rigorous process has expanded the assessment of institution-wide outcomes by including a cross section of faculty from all programs using rubrics that have been standardized campus-wide.

The complete review of degrees takes place on a 5-year cycle. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3) The program review process has resulted in improvements and changes to ensure greater student learning. The team noted that MCU's IR office has been critical in providing data to support campus decision makers in monitoring retention and graduation rates for various groups. The team felt the IR group seemed to be thoughtful about providing data responsive to campus needs and reporting in ways that help connections to be made. (CFRs 2.10, 4.1, 4.2) Overall, the team felt that MCU was committed to improvement and quality assurance.

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

As identified in prior WSCUC reviews, MCU has struggled financially over the past several years with continued decreases in revenue or cash flows available for operations. In fact, MCU has functioned with an operational deficit from 2019 through 2021, thereby jeopardizing compliance with CFR 3.4. In addition, the most recent budget for FY2022 projects a continued loss from operations in excess of \$5M.

The team found the university primarily focuses on enrollments for its financial stability yet has been unable to meet its enrollment targets. Most recently, 180 new students of which 66 were first-time freshman were enrolled in fall 2021, compared to a target of 400 (see Strategic Enrollment Plan 2020-

2023, page 9). Additionally, MCU made the difficult decision to temporarily shut down all athletic programs in early 2021 due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Student athletes represent about 40% of the university's student population.

In discussions with the CFO, president, and board of trustees, it was apparent that MCU relies significantly on cashflow from tuition revenue, perhaps to its detriment. As a 501c(3) entity and a Catholic-based institution, the team ponders MCU's apparent lack of focus on fundraising, development and advancement activity as an alternative to its cash flow issues. As indicated by campus leadership, Marymount is a tuition-driven school, however given its inability to rectify its enrollment deterioration, the team felt there was an absence of urgency to identify immediate solutions. For example, although MCU is in a prime southern California area and has been willing to sell off-campus property in the past, the finance team had not at the time of the visit obtained a recent formal appraisal which could help them assess its options for leveraging or selling other property holdings.

In 2020 and 2021, the university was able to access multiple federal resources available to institutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included Payroll Protection Plan loan(s) and various HEERF grants. This artificially bolstered the financial position in the short term, however it is unclear if the federal government intends to continue providing such relief. Therefore, per its own cash flow projections, the university is planning to utilize unrestricted investment funds to remain operational, ultimately reducing its unrestricted funds balance from \$6.35M (reported as of March 2021) to \$2.5M by June 2023.

As recommended by the WSCUC Special Visit team in 2019, MCU has taken steps to secure a strategic partner who has been identified, however these relationships require time, and there is no indication that this transaction will be finalized soon. Prudently, should this merger not come to fruition, the university has prepared a "worst-case scenario" narrative, "MCU Partnership Journey and Planning" revised for this visit, which realistically identified several alternatives, including a teach-out by December 2023.

In discussions with the provost, it was apparent that MCU recognizes its financial situation and has taken steps to eliminate or teach out non-fiscally viable programs, such as minor in Music and certain master's degrees. This helped to concentrate resources towards programs with the strongest potential for growth and viability, and, although a sensible and necessary approach, it may be "too little, too late" if the proposed merger is not successful. It is the team's assessment that MCU remains a "going concern."
(CFR 3.4)

Component 8: Optional essay on institutional specific themes - Not applicable

Component 9: Reflection and plans for improvement

The institution very succinctly reviewed the conclusions made throughout the report from the evidence gathered. Among the recommendations for change made by the institution were several that align with the team's observations about areas for more immediate attention, including a focus on growing enrollment and enhancing student retention and degree completion, securing a broader resource base for the future, and carefully monitoring finances to ensure future viability. The team felt it was clear that MCU is aware of the significant challenges they currently face, particularly with respect to declining enrollment revenue and difficulty recruiting and retaining students, particularly those who enter as first-time first year matriculants.

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS (such as Substantive Change)

There were no other issues to note outside of what has already been addressed in this report.

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

The board and leadership of Marymount California University are to be commended for:

1. The institution's leadership, which at all levels, is characterized by a strong common belief in the institution's mission and the students' success, with the current senior leadership team showing high levels of integrity, collaboration, and accountability.
2. The belief, care, and passion of the leadership, faculty and staff commitment to the whole student experience through personalized engagement, often extending beyond their specific formal areas of organizational responsibility, especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The robust delineation and mapping of learning outcomes from the institution to the course level, including the integration of core competencies, and the thoughtful placement of key assignments for assessment throughout student progression in the major.
4. The integrated approach to assessment of learning outcomes using a common reporting methodology which facilitates easy comprehension of results and a common foundation for discussion and action on areas for improvement.
5. The diligence shown in seeking and identifying a strong strategic partner with a like-minded vision for the key purpose of strengthening the institution's future sustainability.

Recommendations

In order to provide a quality and effective student experience, the team recommends that Marymount California University should:

1. Aggressively focus on the stand-alone financial sustainability of the institution with particular focus on balancing annual revenue and expenses without the current and projected reliance on unrestricted investment funds. (CFR 3.4)
2. Diversify viable revenue sources through non-tuition channels such as fund-raising development/advancement, and governmental resources available to your specific institutional status (i.e., HSI), specifically with non-student/parent external stakeholders, optimizing financial opportunities aligned with your mission. (CFR 3.4)
3. Revisit the strategic planning process with emphasis on increased review frequency, monitoring and updating of the plan, to promote responsiveness to changing circumstances. (CFRs 4.6, 4.7)
4. Expand the focus of the Strategic Enrollment Plan, with a stronger emphasis on intentional and equitable improvements in retention and graduation rates. (CFRs 2.10, 4.3, 4.6)
5. Build on the inventory created by the DEI committee to identify opportunities to more substantively integrate DEI topics and learning outcomes across the institution, with particular focus on all academic curricula. (CFRs 1.4, 2.2a)
6. Further develops the data architecture/infrastructure, to support advanced analysis, interpretation, and utilization in all planning and decision-making throughout the institution. (CFRs 3.7, 4.1, 4.2)
7. Examine the role and responsibilities of the board in exemplifying current governance best practices including, 1) self-evaluation of committee effectiveness in assisting the achievement of institutional goals such as fiscal resourcing beyond tuition, 2) strategic board composition (higher education industry expertise and diversity), 3) a review of the committee structures to ensure the representation of all stakeholders, and 4) the continual monitoring of trends and changes in the higher education environment. (CFRs 3.9, 4.6, 4.7)

APPENDICES

A. Federal Compliance Forms

1 - CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW FORM

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.)
Policy on credit hour	Is this policy easily accessible? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, where is the policy located? 2020-21 University catalog p. 65
	Comments:
Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour	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)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: The Curriculum Development and Review Committee (CDRC) reviews syllabi for new courses. All MCU syllabi include a credit hour statement.
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: Courses meet the prescribed number of hours
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? 1 Syllabus
	What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)? In Person
	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
	What discipline(s)? Internship 291, 391, 491, 591: & Practicum 296, 396, 496, 596
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
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) <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed?
	What kinds of courses?
	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
	What discipline(s)?
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
Sample program information (catalog,	How many programs were reviewed? 1 Program
	What kinds of programs were reviewed? Business

website, or other program materials)	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
	What discipline(s)? See above
	Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:

Review Completed By: Susana Santos
Date: 9/25/21

2 - MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions and Comments: Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this table as appropriate.
**Federal regulations	<p>Does the institution follow federal regulations on recruiting students? X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>Comments:</p> <p>All recruitment personnel are compensated through a standard salary schedule that does not include bonuses or commission. Third party enrollment partners do not receive incentive payments based on student enrollment, with the exception of enrollment partners recruiting international students residing outside of the U.S.</p> <p>Additionally, decisions regarding promotion or merit salary increases of MCU admissions personnel are not based solely on student enrollment volume.</p>
Degree completion and cost	<p>Does the institution provide information about the typical length of time to degree? X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>Does the institution provide information about the overall cost of the degree? X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>Comments:</p> <p>MCU transparently communicates length of time to degree on its website for all undergraduate degree programs as well as the MBA program (https://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/about/consumer-information/).</p> <p>A full breakdown of tuition and fees is posted on the MCU website (https://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/admission/tuition-financial-aid/tuition-fees/) as well as a comprehensive net price calculator that includes indirect costs such as transportation and books (https://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/admission/tuition-financial-aid/net-price-calculator/).</p>
Careers and employment	<p>Does the institution provide information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable? X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>Does the institution provide information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable? X YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p>
	<p>Comments:</p> <p>MCU's Internship and Career Planning Office provides a "career guide" sheet for each degree program that details how the learning outcomes apply to career options (https://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/campus-services/internship-career-planning/career-guides/) in addition to offering deep self-assessment services to match skills, education, and personality with potential professions.</p> <p>The Internship and Career Planning Office also houses a database of alumni employment and regularly shares alumni success stories in many modalities, such as a dedicated landing page on the MCU website (https://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/category/alumni-profiles/).</p>

*§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.

Review Completed By: Sandy Sarge

Date: 09/30/2021

3 - STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)
Policy on student complaints	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, is the policy or procedure easily accessible? YES. Is so, where? In the online student handbook , which has a linked table of contents, www.marymountcalifornia.edu/campus-services/student-affairs/the-anchor/ . On the University Report a Concern page , www.marymountcalifornia.edu/campus-services/student-affairs/report-a-concern/ . Presented during new student orientation.
	Comments:
Process(es)/ procedure	Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly: MCU provides several means by which student complaints and grievances may be addressed. In all cases, students are encouraged to put their complaints in writing and carefully document the events that led to the complaint or grievance. Before filing a formal complaint, students are encouraged to address their concerns and conflicts with those involved to try to resolve the issue at that level. If addressing an issue informally does not lead to satisfactory resolution, students are encouraged to seek assistance from the Vice President of Student Affairs/Dean of Students. The MCU student complaint procedure directs students to a campus contact to resolve some specific concerns (e.g., discrimination or harassment, academic appeals, student conduct), as well as provides the campus contact for the university administrator who oversees specific areas of the campus.
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
Records	Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? Discrimination and harassment complaints are maintained by the Title IX coordinator or Student Conduct (should a discrimination or harassment claim not raise to the level of Title IX). All other student complaints are logged with the Office of Student Affairs.
	Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly:

	MCU does have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time. Logs are maintained by year and are easily sorted by student or nature of the complaint.
	Comments:

*§602-16(1)(1)(ix)

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission's Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.

Review Completed By: Miguel Valenzuela

Date: 9/26/21

4 – TRANSFER CREDIT POLICY REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)
Transfer Credit Policy(s)	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for receiving transfer credit? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, is the policy publicly available? ✓ YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? Under “Acceptance of Transfer Credit” page 58 (pdf p.78) of the College Catalog: https://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Marymount_California_University_2021_2022_Catalog_web_version_8142020.pdf
	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 <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:

*§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: Susana Santos
Date: 9/25/21

Distance Education Review-Team Report Appendix

Institution: Marymount California University
Type of Visit: Reaffirmation of Accreditation
Name of reviewer/s: John Reynolds
Date/s of review: September 21-24, 2021

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)

Program:

Master of Business Administration

Courses:

- Bus 350-01 Principles of Marketing
- Bus 230-01 Business Communications

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)

Self-study report identifies the increased potential and marketing of the MBA utilizing online modality. The effect has been complicated by all academic programs being delivered online in the 2020-2021 academic year caused by the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Nature of the review (material examined and persons/committees interviewed)

Materials reviewed:

2021-2022 Marymount California University Academic Catalogue
Course Syllabi
MBA Program review
IPEDS
WSCUC Key Data
No interviews

¹ See Distance Education Review Guide to determine whether programs are subject to this process. In general only programs that are more than 50% online require review and reporting.

Observations and Findings

Lines of Inquiry (refer to relevant CFRs to assure comprehensive consideration)	Observations and Findings	Follow-up Required (identify the issues)
<i>Fit with Mission.</i> 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?	Aligned with the mission. With only one DE academic program, DE is not the institution's primary modality (only graduate).	
<i>Connection to the Institution.</i> How are distance education students integrated into the life and culture of the institution?	Limited number and biased due to pandemic	
<i>Quality of the DE Infrastructure.</i> 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?	Adequate	
<i>Student Support Services:</i> 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?	Adequate	
<i>Faculty.</i> 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?	Limited FTE (one program) and aligned with focus of using practitioner adjunct faculty in business programs	
<i>Curriculum and Delivery.</i> 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.)	Framework established and processes appear adequate for one academic program	
<i>Retention and Graduation.</i> 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?	Limited and premature (program launched within the last 5 years)	Identify acceptable graduation, retention and other key parameters and disaggregate for online only students.
<i>Student Learning.</i> 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?	Comparable and to a defined standard	
<i>Contracts with Vendors.</i> 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 <i>Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations</i> ?	None	

Quality Assurance Processes: 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?

Program review framework includes online programs