



UNITED STATES
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Report for Reaffirmation

Submitted to the
WASC Senior College and
University Commission
July, 2021

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1: Introduction: Institutional Context; Response to Previous Commission Actions

(CFRs 1.1, 1.8)

This report provides an overview of United States University (USU) as it prepared for its WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Offsite Review and Accreditation Visit while concurrently responding to the myriad of challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This introductory component describes USU's background and history, organization, distinctive characteristics, leadership profiles, the manner(s) in which the institution addressed recommendations in previous WSCUC Action Letters, and how the university prepared for this accreditation process.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

United States University was originally founded as InterAmerican College (IAC) in National City, CA in 1997. USU has a long history of and commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The institution's founding focus was to provide educational opportunities for underserved populations such as working adults, Latinx, first-generation college students, and immigrants to increase bilingual capacity in nursing, healthcare, and education in Southern California. In 2009, WSCUC approved initial accreditation for IAC and concurrently approved a structural change from nonprofit to for-profit status. The change was formally implemented in 2010, and the school was renamed United States University (USU). The institution moved to its current location in 2016, and the next year submitted a change of ownership application resulting in Aspen Group, Inc. (AGI) assuming ownership of USU on December 1, 2017. USU's headquarters is located in the Mission Valley area of San Diego, California. The San Diego campus houses the president, CFO, provost, deans, academic services, and registrar. The university also has offices in Phoenix, Arizona housing various administrative functions, such as academic advising, enrollment, financial aid, and student accounts; and offers its weekend Immersion Experience for students in the Family Nurse Practitioner program in San Diego, California; Phoenix, Arizona; Austin, Texas; and Tampa, Florida.

MISSION

United States University provides personal and educational opportunities with a special outreach to underserved groups. Through campus and online courses, the university offers affordable, relevant, and accessible undergraduate and graduate degree programs and certificates in a supportive student-centered learning environment.

COVID-19 AND MARCH 2020

The university complied with all COVID-19 related federal, state, and county requirements and went directly into “lock down” mode on March 16, 2020. As a primarily online institution, however, the teaching and learning mission of the school has continued unabated. Each program director and dean pivoted to an exclusively online format immediately. The institution's largest program, for example, the Master of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner, adopted software necessary to continue what had been campus-based immersion models in a virtual environment within two weeks of the lock down date. USU was one of the first WSCUC schools to host a virtual Special Visit in April 2020. Persistence and retention rates remain high at 93% and 72%, respectively, as of the fall 2020 term. Average GPA has remained stable. Enrollment has increased during the first year of the pandemic, from 1,600 in January 2020 to 2,629 in January 2021. Additionally, the number of students graduating in the 2020 calendar year was the highest in any year in the university’s history. Even as faculty, staff, and students enrolled in hybrid programs return gradually to campus, the online delivery of programs will remain the principal focus of the university’s academic strategy.

COLLEGES AND PROGRAMS

College of Nursing and Health Sciences

- Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN)
- Master of Science in Nursing
- Post-Master's Graduate Certificate in Emergency Nurse Practitioner
- Post Master’s Graduate Certificate in Health Care Leadership
- Post Master’s Graduate Certificate in Nurse Educator

College of Education

- Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies
- Master Arts in of Education
- Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Education
- Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Administration
- Graduate Certificate in Special Education
- Teacher Credentialing Preparation Program

College of Business and Technology

- Bachelor of Arts in Management
- Bachelor of Science in Information Technology
- Master of Business Administration
- Graduate Certificate in Business Analytics
- Graduate Certificate in Finance
- Graduate Certificate in Human Resources
- Graduate Certificate in Information Technology
- Graduate Certificate in International Business
- Graduate Certificate in Marketing
- Graduate Certificate in Project Management

OTHER PROGRAMS

The following programs are approved by WSCUC and are pending implementation as of May 31, 2021.

- Bachelor of Education
- Master of Arts in Teaching

As of spring 2021, USU had 14 full-time faculty and 250 adjunct faculty members in the three colleges listed above. The student population was 2,629. USU has a 13:1 student-to-faculty ratio and prides itself on high levels of student interaction and student centrality.

The average current teaching load for full-time faculty is two (2) courses per session with available release time for assessment, curriculum development, and scholarship and service to the community. In calendar year 2020, a total of 379 degrees were conferred.

STUDENT COMPOSITION

As of spring 2021, USU's enrollment included 173 undergraduates and 2,456 graduate students for a total of 2,629 students. For undergraduate students, 25% are male and 75% are female. For graduate students, 19% are male and 81% are female. Among the three colleges, the highest student population is in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences (2,467) followed by the College of Business and Technology (72), and the College of Education (42). In addition, there are non-degree seeking students (48).

As of spring 2021, USU's student ethnicity profile was White (35%), Asian American (26%), Hispanic (16%), African American (17%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%), Native American (1%), and two or more races (2%). Also as of spring 2021, international students accounted for less than 1% of the student population. Domestically, USU draws its students from 46 states. The average age of USU students is 40.

FACULTY AND STAFF COMPOSITION

There are 14 full-time faculty and 250 adjunct faculty as of spring 2021. USU faculty are 27% male and 73% female. USU's faculty ethnicity profile is White (45%), Asian American (7%), Hispanic (6%), African American (13%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Native American (less than 1%), two or more races (3%), and remaining unknown (23%). As of summer 2021, 66% of faculty have a terminal degree in their field and 34% have a master's degree. Staff at USU totals 86. For staff, 36% are male and 64% are female. USU's staff ethnicity profile is White (49%), Asian American (5%), Hispanic (20%), African American (15%), Native American (1%), and remaining unknown (10%). The administrative leadership at USU is aware that this group does not reflect the diversity of USU's student body. As a result, the

administration is exploring best practices for the recruitment, hiring, and increasing career trajectory of USU's diverse faculty and staff.

CAPACITY AND INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORT: THE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA)

In addition to USU faculty and staff, approximately 72 additional AGI staff members support the institution through a variety of functions described in the [Infrastructural Support and Service Level Agreement Operating Framework \(SLA\)](#). Functions undertaken or supported by AGI offices include the following: recruitment and marketing, student accounts and financial aid, technology services, business office support, human resources, institutional research, and regulatory compliance support.

Originally documented in 2018 (the year after AGI's assumption of ownership of USU) and modified via narrative and enhanced assessment indicators in 2021, the primary purpose of the SLA is to delineate the roles and responsibilities of the various offices embedded both within the university and its corporate ownership group. The university remains fully aware that it bears final responsibility for ensuring the quality and integrity of all services conducted in its name and has consequently engaged in ongoing and transparent communications with its colleagues at AGI to monitor the efficacy of the services provided. These multi-level communications take place weekly at the [USU-AGI Operations Management Meetings](#) and quarterly at board of trustees meetings. An annual allocation for costs and services is embedded in USU's annual operating budget approved by the board of trustees on or about May 1st of every calendar year to coincide with the beginning of a new fiscal year. The Audit Committee of the board of trustees evaluates AGI's services to USU. At its quarterly meeting, the Audit Committee reviews AGI's services to USU according to the [SLA Evaluative Instrument](#), which includes Key Performance Indicators.

SERVICES AND OUTSOURCING TO UNACCREDITED ORGANIZATIONS

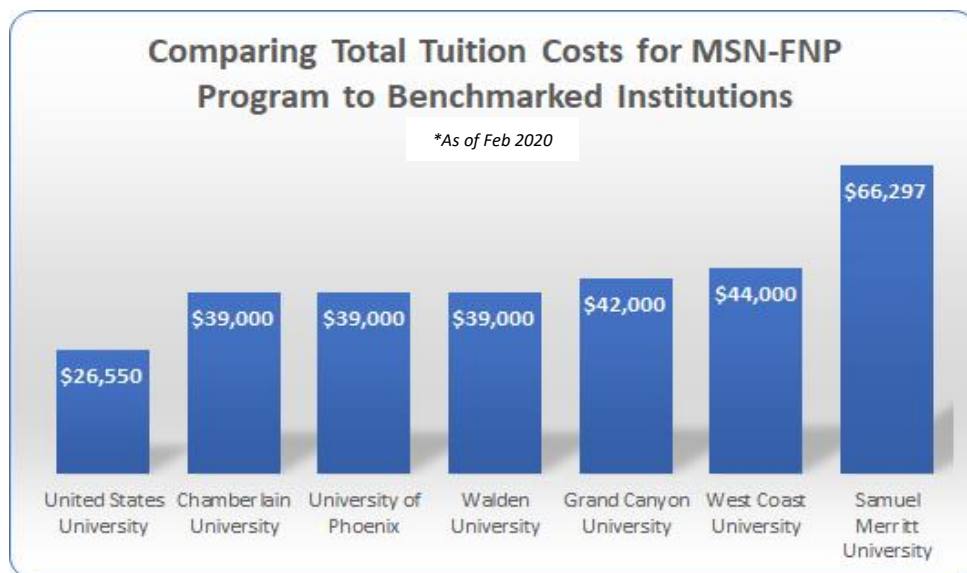
The university takes careful consideration of services that are outsourced to ensure compliance with WSCUC policy and to retain accountability and quality assurance for the most integral functions at the university. These retained functions include academic policies, course development, pedagogy, instruction, and academic support functions, among others. As such, USU has chosen to outsource just six of the 27 services listed as permissible to outsource in

WSCUC's Services and Outsourcing to Unaccredited Organizations chart, as shown on the [WSCUC Table on Outsourcing for USU](#).

CONTRIBUTING TO THE PUBLIC GOOD

USU contributes to the public good in a number of substantive ways. First, by providing accessible education at affordable tuition rates, students can pursue and complete their degree without incurring large amounts of student loan debt (see table 1.1 below). In addition, USU offers an innovative approach to paying for a degree, a monthly payment plan (MPP), which has proven popular with students. The number of USU students paying tuition and fees through the MPP is 64% of USU's total active student body.

Table 1.1 Tuition Comparison



In an era of increasing challenges and public health crises, the nursing students and faculty in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences have responded by devoting significant efforts to contribute to the public good. For example, USU had several FNP students serving as RNs on the frontline during the pandemic. In April 2020, one FNP student shared his story about traveling to New York City from San Francisco while the United States COVID-19 cases were on the rise. He was bused into the Bronx hospital from Manhattan, approximately 2 hours transit time, to assist his nurse colleagues in caring for COVID-19 patients. He talks about purchasing a full-face shield P-6000 face mask, N-95 respirator, and protective jumpsuit from a paint store back home before leaving. The supplies were limited in NYC and the nurses were asked to use their

N95s for 7 days. He worked 13 hours a day for 6-7 days a week with the local nurses having 8-13 patients in the ER with COVID-19. He states that one of the hardest things, besides nursing care, was having clean scrubs because all of the local businesses were closed, including laundromats. He describes washing his scrubs in the bathtub after his shift. He was hoping for an FDA-approved treatment quickly as he experienced so many patients dying on him daily. Fortunately, he has continued his FNP program of study and is positioned to be a USU graduate in the next six months. His story is highlighted by the dean of the CONHS in this [colloquium presentation](#) on March 28, 2021. This example describes one student of so many USU students that was working overtime as RNs during the pandemic to serve the public good, while balancing family obligations and graduate work.

The USU clinical and didactic nursing faculty are also contributing to the public good by educating the next generation of nurses, performing their own clinical practice, and contributing to scholarly research to encourage evidence-based practice. The clinical nursing faculty are practicing within their area of expertise to promote health and provide care in their own communities. Since they are active clinicians, they can authentically describe and promote relevant clinical guidelines and experiences to USU's nursing students. Many of the didactic nursing faculty have engaged in scholarly activities that further expand the essential body of nursing literature on which clinical practice and care delivery relies. For example, one of USU's faculty members, Dr. Sharon Bigger, recently co-authored an article about the novel use of experiential learning in teaching theory at the graduate level published in the Journal of Nursing Education and Practice. Another faculty member, Dr. Tamika Dowling, also published an article titled "[Storytelling as Nursing Pedagogy](#)" in which she describes how she utilizes personal experiences and stories of her past and current practices to help facilitate student learning and understanding.

As part of its ongoing commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, in fall 2020, the CONHS faculty formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee to initiate the conversation on how they could learn from each other's lived experiences. The committee is driven by [AACN Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Academic Nursing Position statement \(2021\)](#) in which the mission is to 1) improve the quality of education by enhancing the capacity of academic nursing 2) address pervasive inequities in health care by ensuring the preparation of nurses and other

healthcare professionals and 3) enhance the civic readiness and engagement potential of nursing students. The committee is led by Dr. Yvette Lowery, who often publishes in the [Minority Nurse Journal](#) as an avenue to increase diversity awareness. The committee meets monthly with the goal of creating a deeper understanding of racial inequities and promoting innovative ideas to increase equity and inclusion within the faculty and student populations. ["A Time to Heal" flyer](#) was used to advertise the first meeting.

Moreover, this committee cascades towards the university-wide DEI committee that grapples with enrollment, persistence, retention, and graduation data and informs initiatives relevant to USU's unique student population.

RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS WSCUC REVIEWS

Since 2015, USU has had multiple interactions with WSCUC and has worked diligently and collaboratively to maintain its accreditation status. In so doing, the university has demonstrated its commitment to honest and open communication with WSCUC; to undertaking the accreditation review process with seriousness and candor; to informing the Commission promptly of any matter that could materially affect the accreditation status of USU; and to abide by Commission policies and procedures, including all substantive and structural change policies. (CFR 1.8)

Notable actions associated with USU's accreditation since 2015 are summarized below:

- In a [June 2015 Action Letter](#), the Commission removed the probationary status (imposed in July 2013) and reaffirmed accreditation for seven years, concurrently issuing a Notice of Concern.
- In [November 2017](#), USU received approval for a structural change/change of ownership to AGI. A substantive change request was approved by the Commission in the same year.
- A Special Visit was conducted on November 28-30, 2018, a year after the change of ownership. The [March 2019 Action Letter](#) announced both the removal of the Notice of Concern and the 2020 date for another Special Visit.
- A Special Visit was conducted virtually on April 1-3, 2020 and the subsequent [Action Letter](#) was received in July 2020.

For reading ease, the institutional responses to the recommendations received by USU over the past six years are summarized by theme with related CFRs noted below:

1. Continue to focus on mission of providing educational opportunities to underserved populations (CFR 1.1, 1.4)

The university's [mission statement](#) was most recently reviewed and reaffirmed as part of the 2018-2019 Strategic Planning Process ([Strategic Plan Update Memo](#)) and continues to focus on providing opportunities to underserved populations. The institution also demonstrates an appropriate response to the increasing diversity in society through its policies, its educational programs, and its administrative and organizational practices.

2. Articulate a comprehensive plan for the assessment of all PLOs throughout the curriculum, including specific rubrics for the assessment of each PLO prior to launch of the program; share PLO assessment rubrics with students (CFR 2.2, 2.3)

As discussed in Components 3, 4, and 6, the university maintains a comprehensive plan for assessing all PLOs in the curriculum and creates rubrics for assessing each one prior to the implementation of a new program. PLO assessment rubrics are shared with students via the D2L assessment of student learning.

3. Utilize the existing assessment infrastructure of student learning outcomes to ensure the quality and rigor of academic programs. (CFRs 2.6, 4.1)

As also discussed in Components 3, 4, and 6 the process and procedure for the annual review of student learning outcomes through a formal Program Learning Outcomes Assessment is documented in the Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Handbook ([PLO Assessment Handbook](#)).

4. Assess and monitor the institution's capacity to support transfer students with any needed remediation and/or support programs and offerings (CFR 2.10, 2.14)

A process for development of [articulation agreements](#) was established and a new staff position, Transfer and Articulation Specialist, was created in July 2020 to provide support for incoming transfer students and to assess and advocate for needs specific to this student population. Remediation or unique support program needs will be addressed as they arise.

5. Develop plan for assessing effectiveness of all student advising services/co-curricular activities (2.11, 2.12, 2.13)

USU launched an [advising assessment summit](#) in the summer of 2021 that focused on assessing the effectiveness of student advising functions offered throughout the institution. The advising assessment articulates goals for measurable outcomes, which are identified and are systematically assessed. As a university community, USU reviewed data relevant to student advising which resulted in the formation of an enhanced retention committee including representatives from student-facing departments. The retention committee meets regularly, examines data, and develops and proposes interventions that are presented to USU leadership. Plans are to continue the advising summit annually and to include co-curricular services as they develop within the university.

6. Optimize, review, and amend the Service Level Agreement through regular assessment of the efficacy and quality of services provided (2.13, 3.5)

USU embarked on the creation of a more comprehensive [Service Level Agreement](#) in late 2020 to clearly define and document the functional services that AGI provides to the university. In addition, the costs associated with those services have been defined and a framework was created to regularly assess, evaluate, update, and communicate the quality and efficacy of these services.

7. Continue to set and evaluate realistic enrollment targets; continue to monitor financial performance relative to plan (CFR 3.4)

The university has transitioned from recommendations on CFR 3.4 related to reducing budget deficits in 2015 to dynamic enrollment growth that began in 2018, resulting in budget surpluses and subsequent recommendations to ensure realistic enrollment and financial targets are set. The process for doing so, the role of key departments in setting the targets, and the regular assessment and evaluation of actual performance are detailed in [Component 7](#). In addition, this component details the annual operating plan development process and the monthly, quarterly, and annual monitoring and reporting of financial performance relative to plan.

8. Clarify the decision-making process for the selection and development of the academic program portfolio including degree levels and content areas. (CFRs 3.7, 3.10)

USU looks to its mission statement and seeks to extend and strengthen its academic pillars when considering new academic programs and/or degree levels. [New programs are developed and proposed](#) at the college level and are subsequently brought to the Faculty Senate and then to the President's Council for consideration and approval. Programs that receive approval are then brought to the Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the board of trustees for approval prior to the implementation of a new academic program.

9. Ensure that the board of trustees continues its active and independent role in guiding the institution. (CFR 3.9, 4.7)

The USU Board Chair was recognized by the WSCUC visiting team in Nov 2018 as a seasoned board member with considerable experience working under a parent organization that provides support in the form of shared services. Her successor, Eileen Heveron, has had many years of experience with WSCUC as provost and visiting team member. In addition, the broader Board was seen as understanding its fiduciary duties and maintaining a healthy and collaborative working relationship with ownership and AGI management. USU's Board Bylaws are aligned with WSCUC's Governing Board Policies.

10. Complete the strategic plan and establish protocols for monitoring its progress and outcomes (CFRs 4.1, 4.5, 4.6)

The strategic plan draft that was presented to the team during the 2018 visit referenced in this recommendation was completed and approved by the board of trustees. As discussed in Component 7, the monitoring of progress and outcomes are done on a regular cadence through the quarterly Board meetings and review of the KPIs as included in the [board binder](#).

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATES

The most recent version of the university's [strategic plan](#) is the 2019-2022 version that was created and subsequently approved by the board of trustees in late 2019. This strategic plan focuses on three foundational areas: 1) Continuing to develop and support its faculty; 2) Continuously improving existing academic program offerings and developing new academic programs; and 3) Development of partnerships to enable the university to organically grow all of its degree programs. Since the university has turned the corner towards financial health, the university community is engaged in and excited about this next phase of the university's history.

HOW THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED

The preparation of this self-study was facilitated by the president. In so doing, he convened a Steering Committee to review progress and offer suggestions. The provost, worked closely with the president in compiling the primary evidence to support the narrative. Prior to the submission of this report to the WSCUC, a draft version of the report was circulated to the USU community. A copy of the submitted report will be placed on the university website in preparation for the spring 2022 Accreditation Visit.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

WSCUC recommendations and guidelines have been followed in the organization of the components comprising this institutional report. No institutional “themes” are included.

REFLECTIONS ON KEY INDICATOR REPORT

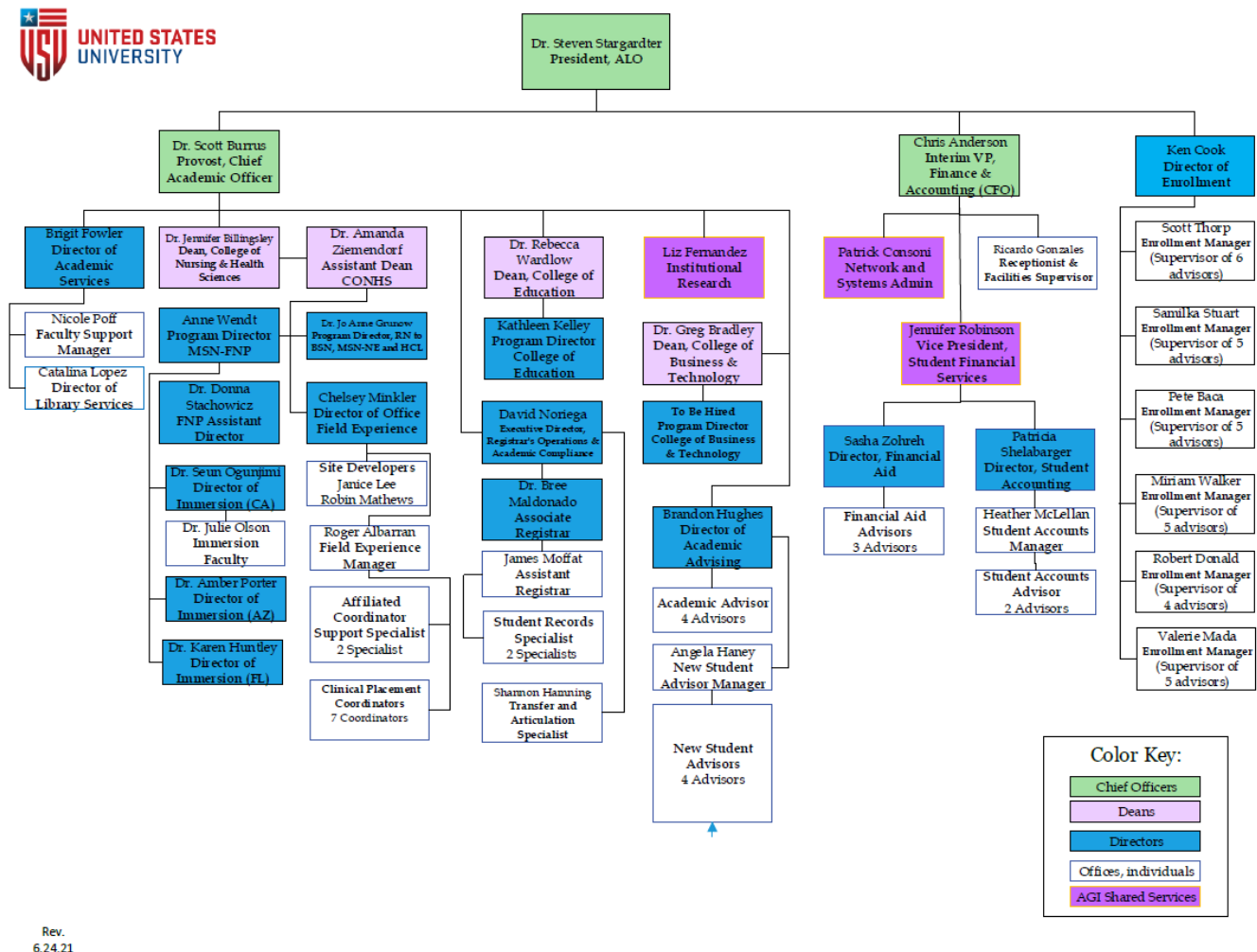
The Key Indicator Report provides limited utility for USU as the report focuses on undergraduate programs and students, which represent less than 5% of the university’s total enrollment. In addition, given the lag in IPEDS reporting and the dynamic growth at USU since fall 2018, the institution is a very different place today than what appears in metrics within the report. As such, the institution will provide data throughout this report which will address key indicators that are relevant to the contemporary characteristics of the institution.

REFLECTIONS ON INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Since the last reaffirmation of accreditation in 2015, USU received a Notice of Concern, was removed from Notice of Concern, had a change of ownership, and two Special Visits. As USU took each of the WSCUC recommendations seriously, this process resulted in USU becoming a thriving, growing, financially sustainable university well positioned to meet the unprecedented needs of a global pandemic. The December 1, 2017 change in ownership to Aspen Group, Inc. (AGI) catalyzed increased enrollment and improved financial sustainability with a focus on enrolling students in the Master of Science in Nursing-Family Nurse Practitioner Program (FNP). Since AGI’s engagement with USU, the university’s total active student body grew from 357 in fall 2017 to 2,629 in spring 2021. As a result, USU was able to respond to the previous

WSCUC recommendations relative to financial sustainability, thereby demonstrating substantive compliance with the Standards for Accreditation.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



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2: Compliance with Standards: Review under the WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements

As noted in Component 1, a Steering Committee was convened to lead the university's WSCUC reaffirmation of accreditation Self Study. With the support of additional faculty and staff, the Committee considered evidence relevant to each of the Criteria for Review (CFR) and identified documents, policies, and examples that demonstrated USU's compliance with each of the CFRs. In addition, documentation was gathered to demonstrate compliance with the four specified areas of federal requirements. This collection of evidence guided the completion and review of the Compliance with WSCUC Standards and Federal Requirements Worksheet and associated appendixes. The following narrative identifies USU's self-assessment of the areas of strength and opportunities for growth resulting from this review.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

Standard 1. Central to the [mission and institutional core values](#), the university prioritizes its contribution to the public good and dedication to a student-centric mission through a focus on affordability, responsiveness to student needs, and attention to student success. USU has a majority-minority student body. In alignment with Standard 1, USU operates with transparency. All [policies](#) are published and embody the best practices of integrity and transparency. Additionally, USU is committed to open and honest communication with WSCUC, as evidenced by the last comprehensive report, change of ownership report, two special visit reports, and this current report. (CFRs 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.7, 1.8)

Standard 2. The university's core functions are enhanced by its strengths with respect to employing effective data-gathering practices and creating clear descriptions of degree requirements and curricular processes. Quality assurance systems are data driven. USU's effectiveness in annual assessment and program review continues to evolve and improve as the faculty complete annual iterations. Assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) is also an area of strength at the university. (CFRs 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7)

Standard 3. Through a committed and dedicated faculty and staff with diverse professional credentials, USU has been able to develop and apply its resources and organizational structures to ensure quality and sustainability. Since the last comprehensive visit, enrollment and revenue

growth have bolstered and strengthened long-term viability. Faculty and staff have access to a variety of resources. Also, significant improvements in data integrity and the use of data to guide decision-making have been made with academic leadership and the board of trustees supporting these efforts in the budget decision-making process. (CFRs 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.9, 3.10)

Standard 4. As it continues to evolve and support a culture of evidence-based, decision-making through administrators, faculty, and staff, USU is actively building an organization dedicated to quality assurance, institutional learning, and improvement. Via a well-trained institutional research office and assessment office, USU has demonstrated its financial capacity to sustain these efforts. Faculty take ownership of the ongoing study of teaching and learning and apply what they learn to their courses, programs, and pedagogy. In addition, USU is proactively discussing developments in higher education and looking for areas of alignment in the strategic planning for the university going forward. (CFRs 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.7)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Standard 1. Since the last comprehensive visit in 2015, the demographics of the USU student body have transitioned from a plurality of international students (40%), average age 33, and 52% female, to a majority-minority student body of less than 1% international and 64% minority, average age 40, and 81% female. This shift in the student body to an older, minority, and female student has provided the university with opportunity to reflect and clarify. First, the definition of the “underserved” population in USU’s mission statement is now better understood to comprise multiple and intersectional groups, including economically disadvantaged, underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and adult, working college students (versus a specific focus on Latinx and immigrants). Second, USU recognizes the opportunity to further explore the unique needs of female, diverse, and older students to ensure that the services offered and the key attributes of the learning experience (e.g., flexibility, feedback, and applicability of learning) align with the needs of this population. (CFRs 1.4, 2.13)

Standard 2. USU benefits from high overall student success measures and recognizes the influence and strength of the MSN-FNP program at over 90% of total student enrollment. Considering this, there is opportunity for USU to bolster support services for smaller, growing degree programs with discipline-specific career services and other beneficial co-curricular

services. In addition, USU will be able to further disaggregate persistence, retention, and graduation rates based on racial, ethnic, gender, age, economic status, disability, and other categories as the enrollment growth in the smaller degree programs allows for breakouts into these categories. (CFRs 2.10, 2.13)

Standard 3. A common challenge in and outside of higher education is having sufficient IT resources to address the wants and needs of stakeholders within a paradigm of continuous technology evolution and growth. USU is no different in this need and has an opportunity to collaborate on the IT initiatives road map to better address the needs of students, faculty, and staff moving forward. Determining prioritization of the various IT initiatives in alignment with the university's strategic plan will assist in meeting the needs of USU's growing online enrollment. (CFR 3.5)

Standard 4. The implementation of the institutional research function as a shared service in the summer of 2018 has contributed greatly to the culture of data-driven decision making at USU. At the same time, the needs and demands of IR services have continued to grow and push against the capacities of the IR team. Given the importance of the expanding use of data by staff and faculty, ensuring resourcing in this area continues to grow as the institution matures is an area of opportunity for the university. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2)

REFLECTIONS ON COMPLIANCE

The self-study process provided an opportunity for USU to reflect on its mission and future trajectory. While USU has maintained an unwavering commitment to its mission, in many ways the university is a completely different institution than it was during the last Accreditation visit seven years ago. Specifically, ten years ago, the archetypal USU student was an international bilingual education or health care professional seeking licensure in the United States. Today, the typical USU student is a 40-year-old woman of color seeking to advance her career. USU remains committed to serving underserved populations, although the definition of that student has evolved just as the university has evolved from a predominantly on ground institution to a predominantly online university. USU's ability to adapt and grow has served it well during these unprecedented times. As USU continues to evolve, the university will remain focused on its core values and growing strategically to ensure its ongoing financial sustainability.

3: Degree Programs: Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees

(CFRs 1.2, 2.2-2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.3)

The purpose of this component is to address the meaning, quality, and integrity of the degrees at USU, while also outlining the institutional processes that ensure their quality and rigor.

Regarding degree integrity, this sub-context is discussed from the perspective of a coherent and aligned curriculum, including its relationship to professional standards and career preparedness.

These concepts and processes are inextricably intertwined, and their assessment outcomes serve as either a corroboration of direction or a checkpoint for change.

THE MEANING OF DEGREES AT UNITED STATES UNIVERSITY

The meaning of a degree is a compilation of what students experience during their tenure at USU. This construct is comprised of planned outcomes of learning, culture of learning, processes for learning, the skills obtained from learning, and the impact of learning on student personal and professional growth. USU continually examines and bolsters current structures, policies, and procedures that institutionalize sustained scrutiny and development of the meaning of degrees at USU ([Board Minutes](#) and [Board Agenda](#); [COE Department Meeting Minutes](#); [CONHS Department Meeting Minutes](#); [COBT Department Meeting Minutes](#); [College of Nursing and Health Sciences Meeting Plan](#); [University Council Meeting Minutes](#); [Faculty Senate and Curriculum Committees](#); [Academic Strategy Presentation](#); [Strategic Plan](#)).

As an example, a USU alumnus expressed meaning as...*All instructors were very knowledgeable of the field. Many had great experiences to share and tips for my future. The material presented challenged me and built upon my existing knowledge.* Another alumnus articulated his meaning of a USU degree as “*After speaking to different recruiters and administrators, I felt that USU’s philosophy of education was in-line with mine. Unlike other universities, United States University allowed me to continue to work while going to school and the program costs were closer to that of state schools than other online universities.* Ultimately, USU holistically attempts to integrate the core values of affordability, diversity, inclusiveness, integrity, lifelong learning, and quality into the meaning of its degrees, as referenced in USU’s [mission and institutional core values](#). A statement on the university’s website expressing its focus on a supportive atmosphere to learn – and succeed – clearly reflects the meaning of its degrees.

United States University believes that education is the key that unlocks opportunity for all people – regardless of ethnicity, economic status, or native language. USU provides quality and affordable education to anyone who desires progress in their life or career – whether they are building on an existing education or seeking a chance to start over. USU’s primary goal is to ensure the success of its students. We know that each student is different, with unique needs and circumstances – whether it be language barriers, busy schedules, or financial needs. Our degree and professional certificate programs combine in-classroom sessions and one-on-one support with online learning to offer students flexibility and accessibility. USU offers programmatic guidance at the time of admission so that students can focus their efforts. Our small class sizes and low student/teacher ratio foster a collaborative, welcoming atmosphere where students can learn and progress – and where no one is left behind. Our diverse and dedicated faculty take into account the individual needs of each student and forge personal relationships that extend far beyond the classroom. USU is committed to providing a foundation for success and an opportunity for lifelong learning to each and every student.

USU ensures the integrity, rigor, and quality of its degree programs through both design and assessment ([Academic Program Review Policies, Guide, Worksheets](#)). These processes and metrics are central to its course and program decisions. As referenced in Components 4 and 6, the periodic review of curricular mapping, assurance of mapping alignment with new courses, and assessment of student learning outcomes provide critical information relative to this construct of degree meaning.

Outcomes and Alignment

Learning occurs on multiple levels within USU’s academic environment. Assessment plans include the hierarchical alignment of course learning outcomes (CLOs) to program learning outcomes (PLOs) and PLOs to institutional learning outcomes (ILOs). Aligning these relationships among these levels is important to ensure that the different elements create a unified whole in the educational design. At USU, this alignment is intentionally designed to capture curricular coherence by investigating the alignment among the institution, programs, courses, curriculum, instructional activities, and assessment of learning.

Institutional Learning Outcomes

The ILOs are the overarching concepts that students should be able to articulate, put into action, or utilize (theoretically or pragmatically) after completing courses or programs and experiencing USU. ILOs are expected to be attained when students are successful, and they are guiding concepts the university desires students to comprehend and utilize during and after their learning experience. As detailed in Components 4 and 6, USU has nine ILOs that guide educational planning and actions ([Institutional Learning Outcomes](#)).

Program Learning Outcomes and Course Learning Outcomes

USU's program learning outcomes (PLOs) are concise statements that describe the specific knowledge, skills, competencies, and habits of mind that a university and its faculty believe graduates of a program should attain by completing their degrees. As a key tool for representing the expected end-results of their learning, PLOs are shared widely on the program's website, in the university catalog, and in the program handbook (CFR 1.2; CFR 2.4).

The university encompasses three colleges (Business and Technology, Education, Nursing and Health Sciences) and a variety of program offerings in which the hierarchical system of outcome alignment is integrated ([PLO Digital Signage Program Pages](#)). PLOs are the framework that provides structure and allows for an integrated and scaffolded approach to learning in lieu of being a culmination of separate courses. USU integrates PLOs to ensure that students are learning at increasing levels of skill and understanding.

Furthermore, USU categorizes learning outcomes into one of three core competencies to include literacy, communication, and reasoning. There are nine ILOs, of which each aligns with the WSCUC five core competencies that include written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and critical thinking (CFR 2.2a). The remaining four ILOs were identified by stakeholders as critical to upholding in support of USU's mission, including diversity ([Diversity Learning Outcomes](#)). The following informs the university on teaching and learning strategies incorporated in the development of PLOs:

Bloom's Taxonomy and Leveling. LOs are created using Bloom's taxonomy, which classifies educational learning objectives into levels of complexity and specificity (See table 3.1).

The purpose of leveling is to ensure that PLOs reflect the level of the degree awarded and there is a distinction between degree programs.

Leveling is achieved through verb choice and where it falls on Bloom's taxonomy sequencing of ability. During the learning outcome assessment review year, CLOs are compared to a particular competency at various points in a program to ensure higher-order learning occurs.

Table 3.1: Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid



Scaffolding. Scaffolding is a teaching and learning strategy employed at USU to bring cohesion and an integrated experience to student's learning. In doing so, USU allows students to learn at increasing levels of skill and understanding. USU incorporates scaffolding within a course and/or across an entire program.

Curriculum Maps. The curriculum map provides an overview of where and when the program supports its PLOs in the curriculum. The mapping uses three identifying markers to include (a) Introduce, (b) Develop, and (c) Master. In order for a designation to effectively represent a course, the concept/skill reflecting the PLO must be taught in the course, have appropriate assignments in the course with formative and summative feedback, and must be able to supply samples for assessment of the PLO at the designated level on the curriculum map (see [Curriculum Development Handbook](#) for more details).

Learning Outcomes Assessment

Learning outcomes assessment is a cyclical process of evaluating student achievement and forms the foundation of the meaning of USU degree programs. Collectively, it (a) identifies what USU wants students to learn, (b) measures how well they are learning it, (c) assigns meaning to these measured learning outcomes, and (d) makes improvements to programs based upon that evidence and analysis. The assessment of student learning at USU is a faculty-owned process. Outcomes assessment is conducted by individual program lead faculty and the Assessment Taskforce, with coordination, training, and other support from members of the provost's office (CFR 2.4). The foundational principle of learning outcome assessment is to provide faculty with the opportunity, time, and resources for thoughtful reflection and conversation about the meaning of USU programs. Likewise, the purpose and goal of the learning outcomes assessment process is to make continual improvements.

One of the five principles of curriculum development at USU, as described below, is the *centrality of assessment*. All USU programs and courses are designed with assessment in mind. The PLO assessment results shape the basis of further curriculum revisions and redevelopment as part of a continuous improvement process. Toward that end, PLOs are expected to be concise and measurable, and CLOs are expected to be aligned to those PLOs as mapped across the program to demonstrate and support the scaffolding of skills. All assignments in a course are aligned to at least one CLO, with specific assignments in each course identified as particularly suitable for direct assessment of the aligned PLOs. All this preparatory design work supports USU's continuous improvement efforts involving clarity of learning expectations, quality of the learning experience in support of those expectations, and inquiry as to whether these efforts are successful, as demonstrated by student work. For more information about the assessment process, please review the [PLO Assessment Handbook](#).

In response to the Commission's [reaffirmation letter of 2015](#), USU has purposefully refined its assessment process to strengthen learning outcomes and the meaning of USU programs. The following information outlines the institutional assessment reports and data that have been used in this process improvement at USU.

Proposed Changes, 2014-2016. After using the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to conduct an assessment of learning outcomes in AY 2013-14, USU conducted the assessment process in AY 2014-15 with a different approach ([2015 Annual Institutional Assessment Report](#)). During its planning phase for AY 2014-15, the faculty assessment committee met multiple times to discuss and approve the 80% goal for student achievement set by the college deans, identify what skills were important for USU students, and design assessment rubrics for each learning outcome.

Table 3.2 depicts the proposed and planned curriculum and pedagogical changes from the AY 2015-16 along with changes to processes and student services ([2016 Annual Institutional Assessment Report](#)). Notably, the assessment initiated key efforts on student tutoring and support services to strengthen reasoning, literacy, and communication skills.

Table 3.2**Aggregated Number of Changes Planned or Proposed Based on Assessment Results**

Type of Change	Number of Changes (proposed or planned)
Curriculum Changes	29
Pedagogy Changes	7
Student Service Changes	3
Student Support Changes	7
Assessment Process Changes	6

2017 PLO Revisions. By the start of the AY 2017-18, 39% of the proposed changes from the AY 2015-16 had been completed and the remaining major and minor revisions were planned for completion by fall 2018 ([2017 Annual Institutional Assessment Report](#), published Jan 2018). The Assessment Taskforce and faculty proceeded with discussions in April 2017 regarding the initiatives for the upcoming assessment period for AY 2016-17. The most significant assessment activity for the year was the revision of all PLOs for four USU programs including the Bachelor of Arts in Management (BAM), Bachelor of Science in Health Science (BSHS), Master of Arts in Education (MAED), and Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree programs. Also, PLO changes were implemented on the General Education requirements. An initiative first discussed in AY 2015-16 was to utilize the institutional level results from learning outcome assessments to inform program-level changes. As such, the Assessment Taskforce developed an asymmetric process for connecting the learning outcomes assessment and existing program review process first established in 2014. Despite the intent of the Assessment Taskforce to have the asymmetrical process for program review developed by creating program level rubrics more directly reflecting the PLOs in AY 2016-17, these plans were moved to the following assessment year of AY 2017-18.

2018 to Present. The assessment of student learning at USU is a faculty-owned process (CFR 2.4; CFR 4.3), comprised of program lead faculty working as an institutional team known as the Assessment Taskforce ([2018 Learning Outcomes Assessment](#)). Learning outcomes are assessed at least once within a five-year cycle ([Program Review Schedule](#)). The timeline and process for learning outcome assessments are designed to provide information on program strengths and weaknesses as related to student achievement. While students are meeting academic expectations, additional assessment is warranted, especially in the area of quantitative

reasoning. USU will continue to assess our PLO-ILO alignment as our programs evolve. Curriculum will continue to be evaluated to ensure PLO-ILO mastery across programs.

The Five Principles of Curriculum Development

There are five principles that guide curriculum development at USU to include (a) faculty and program ownership, (b) authenticity, (c) rigor, (d) student learning and success, and (e) centrality of assessment ([Curriculum Development Handbook](#)). Having covered the centrality of assessment, the remaining four principles represent the process and focal points at USU. The following descriptions provide deeper insight into the core processes and focus on learning outcome development and assessment USU.

Faculty and Program Ownership. While the university provides an infrastructure of process support, faculty create and direct the content of their curricula as they deem appropriate. The content is reviewed and voted on by respective college curriculum committees. As such, faculty own their courses. They develop the courses, participate in the evaluation of student learning and program assessment, and inform any processes in order to close the assessment loop. For more information on how USU supports faculty in creating degree meaning at USU, please see the Faculty Handbook and Faculty Commons in D2L ([Faculty Handbook](#)).

USU believes that shared governance is a fundamental ingredient of a healthy academic institution— and an essential right and responsibility of a scholarly community. The USU faculty provide a structure that includes an elected faculty governance body – the Faculty Senate – through which faculty and administrators work together to implement USU’s mission. USU is a complex entity. The tasks of governance must be apportioned and delegated within the structures approved by the board of trustees ([board minutes](#) and [board agenda](#)). The interdependence and cooperation of the administration, faculty, and the board of trustees are essential to effective governance. In this regard, USU supports:

- The faculty’s fundamental role in making academic decisions
- The protection of legitimate faculty aspirations
- The existence of clear and varied channels of communication
- The implementation and preservation of academic standards
- The promotion of the welfare of the students

Authenticity. Learning outcomes are derived from the university's mission by remaining authentic ([published mission and values statements](#)). The university's mission is to provide *professional and personal educational opportunities* that are *relevant and accessible*. This requires that PLOs are aligned to their disciplines and are relevant and current to a global working environment.

Rigor. Each program is constructed based on program learning outcomes (PLOs), written by the program faculty lead in conjunction with university staff for guidance in the appropriate degree level (e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy), authenticity to the discipline and the student population, and measurability. Course learning outcomes (CLOs) and assignments are written in alignment with the PLOs to prepare students to achieve the appropriate learning outcomes for the degree level and discipline by graduation. Some programs may also use disciplinary standards or expectations to structure their curricula to the appropriate level. In addition, courses are specifically designed for appropriate seat-time per credit hour awarded.

Student-Learning and Success. Faculty are expected to use curriculum maps to plan and document course by course scaffolding at the program level. At its core, the map represents where students, as defined by the PLOs, are (a) introduced to a concept or skill, (b) develop a concept or skill, and (c) master a concept or skill. However, program faculty are also encouraged to use curriculum maps to scaffold non-PLO skills or activities across the program (clinical preparation, a major research project or portfolio, technology skills, etc.). Faculty design their courses, with the assistance of instructional designers, within the context of a satisfying online experience for students and faculty and with online pedagogical best practices in mind. Within the course development process, student engagement is at the forefront. Focal points of engagement include (a) clarity of instructions, (b) activities integrated into content, (c) multiple opportunities for interaction between faculty and student, student and student, and student and content, and (d) student-centered technologies that support either professional expectations or the learning process itself ([Faculty Performance Evaluation Policy](#) and [Rubric](#)).

THE QUALITY AND INTEGRITY OF DEGREES AT UNITED STATES UNIVERSITY

The meaning of degrees is a function of the quality and integrity of USU's degrees. The contextualization of degree quality and degree integrity are united, respectively, with aligned

learning outcomes and a coherent and relevant curriculum related to professional standards and preparedness.

System of Quality and Integrity: Program Review and Assessment

USU has established a system of quality through a formal program review and learning outcomes assessment process. This system upholds both the integrity of USU degree programs and establishes a continuous quality assurance system. The faculty of USU holds primary responsibility for assessing program quality, with assistance from the academic administration.

The program review process occurs annually within a five-year cycle, meaning that each program is reviewed every five years with learning outcomes assessed annually in a second five-year cycle ([Program Review Manual](#); [Program Review Schedule](#)); (CFR 2.6). The purpose of program review is to evaluate and continuously enhance the quality, relevance, and currency of USU programs. Conducted through a combination of self-evaluation and peer-evaluation, the program review uses external reviewers to the program or department, and, typically, also external to the organization. Both internal and external shareholders comprehensively analyze program quality and viability using a wide variety of data, including the annual institutional learning outcomes assessment report (CFR 2.4).

Our timeline for program reviews is designed to provide information on resources required to implement recommendations for quality improvement in sufficient time for consideration in budget development. The program review process follows the learning outcomes assessment process as the learning outcome assessment data found in the *Annual Assessment Report* is used during a program review. The following outlines in more detail the components of the program review at USU. Component 6 provides a detailed analysis and reflection of how program review is utilized at USU.

Preparation

Preparation begins in the final quarter of each year and takes approximately two months. The Program Review Committee ([Program Review Manual](#), *Appendix C*) notifies program leads about upcoming reviews while the provost constitutes a self-study team. The self-study team led by an appointed Chair is responsible for creating the program review self-study. The purpose of

preparation is to review Institutional Research (IR) needs and assemble required program data on faculty and learning outcome assessment results.

Analysis

The analysis phase begins upon receipt of relevant/available program data that the self-study team requested from IR. The data supplied by IR is for a period of five years and is derived from a variety of sources, systems, and departments, including enrollment/retention data, alumni and student satisfaction results, average class size, and finance (CFR 2.7). The self-study team completes data collection and commences with analysis. This phase lasts for approximately two months.

Self-Study and External Review Preparation

The self-study and external review preparation are completed during the spring semester of each review year. Once the self-study team has finalized their analysis of data, they draft the self-study ([Program Review Manual](#), pp. 6-10). The self-study is designed to identify program strengths and limitations while suggesting solutions for identified problems (CFR 2.6). The self-study team forwards the draft of the self-study to the Program Review Committee for internal review and approval. The Program Review Committee reaches out to program leads for a list of external reviewers. Program leads are required to indicate how these potential reviewers are qualified to conduct the review and include a copy of the reviewer's curriculum vita. The Program Review Committee selects external reviewers (between 1-3 reviews) and organizes the external review visit for late April or early May of each review year.

External Review

The external review consists of a planned one-day onsite program review where external reviewers visit the campus and provide recommendations for program improvement. Upon completion of the external review, external reviewers send the Program Review Committee the external report ([Program Review Manual](#), *External Review Rubric and Recommendations Form*). The Program Review Committee consults with the self-study team and the program leads to flesh out factual inaccuracies. Finally, the Program Review Committee writes a preliminary findings and recommendations report presenting a cohesive plan of action for program improvement. These findings are presented to the self-study team and provost for input.

Institutional Actions

The program review process concludes with a series of institutional actions. Once the provost and self-study team have concluded their revisions to the preliminary report, the self-study group incorporates the external review findings and recommendations ([Program Review Manual, Improvement Plan Template](#)) into the final draft of the self-study and improvement plan. The provost organizes a meeting of program representative(s) and leadership group members with authority over campus resources to agree to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) placing the findings and recommendations in the context of resource allocation decisions. Upon agreement, the self-study team revises the self-study and improvement plan according to the MOU, including budgetary considerations, and submits it to the Program Review Committee for implementation, tracking, and archiving. Resource recommendations must be made available by the end of August of each review year to permit consideration in the following year's budget development.

Programmatic Accreditation and Program Reviews

USU degree offerings include programs that have received specialized programmatic accreditation. Programmatic accreditation or certification reports may substitute for portions of the program review if the provost or designee determines they sufficiently address the elements considered under the program review process. In such instances, the accreditation or certification process will normally have included the assessment of learning outcomes and a site visit by one or more discipline experts. If the programmatic accreditation does not include elements required for the program review, however, they may be addressed in a supplemental report submitted with the programmatic accreditation self-study to the Program Review Committee and considered in the department's improvement plan. Following is an overview of the most recent self-study results from the 2017 reaffirmation visit for the College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) and the Commission of Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

CCNE Reaffirmation 2017

The College of Nursing and Health Sciences' BSN and MSN programs were the subject of self-study and visit in September 2017 from CCNE. The CCNE review resulted in a ten-year reaccreditation for both programs which extends to June 30, 2028. The California Board of Registered Nursing (CA BRN) also re-affirmed the MSN-FNP licensure program in April 2019

for five years. The FNP program and Arizona immersion site also received full approval from the Arizona State Board of Nursing in May 2020 ([Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education; BSN and MSN Approval Letters](#); [BRN FNP Approval Letter](#)).

REFLECTION ON MEANING, QUALITY, AND INTEGRITY OF DEGREE

There is evidence that USU is meeting its commitment to education in offering an accessible, nurturing, and student-focused educational experience. The findings suggest an inclusive community of learning dedicated to the personal and professional growth of students and graduates. The self-study revealed that USU degrees are aligned with its mission to offer affordable, relevant, and accessible undergraduate and graduate degree programs and certificates in a supportive student-centered learning environment. Evidence of a progressing university is the evolution of a more structured curriculum development and approval process. The curriculum development process has improved, and efforts have been made to advance efficiency and effectiveness through the implementation of a more unified, transparent structure. A key finding during the self-study is that the USU community fully understands the meaning, quality, and integrity of the USU graduate degree programs through the discussed processes and constructs, but less is known about the meaning, quality, and integrity of undergraduate degree programs at USU. Hence, the university will begin discussions about these constructs and processes in the context of undergraduate degrees, and how they should also appropriately serve as a scaffold to USU's graduate programs.

Ultimately, the meaning, quality, and integrity of the university's degrees are determined by the success of students during their time at USU and in their selected paths after graduation. Assessing student learning and outcomes is a critical factor in ensuring the quality and integrity of degree programs. As discussed in the following components, USU continues to grow in these areas, but substantial opportunities exist to advance, hone, and expand the assessment of student learning outcomes and, in the process, continue to close the loop by applying changes that constructively impact all students.

4: Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation

(CFRs 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)

CORE COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

USU is an inclusive community of learning dedicated to the personal and professional growth of its students and graduates. The students obtain an affordable, relevant education to pursue their professions from a university that encourages core values of quality, integrity, diversity, inclusiveness, and lifelong learning. In 2017-2018, the faculty in all colleges contributed to revising the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and accompanying undergraduate and graduate Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for clarity and to better support scheduled program-wide development efforts. All colleges regularly conduct faculty and student committee meetings to encourage shared governance and make data-informed decisions ([Program Advisory Meeting Minutes - COE example](#)). The undergraduate and graduate PLOs were carefully crafted to align with the level of degree and any college-specific accreditation guidelines. For example, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) is accredited by the Commission of Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) so their PLOs are aligned to the [American Association of Colleges of Nursing Baccalaureate and Master's Nursing Essentials](#).

There are currently nine ILOs organized into three sets of three with accompanying core competencies: Literacy (Information and Media, Cultural, and Discipline); Communication (Written, Oral, and Collaboration); and Reasoning (Quantitative, Ethical, and Critical Thinking) with the PLO alignment to each degree program, as shown in [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) of table 4.1 below. The primary goal of learning outcomes assessment is to provide an avenue for continuous program improvement based upon direct and indirect evaluation of student learning as it relates to PLOs that are aligned to the ILO and core competencies.

Table 4.1: USU Core Competency, ILO, PLO Alignment (Part 1)

Core Competency	ILO	GE PLO	BAM PLO	MBA PLO	BSIT PLO	TCPP PLO
Goal: Literacy						
1. Information & Media Literacy (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	1. Effectively use information from academic and popular sources.	1. Access, assess, and use information responsibly.	1. Select and use appropriate sources of business information.	1. Evaluate academic and professional sources of business-related data and information.	1. Employ information research skills to identify IT solutions and monitor emerging technologies	1. Find and evaluate appropriate information and content for the classroom.
2. Cultural Literacy	2. Demonstrate cultural and global awareness as responsible citizens and professionals.	2. Explain how social diversity and social identity impact life experiences and social relations.	2. Promote diverse perspectives to optimize performance in a global business environment.	2. Leverage diversity to optimize performance in the global marketplace.	2. Address cultural or digital divide issues in designing or implementing IT solutions	2. Practice cultural proficiency, including differentiation of instruction, in school settings.
3. Discipline Literacy	3. Exhibit mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities within a discipline.	3. Demonstrate knowledge of multiple disciplinary perspectives.	3. Solve discipline-specific problems demonstrating mastery of foundational business knowledge.	3. Lead organizations using creative and innovative strategies and solutions to achieve business objectives.	3. Design, implement, and evaluate a computing-based solution to meet a given set of computing requirements	3. Demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities that promote student learning.
Goal: Communication						
4. Written Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	4. Write effectively according to disciplines and/or audiences.	4. Write fluently and effectively.	4. Construct and present effective written forms of business communication.	4. Write effectively as a business professional to meet organizational goals.	4. Document clearly how an IT turnkey solution can resolve identified challenges and issues	4. Write effectively in communicating and planning for your classroom.
5. Oral Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	5. Effectively express ideas and information verbally.	5. Speak fluently and effectively.	5. Construct and present effective oral forms of business communication.	5. Speak and present effectively as a business professional to meet organizational goals.	5. Speak effectively in presenting how an IT turnkey solution can resolve identified challenges and issues	5. Perform effectively in the classroom.
6. Collaboration	6. Collaborate effectively as members and leaders of diverse teams.	6. Work effectively with others to achieve mutual goals.	6. Work effectively in teams on business projects.	6. Work effectively in pursuit of optimal team decision-making and performance.	6. Function effectively as a member or leader of a team engaged in IT activities and projects	6. Work effectively with others to improve student outcomes.

Core Competency	ILO	GE PLO	BAM PLO	MBA PLO	BSIT PLO	TCPP PLO
Goal: Reasoning						
7. Quantitative Reasoning (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	7. Apply quantitative analysis and techniques to address complex challenges.	7. Calculate and interpret numerical data in scientific and social contexts.	7. Compute and analyze financial and other quantitative data to support business decisions.	7. Analyze financial and other quantitative data in the decision-making process.	7. Apply quantitative problem-solving skills to manage IT activities and projects	7. Interpret student performance data to improve teaching practice.
8. Ethical Reasoning	8. Integrate ethical principles in professional and civic life.	8. Analyze ethical choices in professional and civic contexts.	8. Analyze the ethical and legal obligations and responsibilities of business.	8. Recommend alternative solutions to resolve ethical dilemmas in business.	8. Make informed judgments in computing practice based on legal, ethical, and professional principles	8. Apply strategies and theories to respond ethically to the changing demographics of the California classroom.
9. Critical Thinking (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	9. Objectively analyze and evaluate issues in order to formulate judgments.	9. Analyze and evaluate arguments and positions.	9. Evaluate ideas and data to rationally produce and implement solutions for business issues.	9. Strategically evaluate the factors involved in business situations/ issues to promote innovation, improve performance, and mitigate risk.	9. Analyze and evaluate organizational systems and processes to recommend IT turnkey solutions that meet organizational needs and goals	9. Objectively analyze and evaluate student performance in order to improve teaching practice.

Table 4.1: USU Core Competency, ILO, PLO Alignment (Part 2)

Core Competency	ILO	MAED PLO	BSHS PLO	RN to BSN PLO	MSN PLO
Goal: Literacy					
1. Information & Media Literacy (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	1. Effectively use information from academic and popular sources.	1. Integrate educational research to guide practice and inform policy.	1. Identify and evaluate a diverse array of health-related information sources.	1. Use information and technologies to monitor and provide quality patient care.	1. Evaluate and apply evidence-based findings to advanced nursing roles.
2. Cultural Literacy	2. Demonstrate cultural and global awareness as responsible citizens and professionals.	2. Frame professional practice through the lens of diversity and inequity.	2. Demonstrate consideration and sensitivity to cultural contexts of patients, their families, and healthcare staff and providers.	2. Demonstrate cultural competency in nursing practice.	2. Integrate cultural competence into advanced nursing roles.

Core Competency	ILO	MAED PLO	BSHS PLO	RN to BSN PLO	MSN PLO
3. Discipline Literacy	3. Exhibit mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities within a discipline.	3. Connect theory and practice to engage 21st-century learners and professionals.	3. Effectively integrate concepts and practices in health sciences to achieve healthcare outcomes.	3. Provide competent, evidence-based nursing care.	3. Integrate the Master Essential's and specialty standards into the advanced nursing role.
Goal: Communication					
4. Written Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	4. Write effectively according to disciplines and/or audiences.	4. Write effectively for education constituents.	4. Employ the language of healthcare effectively in written forms.	4. Document nursing information and activities in support of safe patient care.	4. Compose professional written communication for advanced nursing roles.
5. Oral Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	5. Effectively express ideas and information verbally.	5. Speak effectively with education constituents.	5. Employ the language of healthcare effectively in oral forms.	5. Speak clearly and concisely in conveying healthcare information.	5. Speak professionally in advanced nursing roles.
6. Collaboration	6. Collaborate effectively as members and leaders of diverse teams.	6. Work effectively in a community of educational practice.	6. Participate effectively in team problem-solving and decision-making in healthcare.	6. Collaborate effectively with healthcare team members.	6. Demonstrate the advanced nursing role through leadership, collaboration, and caring science to improve health outcomes.
Goal: Reasoning					
7. Quantitative Reasoning (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	7. Apply quantitative analysis and techniques to address complex challenges.	7. Interpret quantitative data relating to challenges and barriers in education.	7. Interpret healthcare data delivered in verbal, numeric, or graphical form.	7. Apply empirical research to nursing practice.	7. Evaluate and apply quantitative and qualitative data to validate and guide decision making relevant to health outcomes.
8. Ethical Reasoning	8. Integrate ethical principles in professional and civic life.	8. Analyze ethical issues that arise in education practices and institutions.	8. Evaluate ethical issues in healthcare in order to propose effective resolutions.	8. Apply the Code of Ethics for Nurses in professional nursing practice.	8. Integrate ethical reasoning into advocacy and decision making.
9. Critical Thinking (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	9. Objectively analyze and evaluate issues in order to formulate judgments.	9. Evaluate societal influences on education practice and policy.	9. Evaluate ideas and evidence rationally to produce and implement solutions for health-related issues.	9. Objectively analyze and evaluate data to inform decision-making in nursing practice.	9. Objectively evaluate and synthesize information in advanced nursing roles.

Through fall of 2020, the students' achievement of learning outcomes were assessed annually in accordance with the [PLO Assessment Handbook](#) guidelines and timeline. Each Program Learning Outcome was assessed at least once within a five-year cycle as depicted in the PLO assessment schedule below ([table 4.2](#)). As USU's student population continued to grow in 2020, it became clear to the institution that the manual assessment process could be better implemented in an automated format. The Office of Accreditation, Regulatory Compliance, and Institutional Effectiveness (OARCIE) designed an automated assessment method in which designated student assessment data were collected directly from the student learning platform. Each college identified Signature Learning Assignments (SLAs) in each program at an introductory, developing, or mastery level that are automatically scored within the D2L courses. Then OARCIE distributes the aggregated SLA data to each college semi-annually for review. This new automated method with increased visibility to data allows the faculty in each college to make informed decisions for continuous programmatic improvement in an expedited timeframe.

Table 4.2 Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Schedule 2018-2023

Learning Outcomes								Comments
Core Competency	Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO) See Core Competency/ILO/PLO Alignment Spreadsheet for specific PLOs Assessed	Last Full Review	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	
Goal: Literacy								
1. Information & Media Literacy (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	1. Effectively use information from academic and popular sources.	2014-15		x				
2. Cultural Literacy	2. Demonstrate cultural and global awareness as responsible citizens and professionals.	2016-17					x	
3. Discipline Literacy	3. Exhibit mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities within a discipline.	2017-18				x		
Goal: Communication								
4. Written Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	4. Write effectively according to disciplines and/or audiences.	2015-16				x		
5. Oral Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	5. Effectively express ideas and information verbally.	2015-16			x			
6. Collaboration	6. Collaborate effectively as members and leaders of diverse teams.	2016-17			x			
Goal: Reasoning								
7. Quantitative Reasoning (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	7. Apply quantitative analysis and techniques to address complex challenges.	2014-15		x				
8. Ethical Reasoning	8. Integrate ethical principles in professional and civic life.	2017-18					x	
9. Critical Thinking (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	9. Objectively analyze and evaluate issues in order to formulate judgments.	2013-14	x					

The results of the student learning assessments led to significant curricular revisions and overall assessment process improvements. During the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 assessments, student samples were scored using faculty-written core competency rubrics (analytic rubrics, with scores ranging from 0-3). As the rubrics would be shared by both undergraduate and graduate programs, the deans set different benchmarks to reflect the difference in degree-level (see [table 4.3](#)). For the 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 assessments, faculty wrote PLO rubrics (based upon an initial core competency rubric for one of the sets of PLOs measured) and adjusted the graduate benchmarks to make the rubrics more functional for that degree level. Annual Institutional Assessment Reports compile the yearly programmatic work.

Table 4.3: Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Results and Plans: 2014-2020

YEAR 2014-2015	Information Literacy PLOs
<p>Undergraduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher</p> <p>Graduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 3 Develop: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher</p>	<p>BAM: Demonstrate ability to utilize multiple sources of information in addressing business challenges. BSHS: Identify information needs, locate and access relevant information and critically evaluate a diverse array of sources. BSN: Model professional role and employ nursing practices that promote health and wellness of the client, family, community, and population/global aggregates. GE: Assess, access, and use information responsibly. MAEd: Effectively gather, analyze, and integrate information to guide practice. MBA: Demonstrate ability to access, interpret, and evaluate academic and professional sources of business-related data and information. MSHS: Exhibit technological proficiency in gathering and using information to address issues and take action. MSN: Demonstrate leadership and effective management strategies for advanced nursing practice, including proficiency in the use of information technology/technology resources to support practice and to ensure continuity for patient care.</p>
Quantitative Reasoning PLOs	SCORING RESULTS
<p>BAM: Utilize quantitative and qualitative research findings to support management decisions. BSHS: Interpret mathematical information and concepts in verbal, numeric, graphical, and symbolic form. BSN: Integrate critical inquiry and decision making to effect excellence in client care outcomes using. GE: Analyze and interpret data in a scientific or social context. MAEd: Apply quantitative and qualitative research to practical problems in education. MBA: Demonstrate ability to understand and utilize financial and other quantitative data to support business decisions. MSHS: Design, conduct and interpret meaningful health science-related research and scholarly activity. MSN: Utilize the process of scientific inquiry to validate and refine knowledge relevant to advanced nursing practice.</p>	<p>Undergrad: 3 of 4 programs met benchmark; the program that measured closest to graduation did not meet Grad: 2 of 4 programs met benchmark</p>
SCORING RESULTS	ACTION PLAN
<p>Undergrad: 3 of 4 programs met benchmark Grad: 1 of 3 programs met benchmark; 1 did not assess</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase focus on APA modeling in curriculum. • Develop additional library trainings and resources; offer online tutoring. • Additional APA resources, instruction, and learning experiences added to courses. • Library webinars offered and recorded. • Course and program library research guides created. • Contracted with Smarthinking tutoring service.
ACTION PLAN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional on-ground quantitative courses scheduled. • Contracted with Smarthinking tutoring service. • Online courses used Blackboard Collaborate for synchronous meetings. 	

YEAR 2015-2016	
Undergraduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher Graduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 3 Develop: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher	
Written Communication PLOs	
BAM: Accurately and effectively communicate business concepts in written and oral presentations. BSHS: Employ effective written and oral communication appropriate for its intended audience. BSN: Adapt caring collaborative communication in interacting with patients, families, and the interdisciplinary healthcare team to improve healthcare outcomes. GE: Write and speak fluently and expressively. MAEd: Write and present scholarly essays on policy, programs and issues relating to education and education leadership. MBA: Accurately and effectively communicate business concepts in written and oral presentations. MSHS: Utilize effective verbal, nonverbal and written communication skills to inform, educate and empower targeted audiences. MSN: Apply the process of scientific inquiry to validate and contribute knowledge relevant to improving healthcare outcomes within a dynamic healthcare environment.	
SCORING RESULTS	
Undergrad: 2 of 4 programs met benchmark; 1 met at earlier point in program but not at later; 1 did not meet Grad: 1 program met benchmark; 1 met at early point in program but not at later; 2 did not meet	
ACTION PLAN	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase focus on writing across curricula; review course sequencing; communicate online tutoring availability to faculty and students. • Increased use of grading rubrics across curricula (more systematically added to courses, in faculty expectations and student orientations). • Career-focused writing assignments added. • Weaver Reader (BSN and MSN) implemented. • Research writing instruction offered to international students. • Switched to Brainfuse tutoring with its faculty dashboard. 	
Oral Communication PLOs	
BAM: Accurately and effectively communicate business concepts in written and oral presentations. BSHS: Employ effective written and oral communication appropriate for its intended audience. BSN: Adapt caring collaborative communication in interacting with patients, families, and the interdisciplinary healthcare team to improve healthcare outcomes. GE: Write and speak fluently and expressively. MAEd: Write and present scholarly essays on policy, programs and issues relating to education and education leadership. MBA: Accurately and effectively communicate business concepts in written and oral presentations. MSHS: Utilize effective verbal, nonverbal and written communication skills to inform, educate and empower targeted audiences. MSN: Synthesize concepts and theories from nursing and related disciplines to develop and integrate new approaches for nursing practice of the whole/healthy human being.	
SCORING RESULTS	
Undergrad: 2 of 4 programs met benchmark; 1 met at earlier point in program but not at later; 1 was not able to measure Grad: 1 of 4 programs met benchmark; 3 did not meet	
ACTION PLAN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add oral communication across curricula • Oral presentation assignments (live, recorded, voice-over) with rubrics added 	

YEAR 2016-2017
Undergraduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher Graduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 3 Develop: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher
Diversity PLOs
BAM: Promote diverse perspectives to optimize performance in a global business environment. BSHS: Work effectively and appropriately interact in a variety of cultural contexts. BSN: Adapt caring collaborative communication in interacting with patients, families, and the interdisciplinary healthcare team to improve healthcare outcomes. GE: Demonstrate a comprehension of one's individual identity in relationship to other cultures and lifestyles. MAEd: Frame professional practice through the lens of diversity and inequity. MBA: Leverage diversity to optimize performance in the global marketplace. MSN: Analyze socio-cultural, spiritual, ethical, economic, and political issues to improve healthcare outcomes and decrease healthcare costs.
SCORING RESULTS
Undergrad: 3 of 4 programs met benchmark; 1 not measured (no enrollment) Grad: 1 program met benchmark; 2 did not meet
ACTION PLAN
Strengthen curricula and assignments; revision of PLOs
Collaboration PLOs

BAM: Work effectively in teams on business projects. BSHS: Participate effectively in team problem-solving and decision-making in health sciences. BSN: Collaborate with and advocate for consumers and colleagues in the delivery of healthcare services GE: Collaborate with others in diverse group settings. MAEd: Collaborate in a community of educational practice. MBA: Influence group dynamics in pursuit of optimal team decision-making and performance. MSN: Demonstrate the ability to effectively engage in collaborative caring intra and inter-disciplinary relationships in the conduct of advanced nursing practice.
SCORING RESULTS
Undergrad: 2 of 4 programs met benchmark; 2 not measured (no enrollment; low enrollment - course availability) Grad: 2 programs met benchmark; 1 did not meet (course availability)
ACTION PLAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen curricula and assignments; increase training in and use of communication tech tools in courses; revision of PLOs. Collaborative assignments being added to courses in course revision/migration; YouSeeU meeting links added to all courses in D2L Brightspace; faculty and student Guides for YouSeeU created; PLOs revised.
YEAR 2017-2018
Undergraduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher Graduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher

ETHICAL REASONING PLOs
<p>BAM: Analyze the ethical and legal obligations and responsibilities of business.</p> <p>BSHS: Evaluate ethical issues in healthcare in order to propose effective resolutions.</p> <p>BSN: Demonstrate professionalism in accepting accountability and responsibility for personal behavior and ethical practice.</p> <p>GE: Apply ethical frameworks in various social and civic contexts.</p> <p>MAEd: Analyze ethical issues that arise in education practices and institutions.</p> <p>MBA: Solve discipline-specific problems demonstrating mastery of foundational business knowledge.</p> <p>MSN: Design and implement advocacy strategies that address healthcare policies and issues of social justice and equity in healthcare.</p>
SCORING RESULTS
<p>Undergrad: 2 of 4 programs met the benchmark; one program did not meet the benchmark and one program was not assessed.</p> <p>Grad: 2 of 3 programs met benchmark with one program not assessed.</p>
ACTION PLAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the curriculum map for ethics-aligned courses and review the course content and assignments to make changes to improve performance on this PLO. Provide PLO refresher to teaching faculty so that they can assist their students in building these skills in their individual courses. Discuss ethics vs. legality and its application in the faculty meeting. PLOs could be addressed through evaluations and feedback more consistently with renewed awareness. Align courses for opportunities to learn, practice and demonstrate this skill.
MASTERY OF THE DISCIPLINE PLOS

<p>BAM: Solve discipline-specific problems demonstrating mastery of foundational business knowledge.</p> <p>BSHS: Effectively integrate concepts and practices in health sciences to achieve healthcare outcomes.</p> <p>BSN: Assume a leadership and advocacy role in promoting individual and global community health and wellness to improve healthcare outcomes.</p> <p>GE: Demonstrate knowledge of basic goals, facts, and approaches of a range of disciplines, including sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and the arts and humanities.</p> <p>MAEd: Connect theory and practice to engage 21st-century learners and professionals.</p> <p>MBA: Lead organizations using creative and innovative strategies and solutions to achieve business objectives.</p> <p>MSN: Demonstrate expertise in a culture of caring and engage in critical dialogue with a vision for nursing practice in a selected environment.</p>
SCORING RESULTS
<p>Undergrad: 2 of 4 programs met the benchmark; one program did not meet the benchmark and one program was not assessed.</p> <p>Grad: 2 of 3 programs met benchmark with one program not assessed.</p>
ACTION PLAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed “application” assignments and instructions and make revisions to ensure that contextual awareness is highlighted. Part of integrating theory to practice is awareness of professional context. This might be an element that has not yet been emphasized in the curriculum. Provide PLO refresher to teaching faculty so that they can assist their students in building these skills in their individual courses. PLOs could be addressed through evaluations and feedback more consistently with renewed awareness. Create a case study and/or problem-solving grading rubric, clarifying expectations for students and faculty.

YEAR 2018-2019	
Undergraduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher Graduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of student scores at “3” or higher Develop: 80% of student scores at “2” or higher; AND 40% at “3” or higher	
Critical Thinking PLOs	
BAM: Evaluate ideas and data to rationally produce and implement solutions for business issues. BSIT: Analyze and evaluate organizational systems and processes to recommend IT turnkey solutions that meet organizational needs and goals. BSHS: Evaluate ideas and evidence rationally to produce and implement solutions for health-related issues. BSN: Objectively analyze and evaluate data to inform decision-making in nursing practice. GE: Analyze and evaluate arguments and positions. MAEd: Evaluate societal influences on education practice and policy. MBA: Strategically evaluate the factors involved in business situations/issues to promote innovation, improve performance, and mitigate risk. MSN: Objectively evaluate and synthesize information in advanced nursing roles. TCPP: Objectively analyze and evaluate student performance in order to improve teaching practice.	
SCORING RESULTS	
Undergrad: 3 programs met benchmark; 2 programs not assessed Grad: 2 graduate programs met benchmarks; 1 graduate program met the development PLO, but not the Mastery PLO. 1 program not assessed.	
ACTION PLAN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving forward, learning outcome data will be collected for all Learning Outcomes for all students with a comprehensive rubric that is embedded into the portfolio assignment. 	

<p>This will assist in ensuring that graduates are meeting the stated program learning outcomes and that the assessment rubric is best aligned with the learning outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including all students in the sample will ensure that there is not a bias in the collection of artifacts or in the scoring of the artifacts. Review ongoing alignment of PLOs to the Institutional Learning Outcomes. Add additional courses to map to mastery level quantitative reasoning and critical thinking at the develop and mastery levels to reinforce these skills and build toward greater outcome achievement at the mastery level. Clarify assignment directions, provide more guidance, and revise to promote greater student achievement. This course assignment was a challenge for several students and contributed to the failure to reach mastery level achievement goals. Review the assessments within the curriculum where students perform lower than levels 2 and higher. Identify revisions to clarify learning goals and support student mastery. Continue to work to bolster enrollment so ongoing evaluation of student learning with a larger sample size can be conducted for future annual reviews. Develop additional signature assignment rubrics (SARS) that are embedded in the program to assess student learning outcome data for all students rather than a sample.
YEAR 2019-2020
Undergraduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of scores at 2 or higher Develop: 80% of scores at 1 AND 40% at 2 or higher Introduce: 80% of scores at 1 or higher Graduate Benchmarks Master: 80% of student scores at “3” or higher Develop: 80% of student scores at “2” or higher; AND 40% at “3” or higher

Quantitative Reasoning PLOs	ACTION PLAN
<p>BAM: Compute and analyze financial and other quantitative data to support business decisions.</p> <p>BSIT: Apply quantitative problem-solving skills to manage IT activities and projects.</p> <p>BSHS: Interpret healthcare data delivered in verbal, numeric, or graphical form.</p> <p>BSN: Apply empirical research to nursing practice.</p> <p>GE: Calculate and interpret numerical data in scientific and social contexts.</p> <p>MAEd: Interpret quantitative data relating to challenges and barriers in education.</p> <p>MBA: Analyze financial and other quantitative data in the decision-making process.</p> <p>MSN: Evaluate and apply quantitative and qualitative data to validate and guide decision-making relevant to health outcomes.</p> <p>TCPP: Interpret student performance data to improve teaching practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviewed ongoing alignment of PLOs to the Institutional Learning Outcomes. ● Several programs underwent major curricular revisions in response to this PLO assessment data. ● Review the assessments within the curriculum where students perform lower than levels 2 and higher. Identify revisions to clarify learning goals and support student mastery. ● Add additional courses to map to mastery level quantitative reasoning at the develop and mastery levels to reinforce these skills and build toward greater outcome achievement at the mastery level. ● Continue to work to bolster enrollment so ongoing evaluation of student learning with a larger sample size can be conducted for future annual reviews. ● Develop additional signature assignment rubrics (SARS) that are embedded in the program to assess student learning outcome data for all students rather than a sample.
SCORING RESULTS	<p>NOTE: Information and Media Literacy PLO deferred by deans until 2020-2021 to use more comprehensive assessment data from the new automated system implemented in 2021.</p>
<p>Undergrad: One undergrad program met benchmarks; 4 programs not assessed</p> <p>Grad: One program met the benchmark; one program met the development PLO, but not the Mastery PLO, one program did not meet the benchmark, 1 program not assessed.</p>	

STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT DATA

Signature assignment rubrics were developed to create an Assessment of Student Learning (ASL) System. These rubrics align specific assignment criteria with program learning outcomes (PLO) and institutional learning outcomes (ILO). Deans, program directors, faculty, and students participate in semi-annual data dialogues, which involves analyzing data and collaborating around continuous improvement solutions designed to improve student achievement. Using data generated by the ASL System, deans/program directors produce programmatic and curricular improvements as needed. The academic calendar is broken into two periods: A (September - February) and B (March - August). The colleges are provided a dashboard that includes student achievement aligned to the ILOs and PLOs. The data is further detailed by course, faculty, and demographic data of the student. Colleges are also given relevant school data for that period

which includes graduation rates (once annual), new admission, re-enrolled information, student body enrollment, and graduate counts. The colleges are also provided aggregate evaluation reports at the programmatic level which include student end of course evaluation, faculty end of course evaluation, and student end of program evaluations.

REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Through its annual assessment of PLOs, USU is able to demonstrate the extent to which its students meet the university's educational quality objectives. Based on USU's [solid assessment foundation](#), given USU's growth, it is clear to the institution that the manual assessment process requires an enhanced and scalable automated format. As an institution committed to continuous improvement, USU has piloted the use of Signature Learning Assignments in each of the colleges so that PLOs in each program can be assessed at an introductory, developing, or mastery level that are automatically scored within the D2L courses. This new automated method will result in greater access to data that better facilitates continuous programmatic improvement across USU's programs and inform student learning at various demographic levels.

5: Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, & Graduation

(CFRs 1.2, 2.7, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14)

Aligning with the university [mission](#) to provide professional and personal educational opportunities, with a special outreach to underserved groups, USU is committed to academic quality and defines student success as students meeting the designated learning outcomes, completing their program of study, and achieving their professional objectives. To this end, USU has established advising services (overviewed in [Advising Summit](#)) and interventions that support student success in the achievement of program learning outcomes and degree completion in the academic disciplines they pursue.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

USU's Academic Support Services are designed to promote and maintain student success. The Student Services Department consists of Academic and International Student Advisors. Student Services works with every student to orient them to the university and to help them understand academic and non-academic policies and procedures. Among other services, Academic Advisors assist students in developing and accomplishing academic goals, utilizing and accessing student success resources, and assisting with faculty outreach, registration questions, and access to tutoring services.

STUDENT RETENTION COMMITTEE

The Student Retention Committee serves in an advisory capacity to USU's President's Council and focuses on initiatives and strategies that impact student retention. The committee reviews and provides feedback on the campus strategies for retention of students and assists campus constituencies with the implementation of these strategies. The committee provides support to the provost and President's Council in dissemination and training of best practices in retention to the campus community and serves as champions as initiatives are moved forward. The committee submits an annual report to the President's Council for circulation to the appropriate governance bodies.

Members of the Student Retention Committee include the director of advising, director of enrollment, chair of the Diversity Committee, representative from the office of the registrar,

representative from the office of student accounts, representative from the office of field experience, and librarian.

Retention Committee members meet bi-monthly to review data provided from the office of accreditation regulatory compliance and institutional effectiveness (OARCIE). The following reports represent a sample of those provided to inform the committee in their work:

- Internal Reports: Progression, completion, admissions, withdrawals, and grade variance
- Student Satisfaction Surveys
- Project Concert (high level + faculty)
- D2L Data Hub, Watermark, and Student Population Reports
- Student End of Course Surveys and Student End of Program Surveys
- Annual Institution Report, Quarterly Board Reports, and ad hoc requests

EARLY ALERT FORM INTERVENTION

USU's Early Alert form is designed for faculty to identify students demonstrating behaviors that may contribute to academic difficulty or course failure. Once a faculty identifies a student in need, the faculty member can then complete the [Early Alert form](#). The Early Alert form allows the faculty to provide context to the Academic Advising team and serves as a notification for the advisor to contact the student to address any academic issues he/she is experiencing in class.

Once a student is identified via this referral, the advisor and/or appropriate support service personnel will attempt to contact and work with the student in an effort to improve the student's academic performance. The Student Retention Committee examined outcomes from the Early Alert form and found opportunity to improve the tracking of outcomes. Recommendations were made to university faculty and leadership that will be piloted in future academic sessions.

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION SERVICES

All new students who are accepted into USU are offered a one-on-one new student orientation with a new student advisor. The New Student Orientation (NSO) is designed to provide all incoming students with the information needed to successfully transition into a college program. The individualized NSO, based on a student's program, background, and unique needs, guides

each student through the structure of the classroom and serves to familiarize the student with classroom navigation, using university resources/technologies, and tips of how to be successful in the classroom. Once a new student successfully completes the NSO, they can revisit the orientation to practice navigating the platform or refresh themselves on any classroom functions. At present, each NSO serves approximately 100 new students during their first session and academic advisors serve approximately 400 continuously enrolled students. USU has evaluated the NSO model and found that because of USU's already high persistence and retention rates (see Table 5.1 below) that before and after implementation of the NSO model, these rates did not significantly change. Thus, USU is evaluating whether to continue with this model or disperse the role within existing academic advisors.

OFFICE OF FIELD EXPERIENCE

USU has invested in the Office of Field Experience (OFE) as a department committed to assisting students with quality, on-time placement opportunities through a high-touch, supportive service model. The OFE is dedicated to supporting the clinical experience preparation process. Currently, the OFE is staffed with clinical placement coordinators, manager, director, and an additional team of full-time employees that support the development, nurturing, and administration of clinical site development and retention.

The Clinical Placement Coordinators (CPC) focus on ensuring student placement at clinical sites. These placements are vital to students' continuous enrollment and completion. The CPC is dedicated to developing and implementing plans for clinical placements by reviewing program and student clinical site requests, facilitating document collection and approvals, and identifying available site mentors/preceptors. CPCs proactively communicate with students to ensure understanding and timely completion of required documentation and approvals and assists them throughout their program to keep compliance and approvals current. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the OFE along with the College of Nursing and Health Sciences developed partnerships with telehealth providers that not only resulted in clinical telehealth placements but provided innovative and relevant skills for future Family Nurse Practitioners. To date, all students who have engaged with OFE have been placed. Specifically, at the time of this report there were over 2,100 affiliation agreements and 2,600 preceptors servicing USU's

approximately 1,500 FNP students. USU collects satisfaction data on the OFE and overall students report that this component of their program is vital to their success.

TUTORING SERVICES

USU partners with Brainfuse, one of the nation's leading online tutoring service providers. Brainfuse offers real-time online tutoring services for distance and online learners. Brainfuse is free for all USU students and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Students can either attach a document to obtain feedback from a certified tutor, which is distributed back to the student within 24 hours of the submission, or request to communicate with advisors in real-time in a user-friendly online classroom. USU maintains data on usage rates and assesses student satisfaction to determine the ongoing engagement of the vendor.

LIBRARY

USU offers both an on-ground and online library, which offers assistance with researching online databases and citing references. All USU students can contact a librarian 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and can directly assist with any questions related to research, references, citations, etc. The USU Library also hosts virtual webinars during the first two weeks of every month that allow students the opportunity to receive further training on researching material specific to their program of interest. USU collects data on library satisfaction from students and faculty. While overall students and faculty report satisfaction with USU's library, USU elected to continuously improve how the community interacts with the university's online library. A recent initiative was launched that improves the library interface through using tools built within D2L aimed at better efficiency between the library and the university's curriculum.

FUTURE RETENTION RELATED INITIATIVES

Since the creation of the Student Retention Committee in 2020, and after thorough review and discussion of the appropriate data, the Retention Committee compiled a list of future student retention initiatives and presented it to the University's President's Council, where it received full approval to enact the following initiatives in 2021.

Student Mentor Program

This initiative's goal is to give students nearing the end of their program the opportunity to work with newer students. The committee will coordinate with the University and President's Council to create this program in the coming year. This initiative could be especially beneficial to students with clinical requirements as well as other programs who might have found challenges in the latter stages of the program.

Automated Outreach

The retention committee has also identified that additional outreach efforts could be created for students who have become inactive in their programs. The committee is working on automating the identification process of inactive students so that academic advisors can focus outreach efforts to assist with registration and reinforce attendance and participation policies.

Portal Pop-Up Window

The retention committee plans to work with the technology team on the creation of an alert system as an intervention in the student portal for program withdrawals. This notification will inform students that they should speak to an academic advisor and financial advisor prior to withdrawing from the program to ensure the student is aware of any academic and financial repercussions prior to withdrawing from the program.

STUDENT SUCCESS MEASURES

Student Satisfaction Survey

The university uses an online questionnaire to collect information from students regarding their college experience as well as to measure the students' level of satisfaction with USU. The Student Satisfaction Survey is distributed every year in the fall and student feedback is aggregated into an annual report and distributed to university leadership.

In the fall of 2020, the Student Satisfaction Survey achieved a 40% response rate. Highlights from the 2020 survey are shown below and, in comparison with the 2019 and 2018 survey data, reflect an overall high level of satisfaction from students on a variety of measures, including academic advising, registration, library, faculty, staff, and overall educational experience.

- **Student Advisor/Academic Advising**

Students' overall level of satisfaction with student advisors and academic advising has remained high and stable in 2018, 2019, and 2020. Approximately eighty-four (84) percent of the survey respondents indicated they were somewhat or very satisfied in each of the survey years. The percentage responding that they were somewhat or very dissatisfied decreased from 12% to 11% to 6% over this period, respectively, with the balance of respondents indicating no opinion. Decreases in dissatisfied percentages is attributed to the increased knowledge level of advisors and improved training processes for onboarding new staff as student and advisor headcount grew over the period.

- **Registration**

Students indicating they were somewhat or very satisfied with registration was 88%, 88%, and 81%. Students indicating they were somewhat or very dissatisfied stayed largely stable at 5%, 4%, and 6% over this period, with the balance of respondents indicating no opinion. With the modest drop in satisfaction in 2020 versus the prior two years, the university is looking at opportunities, including automated outreach to inactive students, to provide advisors with more time to assist active students with their registration and related questions.

- **Library**

Students' level of satisfaction with the library has increased over time with those responding somewhat or very satisfied with the library increasing from 66% to 67% to 72% over this period. The percentage responding that they were somewhat or very dissatisfied remained relatively stable at 8%, 4%, and 5%, and the balance of respondents indicated no opinion. A qualitative review of students' comments reveals opportunities to continue to enhance library services through greater awareness of search and navigation tools available to students at the beginning of their program and to continue to add relevant databases as program growth and program reviews identify new resources.

- **Overall Experience with Faculty**

Student satisfaction relative to their overall experience with faculty has remained high with 84%, 80%, and 88% of respondents indicating they were somewhat or very satisfied

in 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively. The percentage responding that they were somewhat or very dissatisfied went from 14% to 15% to 6%, respectively, with the balance of respondents indicating no opinion. The gain in students satisfied to 88% and decrease in students dissatisfied to 6% provides compelling evidence of the level of investment that faculty have in their role of supporting students at USU as well as their commitment to student success.

- **Overall Experience with Staff**

Student satisfaction levels with university staff have a similar pattern to their satisfaction level with faculty. Students indicating that they were somewhat or very satisfied in their overall experience with staff was 88%, 81%, and 88% over the period. Students indicating they were somewhat or very dissatisfied went from 9% to 13% to 5%, respectively, with the balance of respondents indicating no opinion. Other than the small dip in 2019, the overall satisfaction of students with staff has been notable and the drop in dissatisfied students to just 5% in the 2020 survey is evidence of the high quality of services provided by staff overall at the institution.

- **Overall Educational Experience**

Lastly, when asked about their overall educational experience at USU, students indicating that they were somewhat or very satisfied was 87%, 79%, and 89%, respectively. Students indicating they were somewhat or very dissatisfied went from 13% to 19% to 7%, respectively, with the balance of respondents indicating no opinion. It is notable that students' overall educational experience ranked as the highest satisfaction level measured in the 2020 survey when compared with all other questions asked (89%). While there are opportunities to continue to enhance the overall education experience, the university is proud of this metric as a broad and important indicator of students' assessment of their educational experience at USU.

End of Program Surveys

Upon completion of their program of study, students are sent an end of program survey to assess various criteria related to their learning outcomes, assessments, recommendations, and employment status. This tool has been used in addition to a Gainful Employment survey

administered six or more months after graduation to track and assess alumni outcomes and their feedback to better inform the university and to improve academic programs and services.

At the end of the fall 2020 term, the end of program survey was completed by 57% of those graduating (63/110). The following are highlights from survey as they relate to student success:

- 98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they met all of the program learning outcomes identified in the Catalog for their program of study.
- Asked if they would recommend this program to a friend on a scale of 1-10 (1 the lowest and 10 the highest), the mean score assigned was 8.37 with 89% assigning a 7 or higher.
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that they had the resources they needed to be successful in the program and that their faculty were helpful in preparing them for the workforce.
- 89% reported being employed at the time of the survey and 81% reporting being employed in their field of study.

Overall, the end of program surveys provided valuable insight related to alumni outcomes with few areas of opportunity relative to strengths in graduate outcome measures. However, limitations exist for generalization to smaller programs as only 16% of respondents (10/63) were from non-nursing programs. As smaller programs grow and the number of graduates increase, additional insights should emerge from this survey.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

USU has provided retention and graduation data for the three previous years, which is located on the university [website](#). Using the institutional data provided, changes in rates at both the program and degree level are shown and summarized below.

Table 5.1 Year-Over-Year Retention Rate by Program – Three Years

Note: Students that have graduated are excluded in the calculation.

		(2017 Fall II to 2018 Fall I)				(2018 Fall I to 2019 Fall I)				(2019 Fall I to 2020 Fall I)			
		Retention		Attrition		Retention		Attrition		Retention		Attrition	
Level	Program	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
Undergrad	BA Management	8	38%	13	62%	6	60%	4	40%	5	63%	3	37%
	BS Health Sciences	5	42%	7	58%	2	40%	3	60%	5	100%	0	0%
	BS Nursing - RN to BSN	3	37%	5	63%	10	67%	5	33%	28	54%	24	46%
Undergrad Total		16	39%	25	61%	18	60%	12	40%	38	58%	27	42%
Graduate & TC	MA Education	3	50%	3	50%	4	33%	8	67%	2	25%	6	75%
	MBA	20	62%	12	38%	13	22%	46	78%	22	48%	24	52%
	MS Health Sciences	0	0%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	MSN Nursing	86	80%	22	20%	359	73%	130	27%	717	74%	248	26%
	Teacher Credentialing	4	31%	9	69%	5	56%	4	44%	0	0%	1	100%
Graduate & TC Total		63	113	71%	46	39%	381	67%	188	741	73%	279	27%
Total		129	64%	71	36%	399	67%	200	33%	779	72%	306	28%

Undergraduate retention rates have increased over the past 3 years from an average of 39% to 58%. Graduate retention rates have seen a net increase over this period, going from 71% to 67% to 73% in 2020. The university recognizes that the MS in Nursing is the highest performing in terms of retention and represents the vast majority of students (approximately 90%). Other programs have group sizes considerably smaller and calculating retention with small Ns results in higher levels of volatility. However, there continues to be opportunity to better support these small programs, and this continues to be a topic of focus in the Retention Committee.

Below in [table 5.2](#) is the cohort-based (cohort as defined by number of students) model graduation rate for the most recent reporting year as applied at 150% time-to-completion, which is calculated where program length is equal to 1.5 normal time to completion. Example: the master's degree traditional track programs have an average program length of 2 years; therefore, the reported cohort would include those who started 3 years prior to their graduation year. Students must make it to Day 8 of their first course in the program within the reporting period. Documented exclusion categories, in alignment with the CCNE definition, include active-duty military service, death, family emergency/obligation, financial difficulties/barrier, internal program change/switch, approved LOA (must list reason), personal illness/disability, relocation, or transfer to another accredited institution. In an analysis of outcomes, graduate programs far outperform undergraduate programs with a graduation rate of 77% and represent 95% of all

students (383/402) in the calculation of rates. Similar to the analysis of retention rates, small group sizes in select programs hinder a broader assessment of outcomes. However, the opportunity to better support student retention and completion in small programs continues to be an important topic in the Retention Committee.

Table 5.2: Program Level Graduation Rate

Degree Level	Program	Cohort	Graduate	Exclusion	Percentage	Avg. Time to Complete	Notes
Undergrad (Cohort CY2014)	Bachelor of Arts in Management	5	1	1	25%	4.25	Less than 25 cohort size
	Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences	7	4	0	57%	3.50	Less than 25 cohort size
	Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN)	1	0	0	0%	0	Less than 25 cohort size
	Undergrad Total	13	5	1	42%		Less than 25 cohort size
Graduate (Cohort CY2017)	Master of Arts in Education	30	24	2	86%	1.24	
	Master of Business Administration	9	7	1	88%	1.42	Less than 25 cohort size
	Master of Science in Nursing - Family Nurse Practitioner	160	105	22	76%	1.85	
	Master of Science in Nursing (HCL & NE)	14	8	1	62%	2.09	Less than 25 cohort size
	Grad Total	213	144	26	77%		

Finally, an examination of degree program graduation rates by ethnicity is provided in [table 5.3](#), which is important given USU's mission and student body. While data at the undergraduate level are difficult to interpret due to sample size, at the graduate level, informative trends emerge that inform discussion and initiatives brought forward by the university's Retention Committee and

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. Specifically, while graduation rates are high across demographics, they are lowest among Black or African American students, who represent a significant proportion (17%) of USU students. Thus, the Retention and DEI Committees are focused on understanding potential barriers to student completion for this population.

Table 5.3: Degree Level by Ethnicity Graduation Rate

Traditionally groups less than 25 students were not included due to the identifiability of the student body; however, that would have precluded the undergraduate programs from being reported for this year.

Degree Level	Ethnicity	Cohort	Graduate	Exclusion	Percentage	Avg. Time to Complete
Undergrad	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	NA	NA
	Asian	2	2	0	100%	3.17
	Black or African American	7	2	1	33%	3.83
	Hispanic/Latino	4	1	0	25%	4.25
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	NA	NA
	White	0	0	0	NA	NA
	Two or more races	0	0	0	NA	NA
	Unknown	0	0	0	NA	NA
	Undergrad Total	13	5	1	42%	
Graduate	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0	1	0%	NA
	Asian	73	54	9	84%	1.92
	Black or African American	48	24	5	56%	1.92
	Hispanic/Latino	5	5	0	100%	1.68
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	3	3	0	100%	1.92
	White	65	46	8	81%	1.79
	Two or more races	4	2	0	50%	1.92
	Unknown	14	10	3	91%	1.44
	Grad Total	213	144	26	77%	

NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION EXAM PASS RATES

Graduates in the MSN Family Nurse Practitioner program have the option to take a national board certifying exam through the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) or American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) to validate their qualifications and knowledge for practice as a family nurse practitioner. Over the years, most graduates choose the AANP exam, so the institution does not report on the ANCC exam results due to the low sample size. Graduates from USU passed the AANP exam at the following rates: 2018 exams = 79% pass; 2019 exams = 80% pass; 2020 exams = 82% pass. The increase in pass rates during this time is attributed to improvements that were made in the academic program and the quality of instruction provided to students in preparation for the exam. From a programmatic accreditation perspective, the exam pass rates meet or exceed the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) program effectiveness standards. The university anticipates continued upward trajectory in this pass rate in the coming years as additional refinements to the MSN program are made.

REFLECTIONS ON STUDENT SUCCESS

USU demonstrates its commitment to student success through a constellation of tailored initiatives designed specifically for USU's unique underserved student population. For example, the Office of Field Experience is distinctive and focuses on ensuring continuous enrollment and successful completion of students in USU's largest program, MSN-FNP. At the same time, as USU continues to understand the evolving nature of its student population, an opportunity exists to further examine how or whether student success may be differentially experienced by various subgroups. This is a key initiative for the university as it continues to grow and thrive.

6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review; Assessment; Use of Data and Evidence

(CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 4.1-4.7)

Faculty and staff at USU understand the value and importance of data to inform decision making and improve learning outcomes for students. Each department at the university is dedicated to data collection, analysis, and reflection on a regular basis to inform processes, procedures, and improvement planning. For example, advisors utilize the proprietary student information system BLUE to access and manage records for all students. Academic advisors are able to use this system to monitor student program progression, participation, and attendance. BLUE also allows the academic advisors to manage and document new student orientations, review call recordings, and enter notes on student files. Tableau is utilized by various groups across the university to further monitor program enrollment, student success, academic progress, and other key data points utilized for decision making.

In academics, the use of data is an essential component to annual goal setting, budgeting, curriculum revision, and improvement planning. On a five-year basis, a comprehensive program review is conducted which further informs future program planning and program improvement. Through the program review process, faculty and staff collaborate on assessing the program's success and review opportunities to address any challenges identified through the process.

This section focuses on the use of data for program review and other functions, the institutional research support services, and use of assessment data for continuous improvement.

PROGRAM REVIEW

Program review follows a five-year cycle at USU ([Program Review Schedule](#)). The faculty of USU hold primary responsibility for assessing program quality, with assistance from academic administration. A [Program Review Manual](#) has been created and approved by the faculty senate that provides specific guidance and support for the process. The manual is designed to provide direction to program self-study teams in the development of a program review document.

Procedures for conducting the annual PLO assessment, a major element in program review, is available in the Learning Outcome Assessment Principles and Processes handbook ([PLO Assessment Handbook](#)). At the conclusion of each cycle of program review and learning

outcome assessment, the manual is reviewed, and changes are made as appropriate to improve the quality and implementation of the program review/learning assessment process.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH PROGRAM REVIEW

Program review is a comprehensive process through which a team of faculty and staff assess the academic quality of a program through a series of steps that include data gathering from Institutional Research. Data collected includes all program data for the past five years including enrollment and retention data, alumni and student satisfaction survey results, average class size, financial and budget information, and benchmarking with other schools. The program review team uses this data as well as specific course level outcome data to identify program strengths and limitations and drafts recommendations for identified problems. Upon completion of the self-study and improvement plans, the team engages with one or two external experts for a review visit. These experts are contracted to review the self-study, conduct interviews with relevant staff, faculty, and students, and draft their report for presentation to the program review team. Findings from the external experts are included in the program review document and recommendations are incorporated into the five-year action plan as appropriate.

Results of the program review are presented to the College Curriculum Committee for review, to the college as a whole, and to the University Council and President's Council. Recommendations are then utilized by the college deans for continuous curriculum improvement and development, annual budget planning, and goal setting.

Specialized Accreditation Reviews

Discipline accreditation or certification reports (e.g., CCNE, CTC) may substitute for portions of the program review if the provost or designee determines that they sufficiently address the elements considered under the program review process. Any required elements of program review that are not covered in an accreditation report may be addressed in a supplemental report for review by the program review committee.

Use of Data and Evidence

The university uses data and evidence to inform decision making and to further their goal of improving programs and increasing positive student outcomes. An overview and highlight of how each college approaches the use of data and evidence follows.

The College of Business and Technology (COBT) utilizes internal and external information to support curricula and program changes to include (a) modifying courses, (b) adding courses, (c) deleting courses, (d) and changing the structural protocol of a program. The primary goal in the COBT is to develop competent practitioners, and course learning outcomes are designed to develop core curricular competencies. In tandem, there is systematic review of the curriculum to ensure alignment with the primary goal. For example, after a thorough review of its most recent program review and a subsequent external review of similar degree offerings, the college proposed changes to its non-executive 36-hour credit Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. The 2018 program review indicated several strengths in the program, but also revealed a lack of adherence to a curriculum review schedule. Subsequently, in late 2019, an in-depth analysis was conducted of current MBA course content, course learning outcomes, and program learning outcomes.

The College of Education continuously uses data and program review results to improve, revise and reimagine the programs offered. Recommendations made during the formal reviews result in detailed action plans that are approved at the college level with a specific plan developed including a timeline for implementation. Following the completion of the MAED program review many changes were made to the program including the discontinuance of many specializations that had no enrollment, the reduction of credits from 36 to 30 to create a more competitive program and the reduction in the number of course starts to six per year rather than 12 to support the building of cohorts and larger class sizes. Additional actions taken during the 2019-2020 year include revised program learning outcomes, revised curriculum, and course changes ([MAED Revisions from Program Review](#)).

Lastly, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences uses data as an integral tool to inform decision making. In order to remain compliant with the state boards of nursing and nursing accreditation bodies, the college maintains, frequently reviews, and appraises the [CONHS Systematic Plan of Evaluation](#) that is aligned to Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education

(CCNE) standards of accreditation. The college utilizes program review and Program Learning Outcome assessment data, student surveys, faculty surveys, national board certification pass rates, and completion rates to regularly guide discussion, curricular changes, fiscal requests, policy, and procedures. Furthermore, the college has increased focus on automation in the collection and application of data to maximize technology and reduce reliance on manual compilation and calculation. These initiatives support consistency, continuity, and compliance with established timelines. Standardized testing using reputable and reliable products were integrated into the learning experience and platform in order to enhance student success and evaluate learning outcomes.

PROGRAM REVIEW AS IMPETUS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

While each of the programs have continually utilized the results of the self-study and review process for program improvement, a recent example of progress towards identified goals is illustrated utilizing the results of the program review for the Masters of Arts in Education (MAEd) and the changes implemented from their program review conducted in 2018 ([MAED Revisions from Program Review](#)). The following chart exemplifies the efforts to date to meet the program review recommendations.

MAED Improvement Plan

Improvement Goal	Action taken or planned
<i>Goal 1: Manage enrollment through fewer start dates.</i>	As of January 2021, D section courses have been eliminated and students will be grouped into starts each 8 weeks allowing for larger class sizes.
<i>Goal 2: Marketing to increase student enrollment.</i>	Strategic partnerships to support enrollment growth are underway for the MAED started in 2019 to provide additional marketing support.
<i>Goal 3: Combine the MAEd and TCPP into one program of study.</i>	2020 update- Permission has been granted by WSCUC to offer a Master of Arts in Teaching program which will combine the requirements for a CA teaching credential with a master's degree in Education.
<i>Goal 4: Discontinue offering specializations with low student enrollment. Create new specializations that are in demand in the field of education.</i>	With the rewriting of the program in 2019, a number of specializations and associated courses were sunset. Along with this, the program requirements were moved to 30 credits to reflect an affordable degree that matches those of other institutions in length.
<i>Goal 5: Develop a principal track for teachers in Arizona and California (and possibly other states).</i>	While this goal is still of interest, the current emphasis of the school is on the further development of teacher certification pathways including an Intern Program and teacher certification in Arizona.

Additional goals identified include additional training and support for faculty, enhanced tracking of students needing additional support, identifying curriculum revision and material updating, and researching additional specializations or certificates that may be valuable. Additional actions taken during the 2019-2020 year include revised program learning outcomes, revised curriculum, and course changes.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING (ASL)

A process and procedure for the annual review of student learning through a formal Program Learning Outcomes Assessment is documented in the Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Handbook ([PLO Assessment Handbook](#)). USU is committed to academic quality and student success. To this end, it has established a system of assessment of learning outcomes at the program level as well as at the institutional level for identified Institutional Learning Outcomes. All program learning outcomes will be reviewed within a five-year cycle, according to the learning outcomes assessment schedule. In addition, a Program Review process has been developed in which the assessment data from those years constitutes a significant element of program review. The faculty of USU hold primary responsibility for assessing program learning outcomes, with assistance from academic administration.

Through 2020, the process for assessing PLOs has been a manual one, as outlined in the handbook ([PLO Assessment Handbook](#)). Samples of student work are gathered, deidentified, and grading marks removed. Following a scoring training, a faculty team conducts a scoring session that includes analysis, planning, and reporting of results. Beginning in 2020, working with Institutional Research, each college identifies a series of signature assignments from within each program that are designated to be an introduction, reinforcement, or mastery of the specific learning outcome. Signature Learning Assignment (SLA) data is gathered automatically on each of these activities and scored with a specific rubric to allow for automated data reporting reflecting all students. Automated reporting will allow for a semi-annual review process by faculty teams during a “data dive” meeting for more informed decision making on an annual basis.

The Role of Institutional Research

Institutional Research (IR) plays a vital and integral role in facilitating understanding of student learning and specifically in conducting program reviews. As part of the program review process, IR provides colleges a Program Review Workbook. This workbook contains data on end of course and end of program surveys, student satisfaction survey, alumni surveys, LMS faculty engagement data, enrollment patterns, and persistence, retention and graduation data broken down by demographics (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity). These data are reviewed by faculty and considered as part of the program review process. Moreover, data reports are disseminated and used throughout the institution outside of the normal program review process. Specifically, the provost's office has worked to clarify and systematize the use of data. This included scheduling Provost Data Summits that include a cross-functional review of student learning and success metrics that ultimately inform student success initiatives ([USU Data Summit](#)). Moreover, deans and other leaders have continuous access to program learning outcome and student success reports in Tableau and are able to review "real-time" data designed to make continuous improvement decisions relative to their programs.

ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

There has been encouraging evidence for the enhancement of student learning in USU's largest program, MSN-FNP, as the pass rates for the national certifying board exam (AANP) have increased over the past three years, from 79% to 82%, as highlighted in Component 5.

Additionally, in spring of 2021, Picmonic and Osmosis learning platforms were introduced to MSN-FNP students starting in the MSN 570 Pathophysiology course and reinforced through their clinical courses based on data indicating that Pathophysiology scores consistently lag behind on the overall student performance. SAP reports showed that in the MSN-FNP program, 25% of the failures came from the MSN 570 Pathophysiology course. While considering that the content is challenging, CONHS responded to the need to support trends in student performance that compete with national averages. Tools such as Picmonic and Osmosis were investigated prior to implementation and faculty were compelled to adopt their integration due to evidence that integrated 'timed repetition' tools support repopulation of concepts, so learners retain content longer. The science behind this suggests that the FNP 597 predictor exam exit scores will

increase following implementation. Recently USU examined the impact of Picmonic in MSN 571 Pharmacology, which is midway through the FNP program. In this course, students take a predictor exam exit practice test. Prior to Picmonic implementation, the average score was 836 whereas following implementation the average score was 931, which suggests this data-driven curriculum improvement may lead to better preparation for the predictor exam exit and potentially for future licensure exams. Many of these data-driven decisions were highlighted in a [colloquium presentation](#) delivered by the CONHS dean in March 2021.

REFLECTION AND AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

United States University is committed to continuously improving its approach to program review, assessment, and the use of data as evidence. As the university grows, an essential next step in scaling the university's assessment system is moving toward the automation of data collection through signature learning assignments. USU faculty and administration will have additional, ongoing visibility to real time data that will further be utilized for thoughtful, data driven decision making on a regular basis. Signature assignment rubrics were developed in order to create the Assessment of Student Learning (ASL) System. These rubrics align specific assignment criteria with program learning outcomes (PLO) and institutional learning outcomes (ILO). Deans, program directors, faculty, and students participate in semi-annual data dialogues, which involve analyzing data and collaborating around continuous improvement solutions designed to improve student achievement. The ASL system also allows for examining student learning by subgroup, which aligns with USU's commitment to the performance of underserved populations. Using data generated by the ASL System, deans/program directors are producing programmatic and curricular improvements as needed.

7: Sustainability: Planning for the Changing Higher Education Environment; Ensuring Financial Viability

(CFRs 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

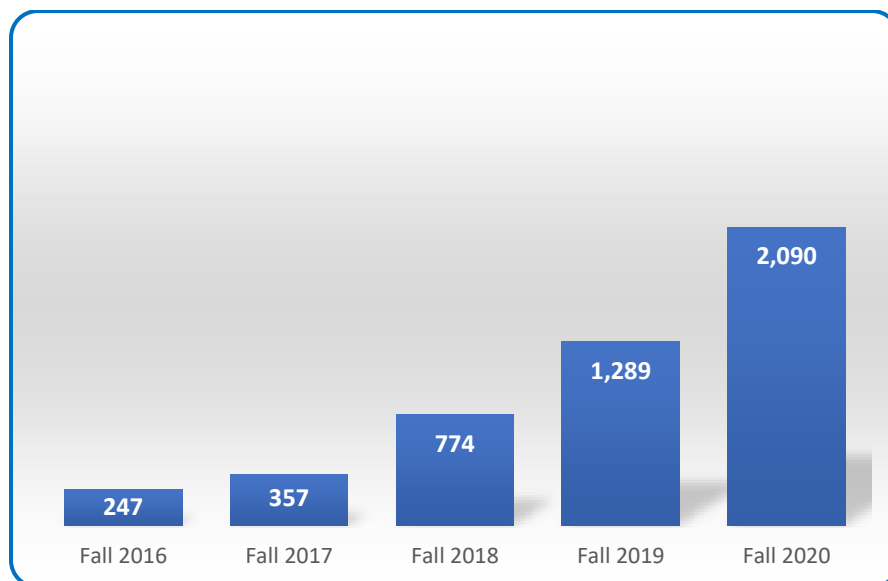
INTRODUCTION AND USU RESPONSE TO COVID-19

As USU positioned itself as a predominately online university and established financial sustainability, the university was well-positioned to face the unique and unprecedented challenges all of higher education faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, as an online institution, USU was nimble in its response to the pandemic ([USU COVID-19 Contingency Plan snapshot](#)). In regard to the FNP program, the 4-day on-ground clinical immersion was quickly transformed into a virtual delivery model using the latest technology. The FNP students who were displaced from clinical had virtual and telehealth opportunities to ensure they continued their academic progression. In addition, the MBA program, which historically offered on-ground weekend courses, moved toward online programming, and the teacher credential program was relaunched in the online modality. The university responded to the pandemic by remaining true to its mission of serving underserved students and affordable education while increasing student retention, enhancing program offerings, maintaining low dependence on financial aid, and facilitating student completion in programs vital to the health and vitality of the nation's economy. Fundamentally, USU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic along with the university's unique competencies and current position in the higher education landscape informs how to strategically plan for the university's future.

FINANCIAL POSITION

Evidence of financial stability is reflected in the composite score; as of FY19 USU's composite score was 1.8, increasing to 2.7 in FY20, to 3.0 in FY21. The university's total active student body has grown from 247 in fall 2016 to 2,090 in fall 2020, as shown in table 7.1 below. This is a total growth of 846%, or a compounded annual growth rate of approximately 212%. USU has also seen a proportional growth in total revenue, ending FY19 with \$6.9M in revenue.

USU Enrollment Growth Fall I Total Headcounts



MONTHLY PAYMENT PLAN

An innovative approach to paying for a degree is USU’s monthly payment plan (MPP), which has proven popular with USU students. USU students have the option to pay tuition and fees through a monthly payment method. As reported in Component 1, on average, 64% of USU’s student body participate in the MPP.

RESOURCE PLANNING & ANNUAL BUDGET PROCESS

The institution has seen tremendous growth since the change of ownership at the end of 2017; a critical factor in managing this growth has been the implementation of a detailed zero-based or “bottoms-up” annual budget development process to support the growing student population, institutional employees, and academic programs. The zero-based budget process ensures a high level of transparency and visibility into the cost assumptions and projections for each functional area of the institution.

The annual budget process is an inclusive, collaborative process managed by the chief financial officer, working closely with established “budget owners” across the institution to develop their specific departmental staffing and expense needs. These inputs are aggregated and presented to the president and provost who, along with the chief financial officer, reviews and prioritizes the detailed budget submissions. Recommended changes or adjustments are discussed with individual budget owners before the final annual budget is formalized and approved.

There are 24 unique cost centers (or “budget units”) within the institution, and 15 established budget owners responsible for submitting an expense template for their respective cost centers. The chief financial officer meets with each budget owner on a regular basis to review actual revenue and expenses, variance to budget, and to identify risks and opportunities that may have an impact on future financial performance. Each budget owner receives a detailed departmental budget template that includes a snapshot of current employee names and compensation rates. Detailed transactional files are provided to each budget owner that show actual expenses incurred (vendor, expense type, month paid, and dollar amount) to facilitate populating his/her departmental budget template(s).

The chief financial officer maintains the tuition and fee model that is used to provide projected student populations by program and by cohort. This data is shared with budget owners to properly capture student-driven costs and to forecast hiring needs for ratio-driven functional areas (e.g. student advising, full-time faculty). Budget owners are responsible for capturing expense needs required to support the current and forecasted student population and to proactively reflect requests for incremental spend in their respective budget submissions. Incremental spend would include requests for additional staff, any proposed changes to student to staff ratios, new vendor agreements (i.e. library subscriptions, software licensing), and other expense needs. The budget owners are also expected to explain how these incremental requests align with strategic initiatives as well as overall institutional goals and initiatives. Incremental requests are isolated and reviewed for prioritization by the president, provost, and chief financial officer based on the consolidated institutional P&L.

USE OF DATA AND FINANCIAL MODELING

The chief financial officer works with the AGI vice president of marketing to generate lead volumes and related advertising/marketing expenses by month for the upcoming fiscal year.

Historical lead conversion rates are used to generate the flow of applications into the enrollment team, and historical application conversion rates are applied to create the number of new student starts for each academic session within the fiscal year.

These numbers are entered into the tuition and fee revenue model that is maintained by the chief financial officer. This model breaks down the returning student population by program and by student cohort, then layers in new session enrollments. Institutional research provides program level data for session over session persistence, as well as overall retention and graduation rates which drive active student populations and resulting revenue. Historical actual tuition and fee discounts are gathered and applied at the program level to calculate net revenue. From a cost perspective, actual course class sizes are used to project adjunct teaching costs, after backing out sections expected to be taught by full-time faculty.

Several models are generated as part of the annual budget process based on differing new enrollment scenarios. The university president, provost, and chief financial officer subsequently agree on a single enrollment and net revenue scenario that is realistic and achievable to be used for the annual budget.

Once the annual budget has been presented to AGI, and then to the USU board of trustees for final approval, the tuition and fee model is extended out for a total of three years. Total annual operating expenses are also extended out an additional two years, assuming a 3% annual compensation increase and 2% annual inflation for non-labor costs. Preliminary enrollments from proposed new programs are conservatively added, leveraging persistence and retention data from similar/like programs. Student-to-staff ratios for support functions are held constant throughout the three-year scenario.

The resulting financials show a steady increase in year-over-year revenue as well as in margin, with a sustainable expense budget to ensure continued support of student and institutional outcomes.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

USU closely monitors financial performance relative to plan to ensure that enrollment estimates are achieved. The university attributes its financial progress to the following factors: 1) improved enrollment projections; 2) increased enrollment; 3) focused marketing efforts; 4) inclusive

budgeting process; and 5) ongoing budgetary monitoring. The process by which USU has improved its enrollment projections is detailed below. An important outcome of this focus is that the university has seen an increase of student growth from 247 in fall 2016 to 2,629 in spring 2021, which resulted in the university improving its financial health and well-being.

USU evaluates and sets enrollment targets based on a market analysis that is aligned to the university's mission to offer affordable, relevant, and accessible undergraduate and graduate degree programs. To achieve this, the university examines the current higher education landscape to provide opportunities for students to access professional and personal educational opportunities at an affordable price. Grounded in this understanding of the higher education tuition landscape, USU benchmarks the cost of its programs to comparable degree programs offered by similar institutions. USU has differentiated itself by focusing its market analysis on the cost of education. As discussed in component 1 of this report, USU addresses this analysis by offering programs that are materially less expensive than comparable universities ([table 1.1, Tuition Comparison](#)). Next, USU examines payment methods utilized by comparable universities. USU instituted an innovative Monthly Payment Plan (MPP) which permits students to pay their tuition and fees over a scheduled, fixed period of months ([Payment Policies](#)).

As part of the zero-based budgeting process, USU forecasts enrollment targets for each program and by each session start. The enrollment projections are reviewed with marketing to confirm potential demand for each program based on internet advertising demand analysis, such as search traffic and current lead volume. Based on historical lead volumes within each academic area and an analysis of lead costs, the enrollment targets are adjusted to ensure that they are both realistic and achievable. All information is captured in an enrollment forecast model. Appropriate assumptions of potential “no show” rates and persistence and retention information are incorporated into the model. Projections of satisfactory academic progress, graduation, and the number of average courses taken per session are also factored in to create a working revenue model. Once the model has been presented to and discussed with the president, it is embedded in the final budget presentation that is reviewed and approved by the Finance Committee of the board of trustees, the board of managers, and ultimately by the board of trustees as a whole. Since USU's engagement with AGI in December 2017, on average, the university has seen accurate projected and actual enrollment, which has contributed to the university's financial sustainability.

AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Marketing/Advertising: Developing more granular lead-to-application reporting will help improve forecasting accuracy. Currently conversion rates are calculated at the total program level; separating data by lead type and vendor is a natural next step towards refining model assumptions for future planning.

Enrollment: The institution began full implementation of its Student Information System in mid-2020. One future benefit will be application tracking within the system, instead of using offline spreadsheets and databases to house this data. Conversion rates by each enrollment advisor can be systematically generated to identify training opportunities and improve the overall quality of advisement and future conversion rates.

Enrollment/Advising: At the end of 2020, USU entered into a multi-year contract with a new telecom provider. This phone system has additional reporting capabilities that will allow for better monitoring of call details for advising teams: number of calls (inbound and outbound) by individual advisor, average talk time per day/week/month, etc. This should allow for better performance monitoring and can better help validate student-to-staffing ratios used in annual and long-term planning.

REFLECTIONS AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

United States University's strategic plan includes an academic strategy focused on three pillars: 1) People, and specifically continuing to develop and support its faculty; 2) Programs, which includes continuously improving existing academic program offerings and developing new academic programs; and 3) Partnerships, which will enable the university to organically grow all of its degree programs. Since the university is financially sustainable, the university community is engaged in and excited about this next phase of the university's history. To this end, USU recently submitted a structural change request to WSCUC requesting approval for the university's first doctoral program ([Doctor of Nursing Practice](#), or DNP). This submission is well aligned with the university's long-term position in higher education given that the archetypal USU student is a 40-year-old, mid-career, woman of color practicing in health care. Moreover, USU is keenly aware that the field is moving toward more advanced practice nurses obtaining doctoral degrees. This, combined with USU's unique tuition model and commitment to

educational access and affordable education, well positions USU to offer the DNP degree. Following USU's approval of the DNP, the university plans to seek approval for a Doctor of Business Administration and Doctor of Education, rounding out USU's degree program portfolio. As discussed in this report, USU recently revised and repositioned the university's Master of Business Administration and Master of Arts in Education programs and obtained approval for the Master of Arts in Teaching. With the growth of these programs, the university will be positioned to serve students ready to continue their education at the applied doctoral level. As USU explores what it means to be a primarily graduate degree offering institution, the university will continue to examine the long-term strategy of its undergraduate program offerings. Moreover, to accommodate the needs of working professionals, USU is exploring the tenability of increasing the start dates for selected programs from once every eight weeks to once every four weeks. This decision will be based on data, student demand, and technological capacity.

Another focus for USU is examining where to best situate the university's main campus long-term. The majority of the university's full-time employees are located in Phoenix. Moreover, as a predominately online institution, the university continues to expand its student population nationally. With the support of USU's parent organization, AGI, the university has opened learning centers in Phoenix, Austin, and Tampa, which allow USU to offer its weekend immersions to FNP students located across the country. USU is no longer solely a California-based institution. USU sought and obtained approval to be licensed in Arizona by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education and the FNP program is approved by the Arizona Board of Nursing. At the time of this report's submission, the USU teacher credential program will be under review by the Arizona Department of Education. USU is seeking this approval as the Arizona Department of Education allows for greater state-by-state reciprocity relative to teacher credentialing, which will allow USU to scale its teacher credential programs outside the state of California. Furthermore, as the State of Arizona is included in NC-SARA, which allows for member states to establish comparable national standards for interstate postsecondary distance education, and given that WSCUC is now an institutional accreditor, USU believes that a potential relocation to Arizona is in the long-term financial best interest of the university.

8: Conclusion: Reflection and Plans for Improvement

The self-study process provided an important opportunity for United States University to evaluate the efficacy of its programs and to reflect on its mission to serve an underserved population of students by providing affordable, relevant, and accessible degree programs. The process to prepare this report was undertaken as a community and has been extremely helpful in focusing USU on areas of strength and on areas for improvement. This report reflects USU's commitment to open and honest communication with the Accrediting Commission referenced in CFR 1.8. Especially noteworthy is the impact the report preparation process has had on crystalizing the focus on the type of underserved students that USU serves and how USU is well positioned to meet the educational needs of this population in the future, especially given these unique and uncertain times.

While USU has maintained an unwavering commitment to its mission, in many ways the university is a completely different institution than it was during the last accreditation visit seven years ago. Specifically, as the university refocused itself on its core value of affordability, the university grew from 247 students in fall 2016 to 2,629 in spring 2021 and is financially sound and sustainable. Never has the university community been able to aspire to be of educational service to such a large and expanding underserved community. As a result, faculty, administration, and staff are more focused and more committed to a shared vision of the future. USU is on a demonstrably progressive track to serve its current and future students.

USU looks forward to welcoming the visiting team to the offsite visit on September 21st, 2021 and on campus the following spring.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS & TERMS

AACN	American Association of Colleges of Nursing
AANP	American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
AGI	Aspen Group, Inc.
ALO	Accreditation Liaison Officer
ANCC	American Nurses Credentialing Center
ASL	Assessment of Student Learning
BAM	Bachelor of Arts in Management
BLUE	Proprietary Student Information System
BSHS	Bachelor of Science in Health Science
BSIT	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology
BRN	Board of Registered Nursing
BSN	Bachelor of Science in Nursing
CCNE	Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CFR	Criteria for Review
CLO	Course Learning Outcome
COBT	College of Business and Technology
COE	College of Education
CONHS	College of Nursing and Health Sciences
CPC	Clinical Placement Coordinator
CTC	Commission on Teacher Credentialing
D2L	Desire2Learn – Online Learning Platform
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DNP	Doctor of Nursing Practice
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FNP	Family Nurse Practitioner
GE	General Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
IAC	InterAmerican College
ILO	Institutional Learning Outcome

IR	Institutional Research
IT	Institutional Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LOA	Leave of Absence
MAEd	Master of Arts in Education
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPP	Monthly Payment Plan
MSHS	Master of Science in Health Sciences
MSN	Master of Science in Nursing
NC-SARA	National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements
NSO	New Student Orientation
OARCIE	Office of Accreditation, Regulatory Compliance, and Institutional Effectiveness
OFE	Office of Field Experience
PLO	Program Learning Outcomes
RN	Registered Nurse
SARS	Signature Assessment Rubrics
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLA	Signature Learning Assignments
SLO	Student Learning Outcome
TCPP	Teacher Credentialing Preparation Program
USU	United States University
VALUE	Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education

Other Terms and Definitions

Brainfuse	Online tutoring service (24/7)
Osmosis	Comprehensive health learning resource
Picmonic	Visual mnemonic health learning resource
Project Concert	Tool for tracking student's clinical and practicum experiences; faculty data