



REPORT OF UNITED STATES UNIVERSITY

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SAN DIEGO, CA 92108

For Special Visit

February 19-21

Dr. Scott Burrus, President/Accreditation Liaison Officer

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1. Institutional Context and Major Changes Since the Last WSCUC Review

The purpose of this Special Visit Report is to respond to the six requirements by the Commission (WSCUC) in the Action Letter dated July 11, 2022 ([Exhibit 1.00 Commission Action Letter](#)). We look forward to welcoming the Visiting Team to campus to discuss the institutional response and the manner in which the university is evolving to serve a growing and vibrant student body.

The report is organized as follows:

- Section 1 provides the Visiting Team with information about USU in addition to a summary of the major changes that have occurred since the last WSCUC Accreditation Visit on March 8-11, 2022
- Section 2 provides the readers with the background as to how the Special Visit Report was prepared
- Section 3 contains direct responses to the six requirements identified in the Commission Action Letter
- Section 4 discusses other changes/issues the University is facing
- Section 5 provides concluding remarks

1.1 Background and Mission

United States University was originally founded as InterAmerican College (IAC) in National City, CA, in 1997 and has a long history of and commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Additional details about the university's history appear below.

United States University (USU) remains unwavering in its commitment to its mission: *the provision of professional and personal educational opportunities, with a special outreach to underserved groups. Through campus and online programs, the university offers affordable, relevant, and accessible undergraduate and graduate degree programs and certificates in a supportive student-centered learning environment* ([Exhibit 1.01 About USU: <https://www.usuniversity.edu/about/>](#)). The institution's core values remain affordability, quality, integrity, diversity, inclusiveness, and life-long learning.

USU is a student-centric, affordability-focused institution committed to providing educational opportunities to underserved groups. In addition to offering financial aid to approximately 18% of the student population, USU offers an innovative approach to paying for a degree, a monthly payment plan (MPP), which has proven popular, with over 70% participating.

The university offers programs in business and technology, education, nursing and health sciences, wherein faculty aim to integrate theory and practice into interactive learning experiences. Classes are taught primarily online; however, all international business students participate in monthly weekend on-ground courses, and nursing students may participate in immersion experiences on campus.

Programs currently enrolling students ([Exhibit 1.02 USU Programs: <https://www.usuniversity.edu/colleges/programs/>](#)) include:

- Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE)
- Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN-BSN)

- Master of Arts in Education (MAEd)
- Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA - domestic; iMBA - international)
- Master of Science in Nursing (concentrations: Family Nurse Practitioner, Health Care Leadership, and Nurse Educator) (MSN)
- Doctor of Business Administration (DBA- domestic; iDBA - international)
- Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)
- Teacher Credential Preparation Program (TCPP)

A list of additional programs that are currently not enrolling students due to a combination of mandated gainful employment regulations, enrollment challenges, and the financial analysis required in the July 11, 2022, Action Letter is presented in Section 3.2.

Enrollment remains stable. At the time of this report, the university's total student population was 2,223; at the start of 2024, the university's student population was 2,114. Since the last accreditation visit, USU has programmatically diversified its student population. This student population produced positive net income during the university's most recent reporting quarter ([Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee Deck](#)). Over the past two fiscal years, the university has enjoyed \$25,782,839 in revenue in FY 22-23 and \$24,672,342 in FY 23-24. Projected revenue for FY 24-25 is anticipated at \$24,925,298, and the university is outperforming revenue projections for the current fiscal year (budgeted vs. actual \$23,114,418 vs. \$24,925,298; +\$1,810,880).

Current Accreditation and Approvals

- Western Association of Schools and Colleges – Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)
- California Bureau for Private and Postsecondary Education (BPPE)
- California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (CTC)
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE)
- California Board of Registered Nursing (CABRN)

State Authorizations: Because California does not participate in NC-SARA, USU has worked diligently to seek and obtain state authorizations from departments of higher education wherever required. Currently, the institution is authorized and/or approved in approximately 45 states and territories ([Exhibit 1.04 State Authorization Disclosures](#); [Exhibit 1.05 State/Territory Boards of Nursing Program Approvals](#)).

Student Demographics

As of Fall 2024, USU's enrollment included a total of 2,194. Demographics are presented in the tables below. The highest student population is in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences (2,025), followed by the College of Business and Technology (44) and the College of Education (106). In addition, there are non-degree-seeking students (19). International students accounted for 1% of the student population. Domestically, USU draws its students from 45 states. The average age of USU students is 40.

Student Sex Assigned at Birth

	Men	Women	Prefer not to Respond
Undergraduate (N = 92)	24%	76%	0%
Graduate (N = 2083)	17%	83%	<1%

Student Ethnicity Profile

White	34%
American Indian or Alaska Native	<1%
Asian	31%
Black or African American	11%
Hispanic/Latino	19%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<1%
Two or more races	3%
Race and Ethnicity Unknown	2%

Faculty and Staff Demographics

There are 8 full-time faculty and 245 adjunct faculty as of Fall 2024. USU faculty are 25% male and 75% female. As of summer 2024, 68% of faculty have a terminal degree in their field, and 32% have a master's degree. Staff at USU totals 82. For staff, 28% are male and 72% are female.

Faculty and Staff Ethnicity Profile

	Faculty	Staff
White	51%	60%
Asian American	7%	2%
Hispanic	9%	21%
African American	24%	15%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2%	0%
Native American	1%	0%
Two or more races	4%	1%
Unknown	2%	1%

1.2 History

As stated above, United States University began its institutional journey in 1997 as InterAmerican College (IAC) in National City, CA. Its initial focus was the provision of educational opportunities to working adults, Latinx, and educated immigrants to increase bilingual capacity in education and healthcare in Southern California.

In 2009, IAC received initial accreditation from WSCUC, which approved a structural change from nonprofit to for-profit status. This change was formally implemented in 2010 when the school was renamed United States University. A Special Visit conducted in April 2013, however, resulted in a probationary status. The work the USU community undertook to correct the deficiencies was recognized by WSCUC in an Action Letter dated June 24, 2015, when the Commission removed the probationary status and reaffirmed accreditation for seven years, concurrently issuing a Notice of Concern.

In 2017, USU received approval for a structural change/change of ownership to Aspen Group, Inc. (AGI) in an Action Letter dated November 16, 2017, with an effective change of ownership occurring on December 1, 2017. AGI is an educational technology holding company that leverages its infrastructure to support two universities: Aspen University and United States University. A Special Visit was conducted on November 28-30, 2018, a year after the change in ownership. The ensuing Action Letter dated March 4, 2019, announced the removal of the Notice of Concern. On July 11, 2022, USU received a reaffirmation of accreditation for a period of 8 years and an action letter that established the timeline for the current Special Visit.

AGI ownership has been institutionally transformational. Enrollment has grown from 278 in December 2017 to 2,194 as of Fall 2024. Despite experiencing growth and improved financial health, the university has remained focused on its student-centered mission. The Fall 2024 student progression report cited session-to-session student persistence rates of 97% and a year-over-year retention rate of 81% ([Exhibit 1.06 2024 Fall Enrollment, Persistence and Retention Rate Information](#)). In addition, the most recent annual student survey (Spring 2024) found that students continue to express satisfaction with the university, with satisfaction increasing over time; when comparing 2022 to 2023, statistically significant improvements were found in the majority of domains assessed. For example, in 2023, 80% of respondents would recommend USU to a friend compared to 68% in 2022 ([Exhibit 1.07 Student Satisfaction Survey 2022 and 2023](#)). Alumni continue to report high rates of employment (89%), with the majority reporting that they were currently employed in a field related to what they studied at USU (74%), and 37% reported receiving a promotion or pay raise as a result of earning their degree ([Exhibit](#)

[1.08 BPEE and Gainful Employment Survey - 2021](#), [Exhibit 1.09 BPEE and Gainful Employment Survey - 2022](#)).

1.3 Major Changes Since the March 2022 WSCUC Accreditation Visit

There are four noteworthy changes since the March 2022 WSCUC Accreditation Visit: migration of previously shared services to USU, relocation to Georgia, changes to financial reporting, and changes in leadership due to the death of President Dr. Steven Stargardter.

Migration of Services

The university began an intentional initiative relative to returning selected services located in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the university and AGI back to the university ([Exhibit 1.10 Original SLA](#)). This initiative followed the recommendation from the WSCUC 2022 Team Report Accreditation Visit: *"As enrollments grow, it will be important for USU to assess whether its IR needs will outgrow the current staffing of the Aspen Group IR office. (CFR 4.2)."* (page 20). Following the WSCUC July 2022 Action Letter, in collaboration with AGI, the decision was made to begin migrating selected regulatory services related to the College of Nursing and Health Sciences and Institutional Research functions into the university. USU has reported on the progression of this migration to WSCUC, with the most recent report demonstrating that the migration of these services is complete ([Exhibit 1.11 Revised SLA](#)). The university has also begun to incorporate selected marketing activities, such as social media campaigns and business development, which has resulted in the university's ability to remain stable relative to the student population. The remaining services in the SLA include Business Operations, Finance and

Financial Aid, Human Resources, Marketing, Technology, and some Regulatory Affairs functions.

Relocation to Georgia

University leadership, in collaboration with the Board of Trustees, concluded that relocating outside of California was essential to strategically position the university for the future. This decision is in accordance with the Board Approved 2022-2027 Strategic Plan (referenced below), which focuses on financial sustainability and responsibly growing new programs. Relocating will afford the university the opportunity to apply to NC-SARA, which will offer the ability to be approved in 49 of the 50 states. Further, such a move will have little impact on operations.

Presently, USU's staff and faculty are located in 39 states, and since USU delivers online programs, faculty and academic administration have historically been hired remotely. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for the university to grow and succeed while most team members remained fully remote or hybrid. Thus, at present, the majority of USU staff and faculty are remote. As an online institution, and given the university's mission to provide accessible education, the university continues to expand its student population nationally. The combination of unexpected circumstances due to the pandemic, along with strategically implementing USU's mission, results in this relocation, which is in the long-term financial best interest of the university, allowing us to fulfill our mission of offering affordable education.

Atlanta, Georgia, was chosen based on the following:

- USU has a pre-existing relationship with the State of Georgia - our largest program, the Master of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner (MSN-FNP), serving 88% of our student body, is approved in Georgia
- The location is geographically approximate to a majority of students, making travel to the main campus (when required) efficient for our predominantly virtual, nationally located teams
- The location provides a larger overall square footage and the opportunity for the University to consider opening a pre-licensure program
- USU is able to fully assume a lease previously held by the university's sister institution, Aspen University

On October 15, 2024, the university received approval from WSCUC to relocate the main campus to Atlanta, Georgia. Pending Georgia Department of Education final approval, this location will serve as the university's administrative center and will become the main campus in the long term. The anticipated relocation is Summer of 2025.

Financial Reporting

The third noteworthy change relates to the financial reporting USU provided to WSCUC beginning April 2023. In early 2022, Aspen University began to experience a series of challenges that resulted in Aspen University being placed on heightened cash management level-two. Subsequently, cash became constrained at the AGI level, resulting in overall cash constraints across both universities. WSCUC requested that USU provide quarterly financial updates relative

to enrollment, budget, accounts payable, and hiring ([Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#) and [Exhibit 1.13 Follow up to USU Response 7-28-2024](#)). As identified in these reports, a primary challenge to the university was the ability to market the university's programs at previous levels. According to the most recent report, in the fiscal year ending April 30, 2024, the university reported a total revenue of \$25,144,395, with operating expenses amounting to \$18,989,209 and a net income of \$7,054,180. Noteworthy, in August 2024, Heightened Cash Management Level 2 (HCM2) was lifted for Aspen University and they are no longer on the Heightened Cash Management Level 1 (HCM1) reimbursement method. This is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.

Leadership

The unexpected passing of the university's previous President, Dr. Steven Stargardter, was significant. Dr. Stargardter enjoyed a 40-year career in higher education, serving USU for 10 years, first as Provost and later as President. This loss occurred within weeks of the university's September 2023 commencement ceremony. Commencement was Steve's favorite time of year, and it was an honor to commemorate his service as we celebrated our student and faculty accomplishments. After an exhaustive national search, on March 8, 2024, the Board of Trustees selected Dr. Scott Burrus, the university's Provost, as United States University's next President. On December 1, 2024, the university promoted Dr. Jennifer Billingsley (previous Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Science) as Provost ([Exhibit 1.14 USU Organizational Chart](#)).

United States University's Board of Trustees is composed of independent trustees who oversee the Governance, Academic Affairs, Audit, and Finance Committees. Along with one member of

the Board of Managers, the Board of Trustees is responsible for the university's governance. Since the 2022 Accreditation Visit, the Board has welcomed Vadim Levitin, Independent Trustee, Dean E. Barbieri, Independent Trustee, Dr. Chadwick Ricks, Independent Trustee, and Dr. Rosario Calderon, Independent Trustee ([Exhibit 1.15 Vadim Levitin Resume](#), [Exhibit 1.16 Dean E. Barbieri Resume](#), [Exhibit 1.17 Chad Ricks Resume](#), [Exhibit 1.18 Rosario "Chato" Calderon Resume](#)).

2. Process to Prepare the Institutional Report

The preparation of this report was managed by the President/ALO, Dr. Scott Burrus, who facilitated a Special Report Steering Committee ([Exhibit 2.00 WSCUC Special Visit Steering Committee](#); [Exhibit 2.01 Initial Meeting Agenda](#)). Prior to submission, a draft version of the Report was reviewed by university constituents, including the Board of Trustees. A copy will be placed on the University website in preparation for the February 19-21, 2025 Special Visit.

The Steering Committee included:

- Career and Alumni Services Manager, Logann Todd
- Chief Financial Officer, Michael LaMontange
- Deans: Dr. Gregory Bradley (College of Business and Technology), Dr. Rebecca Wardlow (College of Education), and Dr. Amanda Jones (College of Nursing and Health Sciences)
- Executive Director of Academic Compliance and Reporting, David Noriega
- Executive Director of Financial Aid, Kera Fairweather
- President, Dr. Scott Burrus

- Program Directors, Doctoral Programs: Dr. Donna Stachowicz (DNP), Dr. Eric Muenks (DBA/iDBA)
- Provost, Dr. Jennifer Billingsley
- Senior Director of Academic Services, Brigit Fowler
- Senior Director of Institutional Research, Dr. Heather Frederick
- Vice President of Academic and Regulatory Operations, Elizabeth Fernandez

Collaboratively, this committee addressed the six identified issues:

1. Continue to work on a mission-driven strategic plan that reflects careful thought about the role of each current and planned program in furthering the USU mission in a competitive and changing higher education landscape. (CFRs 1.1, 4.8, Standard 4)
2. Support strategic planning with financial analyses that disaggregate data by student population and type of program, including undergraduate programs, to better understand profitability and institutional needs. (CFRs 3.5, 4.8)
3. Continue to work with the financial aid service provider to ensure appropriate financial aid policies and compliance with Title IV requirements in light of issues identified in recurring financial aid audit findings. (CFR 1.3, Title IV Compliance Policy)
4. Acquire knowledge of co-curricular services and programs in online environments that address the needs of all students and support their personal and professional development in meaningful ways. Develop a more holistic and comprehensive model for academic and student support services that is regularly assessed. (CFRs 2.14, 2.13)
5. Continue to develop and strengthen assessment and program review processes and use the results to inform decisions regarding program viability, sustainability, improvement,

and planning for growth. (CFRs 4.3, 4.1)

6. Develop a culture and infrastructure to support student and faculty success at the doctoral degree level. (CFR 2.8)

3. Response to Commission Requirements from Previous Visit

3.1. Mission-Driven Strategic Plan and Current/Planned Programs

Continue to work on a mission-driven strategic plan that reflects careful thought about the role of each current and planned program in furthering the USU mission in a competitive and changing higher education landscape. (CFRs 1.1, 4.8, Standard 4)

Evidence:

- [Exhibit 3.1.00 Minutes BOT](#)
- [Exhibit 3.1.01 Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)
- [Exhibit 3.1.02 Strategic Plan Assessment June 2024](#)

In anticipation of the strategic planning cycle scheduled for 2022, then President Stargardter called a joint meeting of the University Council and President's Council on November 18, 2021, to initiate the development process of an updated strategic plan. The following

Colleges/Offices/Departments were represented:

- Academic Advising
- College of Business and Technology
- College of Education
- College of Nursing and Health Science
- Faculty Senate
- Library Services

- Office of Enrollment
- Office of Field Experience
- Office of Institutional Research
- Office of the President
- Office of the Provost
- Office of the Registrar
- Vice President of Finance

Attendees emphasized the importance of including all institutional constituencies in the Strategic Planning Process and included a review of the university's extant strategic goals: 1. Growth and Scalability; 2. Culture of Innovation; and 3. Quality.

Growth and Scalability

Consensus was achieved around the recognition that the continued growth of programs embedded in the university's academic pillars and the scalability of those programs remain vital for the institution's future. Examples of this goal include: 1. Focusing the university program portfolio on graduate programs, in particular doctoral programs; 2. Growing the teacher credential offerings; and 3. Installing a Student Progression Task Force focused on improving student persistence, retention, and completion.

Culture of Innovation

Discussion ensued regarding the concept of "challenging the status quo" as it relates to the "Culture of Innovation." Recognizing the globally disruptive impact of COVID-19, the group

was unanimous in its belief that a working description of the “new normal” would be central to the Strategic Planning process. Additionally, a discussion ensued as to what innovation should and/or could mean to the typical USU student – now approximately 40 years old. Specific to this goal, the university implemented a Student Mentor Program (see Section 3.4); introduced greater synergy between academic advising and academic services; reconstituted the DEI committee to focus on climate within online graduate programs; and revised curriculum, such as virtual clinical immersions in the MSN-FNP program and internship tracks in teacher credential programs.

Quality

Finally, all agreed that student success, accessibility of education, graduation rates, education affordability, career success, and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion demonstrate university quality. To demonstrate a continued focus on quality, the university instituted the Student Progression Task Force, a cross-functional group that regularly analyzes student outcomes and implements interventions. USU also created a new Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) that supports best practices relative to data utilization across the university (see Section 3.5).

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee unanimously approved a draft sent to the Board of Trustees for their review and approval, which occurred at the September 2022 Board meeting ([Exhibit 3.1.00 Minutes BOT](#)).

The USU Strategic Plan 2022-2027 ([Exhibit 3.1.01 Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)) is monitored

through the calendar year, and progress is provided to the Board of Trustees Audit Committee, which reviews and opines on progress, forwarding their findings to the full Board ([Exhibit 3.1.02 Strategic Plan Assessment June 2024](#)). The ongoing assessment of the Strategic Plan and the examples of progress discussed in this component of the 2025 Special Visit report demonstrate that the university is making substantive progress and executing the strategy with fidelity across three goals. We will continue to monitor and report progress to the Board of Trustees.

According to the most recent Strategic Plan Assessment provided to the Board of Trustees, USU is making progress on its strategic plan across initiatives. Specifically, the university conducted financial analyses, as detailed below, to better understand profitability. Moreover, the university leveraged data to monitor and improve student progression across the lifecycle. In addition, the university implemented a career services support structure and a doctoral culture, among other initiatives discussed in this report. As the university evaluates its strategic plan quarterly and reports on progress annually, it is evident that the strategy approved in 2022 remains relevant today.

3.2. Financial Analysis and Strategic Planning

Support strategic planning with financial analyses that disaggregate data by student population and type of program, including undergraduate programs, to better understand profitability and institutional needs. (CFRs 3.5, 4.8)

Evidence

- [Exhibit 3.2.00 COBT Undergraduate Program Concentration Review Fall 2022](#)

- [Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee Deck](#)

Following the strategic planning process, the long-term financial viability of selected undergraduate programs was evaluated. Following the decision of the faculty ([Exhibit 3.2.00 COBT Undergraduate Program Concentration Review Fall 2022](#)), it was proposed that enrollment be stopped in select programs (listed below, with current student enrollment). This decision was informed by current and projected program enrollment status and regulatory trends relative to Gainful Employment. Analysis was informed by the overall student population; disaggregation by student population demographics was challenged given low enrolled programs being evaluated. The Provost forwarded the proposal to the Board of Trustees Academic Affairs Committee for approval during its November 2022 meeting. In August 2024, the decision was made to temporarily stop enrollment in the Doctor of Education and Education Specialist programs until marketing may begin. A detailed programmatic return on investment analysis supports these decisions and facilitates the university's ability to continuously ensure the financial sustainability of its programs ([Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee Deck](#)).

At the time of this report's submission, the current student population in these programs is the following:

Bachelor of Arts in Management: 4
Bachelor of Science in Information Technology: 2
Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies: 1
Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences: 2
Doctor of Education: 3
Education Specialist: 0

As evidenced by the current return on investment reported in the 2024 September BOT Finance Committee Deck above, the university has supported strategic planning with financial analyses that have resulted in administering programs that are both profitable and aligned with the university's mission. University leadership will continue to monitor programmatic profitability and report the return on investment of all programs to the Board of Trustees.

3.3. Financial Aid Policies/Compliance

Continue to work with the financial aid service provider to ensure appropriate financial aid policies and compliance with Title IV requirements in light of issues identified in recurring financial aid audit findings. (CFR 1.3, Title IV Compliance Policy)

Effective January 2023, United States University migrated all financial aid servicing into the university and no longer works with the financial aid service provider. Moreover, USU has migrated to Anthology, Campus Nexus web client from which all data are available. These initiatives, along with ongoing internal process improvements, resulted in the university receiving zero material findings in its most recent federal compliance audit. During the calendar year 2024, the university updated policy and procedures and put quality assurance measures in place to ensure the university remains in compliance with all regulations that went into effect on July 1, 2024. Overall, the enhancements made to the financial aid process demonstrate the university has and will continue to remain fully compliant with Title IV requirements.

3.4. Co-curricular Services/Programs

Acquire knowledge of co-curricular services and programs in online environments that address the needs of all students and support their personal and professional development in meaningful ways. Develop a more holistic and comprehensive model for academic and student support services that is regularly assessed. (CFRs 2.14, 2.13)

Evidence:

- [Exhibit 3.4.00 Alumni Engagement Survey 2022](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.01 List of CAS Workshops](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.02 Career Cafe Sample Newsletter](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.03 Career Services Website: <https://www.usuniversity.edu/career-services>](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.04 Outcome and Data Tab:](#)
<https://www.usuniversity.edu/career-services/outcome-and-data>
- [Exhibit 3.4.05 JCPenney Suit-Up Program Usage Data Fall 2024](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.06 Career Services Impact Report](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.07 CAS Feedback Survey Reports - Appointments](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.08 CAS Feedback Survey Reports - Workshops](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.09 EmpowerU Mentoring Peer Program Handbook](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.10 Fall I 2024 Cohort_KPI Tracking](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.11 Peer Mentoring Program Fall 1 2024 Program Overview and Outcomes](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.12 WSCUC ARC 2024 Presentation](#)
- [Exhibit 3.4.13 Student Progression Task Force](#)

USU continues to create an environment that addresses its students' personal and professional development needs. To support the creation of a comprehensive model for academic and student support services, USU participated in the Accreditation Leadership Academy (ALA) in 2022-2023. The project focused on disparities in USU's student sub-groups; an engagement survey was deployed to better understand student needs and gain insights into opportunities for improvement, including the possible addition of co-curricular activities. While many students showed limited interest in co-curricular activities, others were interested in career-related workshops, mentorship programs, and honor societies ([Exhibit 3.4.00 Alumni Engagement Survey 2022](#)). In response to these findings, we have implemented the programs described below.

Career-Related Services and Workshops

In response to the ALA project outcomes and the WSCUC recommendations for co-curricular activities and services supporting student needs (CFRs 2.13 and 2.14), the university hired a Career and Alumni Services Manager, Logann Todd, in November of 2022 to build a Career and Alumni Services Department. Examples of services include one-on-one virtual student appointments, workshops ([Exhibit 3.4.01 List of CAS Workshops](#)), monthly newsletters with an over 60% open rate ([Exhibit 3.4.02 Career Cafe Sample Newsletter](#)), a resource-focused website ([Exhibit 3.4.03 Career Services Website: https://www.usuniversity.edu/career-services](#), [Exhibit 3.4.04 Outcome and Data Tab: https://www.usuniversity.edu/career-services/outcome-and-data](#)), and other professional development resources ([Exhibit 3.4.05 JCPenney Suit-Up Program Usage Data Fall 2024](#)). At the end of the 2023 calendar year, the first "Career Services Impact Report" was completed, indicating 624 total interactions with Career and Alumni Services ([Exhibit](#)

[3.4.06 Career Services Impact Report](#)). The results of these interactions have been evaluated to ensure continuous improvement. Based on survey outcomes, students are extremely satisfied with the level of service and support provided, with an average overall experience rating of 4.93 on a 5-point scale ([Exhibit 3.4.07 CAS Feedback Survey Reports - Appointments](#), [Exhibit 3.4.08 CAS Feedback Survey Reports - Workshops](#)). Results from the survey served as the catalyst for the development of new workshops such as Preparing for Licensure and Developing Portfolios specific to careers of interest for USU students. Given USU's adult working population, the university appears to be offering relevant career services that meet the needs of students who are obtaining new careers (e.g., credentialed teachers and licensed nurse practitioners) or growing in their current field.

Mentoring Program

Another outcome from the 2023 ALA project, confirmed by the 2022 Alumni Engagement Survey, was the need for a Mentoring Program. This initiative directly aligns with WSCUC recommendations (CFRs 2.13 and 2.14). Housed within the Career and Alumni Services department, the EmpowerU Peer Mentoring Program initiative began development in the Fall of 2023 and was officially deployed in the Summer of 2024. The program matches new students (mentees) with high-achieving students or alumni (mentors) to create a mentorship space that supports student success and persistence toward graduation. The approach is student-centered, focusing on the unique needs of each mentee through one-to-one working relationships with trusted mentors ([Exhibit 3.4.09 EmpowerU Mentoring Peer Program Handbook](#)). With an emphasis on reaching students who may need help adjusting to the various demands of college, the program promotes leadership, goal setting, and time management skills. Each mentee is

matched with a mentor for an 8-week course. The first cohort launched on September 3rd, 2024, with 9 mentor/mentee pairs. This program was evaluated using a KPI tracking system that measures program satisfaction and academic outcomes ([Exhibit 3.4.10 Fall I 2024 Cohort_KPI Tracking](#)). Data from the first cohort suggest that the program fosters an increased sense of belonging and confidence in using available resources ([Exhibit 3.4.11 Peer Mentoring Program Fall 1 2024 Program Overview and Outcomes](#)). Following this initial cohort, the university is preparing for the second cohort, which will start on 1/07/2025.

Honor Societies

USU now has two national honor societies: Alpha Beta Eta (College of Nursing) and Kappa Delta Pi (College of Education). We proudly chartered our STTI chapter, Alpha Beta Eta, on April 7th, 2022, with a ceremony inducting 129 candidates. Following the launch of the Nursing Honor Society, the College of Education also formed an Honor Society, Kappa Delta Pi, on December 7th, 2023, with 11 inductees.

Holistic Student Support

In alignment with the WSCUC recommendation to “develop a more holistic and comprehensive model for academic and student support services that are regularly assessed,” United States University merged the Academic Advising Department with the Office of the Registrar and created a Student Progression Task Force.

Merging of Academic Advising with the Office of the Registrar

In 2023, Academic Advising was merged with Academic Services, as the two departments frequently collaborated to improve the student experience and ultimately sought to impact retention and progression. The success of this merger was presented at the recent ARC conference ([Exhibit 3.4.12 WSCUC ARC 2024 Presentation](#)). One example of this collaboration was a seamless, real-time reporting solution via a Classroom Concern Form. This form allows advisors to immediately notify the Academic Affairs team of a student concern with the ultimate goal of resolving student concerns as they arise. Following the implementation of the Student Progression Task Force discussed below, it became clear that additional synergy was warranted relative to stronger collaboration between the Office of the Registrar and Academic Advising. In November 2024, upon completing the migration to CNS and developing new procedures for handling student issues (e.g., leave of absence, scheduling, etc.), the Academic Advising team was merged with the Office of the Registrar.

Student Progression Task Force

The Student Progression Task Force, composed of representatives across the university, was initiated in September 2023 to identify student risk points and implement interventions to enhance student success. Key accomplishments include a holistic revision of the Academic Advising model described above and eliminating New Student Advisors in favor of a team approach from registration through graduation. As identified in the Student Engagement Survey from the 2023 ALA project, our students have limited prior online learning experience, which prompted a revision of our New Student Orientation. The New Student Orientation was launched in January 2024 and provides a customized, interactive approach based on the student's program

of study and their exposure to distance education. The Task Force also completed clinical placement improvements, focusing on inactive students and refining preceptor processes while developing new tools and support options for students in clinical rotations. Additionally, several course-related interventions were completed, including updates to gradebook practices, early alert systems, and a revised leave policy, all aimed at improving student support and, therefore, outcomes. These changes resulted in improved student persistence rates (assessed from session to session) and retention rates (assessed from year to year): in summer 2023, persistence was at 91% and retention at 51%; in summer 2024, persistence rate went up to 97% and retention rate to 71%. For a complete list of initiatives, see [Exhibit 3.4.13 Student Progression Task Force](#).

Since the March 2022 Accreditation Visit, USU has acquired knowledge related to the needs of our unique student population for co-curricular services and programs. Initiatives described in this section are grounded in our mission to provide professional and personal opportunities. The ongoing assessment of these services and programs demonstrates that implementing these initiatives results in positive student outcomes. The university will continue to evaluate these initiatives with the commitment to continuously improve the USU student experience.

3.5. Assessment and Program Review

Continue to develop and strengthen assessment and program review processes and use the results to inform decisions regarding program viability, sustainability, improvement, and planning for growth. (CFRs 4.3, 4.1)

Primary Evidence

- [Exhibit 3.5.00 Director of Institutional Research Job Description](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.01 Director of Regulatory Compliance, College of Nursing & Health Sciences Job Description](#)
- [Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.02 OIRA Year in Review](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.03 Sample Audit: Board of Nursing Audit Worksheet](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.04 Sample Petition February 7, 2024](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.05 Sample Tool 2023 Completion Rates](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.06 CONHS Compliance Year in Review](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.07 Sample - Signature Assignment Rubric](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.08 Assessment of Student Learning - COBT Pilot](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.09 Assessment Committee Policy](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.10 Assessment Materials Approval Process Policy](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.11 Assessment Handbook](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.12 RN-BSN Program Review 2021-2022](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.13 MSN-NE Program Review 2021-2022](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.14 MSN-HCL Program Review 2021-2022](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.15 MSN-FNP Program Review 2021-2022](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.16 CCNE CIPR 2023](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.17 CONHS Systematic Plan for Evaluation](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.18 COE Evidence Link:](#)
<https://sites.google.com/view/usu-coe/home?authuser=0>

- [Exhibit 3.5.19 MBA/iMBA Program Review 2024](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.20 Program Review Manual](#)
- [Exhibit 3.5.21 Sample Quality Monitoring Tableau Dashboard, Redacted](#)

Migration of Institutional Research and Select Compliance Services to USU

In the Team Report from the 2022 Accreditation Visit, the team stated, "*As enrollments grow, it will be important for USU to assess whether its IR needs will outgrow the current staffing of the Aspen Group IR office. (CFR 4.2).*" (p. 20). Following the July 2022 WSCUC Action Letter, in collaboration with AGI, USU began migrating Institutional Research (IR) into the university in addition to selected services related to regulatory tasks within the College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

With the transition came the development of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), staffed by a new Director of Institutional Research ([Exhibit 3.5.00 Director of Institutional Research Job Description](#)) and supported by team members, three of whom were already on staff and an additional new hire. The transition of IR services provided an opportunity to engage with stakeholders to enhance a collaboratively created culture of assessment. Both academic and non-academic departments provided reflections on the previous system(s) and what they needed to assist in making and assessing data-informed decisions; these informed the initiatives reported below.

Also hired was a Director of Regulatory Compliance to support the College of Nursing and Health Sciences ([Exhibit 3.5.01 Director of Regulatory Compliance, College of Nursing &](#)

[Health Sciences Job Description](#)), ensuring the department's alignment with all relevant standards and requirements set forth by the various Boards of Nursing, conducting thorough research on regulatory issues, and performing a degree of data analysis to aid informed decision-making within the institution. USU has reported on the progression of this migration to WSCUC, with the most recent report ([Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#)) demonstrating the migration of these services is complete

OIRA Initiatives

The migration of most institutional research functions to USU has resulted in several key developments. A culture of continuous improvement was facilitated by having a person dedicated to assessment at regularly occurring leadership meetings, allowing for conversations about what each college and department needs in order to make data-informed decisions. Infrastructure was enhanced by way of a Policy and Procedure Manual refresh, establishing an IRB, revising relevant surveys/Handbooks, and creating templates for Data Digests to assist with thoughtful data-driven decision-making. While the transition of IR services to OIRA provided a unique opportunity to enhance current systems, assessment has continued as usual, as described below. For more details, see [Exhibit 3.5.02 OIRA Year in Review](#).

CONHS Compliance Initiatives

The migration of Boards of Nursing (BON) regulatory tasks into the university now includes: BON disclosure updates ([Exhibit 3.5.03 Sample Audit: Board of Nursing Audit Worksheet](#)); annual BON regulatory reports and ongoing communication ([Exhibit 3.5.04 Sample Petition February 7, 2024](#)); and development of tools to efficiently calculate programmatic outcomes for

reporting, specifically focusing on AANP and ANCC board certification pass rates and CONHS program completion rates ([Exhibit 3.5.05 Sample Tool 2023 Completion Rates](#)). For additional details, see [Exhibit 3.5.06 CONHS Compliance Year in Review](#).

Metrics

USU's assessment of student success is based on multiple metrics including, but not limited to, retention, graduation, time to completion, and various student evaluations. The institution used multiple data sources, including national standards from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and the Council on Graduate Schools for graduate programs, along with the most recent peer-reviewed literature that specifically takes into account distance education and USU's unique student population (e.g., predominantly women of color over the age of 40) to determine benchmarks (see table below). According to the data available at the time of this report, all benchmarks are met except for the on-time graduation rate for Bachelor's programs. As mentioned above, and as informed by both financial sustainability as well as student achievement data, USU made the determination to stop enrolling in the majority of its Bachelor's degree programs. Moreover, while historically, USU upheld a flexible continuous enrollment policy that allowed its student body, composed primarily of working professionals, to remain out of class for up to 180 days, the university recently implemented a revised continuous enrollment policy shortening the total allowed time out of class to 90 days. We believe that over time, this will improve our 150% and on-time completion rates.

Metrics

USU Metrics	Minimum Expected Level of Achievement	Actual Outcome
Retention Rate - Bachelor	50% or higher	88%
Retention Rate- Master	55% or higher	81%
Retention Rate- Doctorate	40% or higher	70%
On-Time Graduation Rate- Bachelor	40% or higher	34%
On-Time Graduation Rate- Master	45% or higher	55%
On-Time Graduation Rate- Doctorate	40% or higher	N/A
Completion Rate (150% time) - Bachelor	45% or higher	53%
Completion Rate (150% time) - Master	55% or higher	69%
Graduate Employment Rate	80% or higher	99%
Student Satisfaction Survey	80% or higher satisfied with the overall educational experience	85%

Assessment of Student Learning

In the last report, we detailed plans to create a “signature assignment” for each course along with corresponding rubrics; this project has been completed ([Exhibit 3.5.07 Sample - Signature Assignment Rubric](#)).

While all program learning outcomes are reviewed within a five-year cycle, we are currently implementing a pilot program in the COBT that would allow for a more efficient, systematic

assessment of all PLOs annually within the current learning management system ([Exhibit 3.5.08 Assessment of Student Learning - COBT Pilot](#)). In the 2022 Accreditation Report, it was noted that the reporting of assessment results was a cumbersome process. Moving to CNS and moving the assessment of student learning entirely into the LMS will decrease this burden and allow for the disaggregation of data.

Other initiatives completed since the last review related to the assessment of student learning include: The reinstatement of the Assessment Committee ([Exhibit 3.5.09 Assessment Committee Policy](#)), the development of an [Exhibit 3.5.10 Assessment Materials Approval Process Policy](#), and the revision to the [Exhibit 3.5.11 Assessment Handbook](#).

Program Review

In the last report, the team recommended: “...that USU further develop and enhance its program review process such that the university can use the reviews to thoroughly assess program viability and sustainability as well as to inform the university of student support needs. (CFRs 2.7, 4.1)”.

Program Review has continued as per the schedule shared in the last report, and changes based on program reviews continue to be evaluated. Noteworthy, only one program review was due between the March 2022 accreditation visit and the writing of this report (Master of Business Administration). However, programmatic changes were made during the time frame based on program reviews conducted prior to the March 2022 visit. Examples from each college follow.

College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) - The CONHS nursing programs undergo comprehensive programmatic assessment through the university's program review process and Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accreditation requirements. All nursing programs underwent a program review in 2021-2022 ([Exhibit 3.5.12 RN-BSN Program Review 2021-2022](#), [Exhibit 3.5.13 MSN-NE Program Review 2021-2022](#), [Exhibit 3.5.14 MSN-HCL Program Review 2021-2022](#), [Exhibit 3.5.15 MSN-FNP Program Review 2021-2022](#)).

Additionally, the college submitted a comprehensive Continuous Improvement Progress Report (CIPR) that was reviewed and approved by CCNE in 2024 to maintain accreditation through 2028 ([Exhibit 3.5.16 CCNE CIPR 2023](#)). This progress report includes CCNE accreditation Standard IV, which details a Systematic Plan of Evaluation (SPE), which is linked to the CCNE Standards and directly correlates to each of the program's learning outcomes ([Exhibit 3.5.17 CONHS Systematic Plan for Evaluation](#)). The program outcome data, including the PLO assessment data, program reviews, along with various survey data (i.e., student and faculty end-of-course, student end-of-program, student satisfaction, and faculty engagement), are consistently used to promote ongoing program improvement. The program review results highlighted that the nursing programs at USU are valued for their quality, affordability, and ease of access. Following are some examples of how the data promoted ongoing program improvement.

The program review revealed strong data on the outcomes of the RN to BSN program. The BSN faculty team has been dedicated to making curriculum enhancements to ensure the direct clinical hours are explicitly defined in the program. These curriculum enhancements were completed and received approval from CCNE. Though there has been organic growth in these programs, threats

to program viability include the possibility of decreasing enrollments due to many online programs offering these degree options and their rigorous marketing efforts. Targeted marketing showcasing the benefits of these degrees at USU may benefit longer-term sustainability.

For the MSN-FNP program, most of the discussion and action planning has been dedicated to maximizing resources, particularly the student practice tests to support board certification pass rates. Therefore, the college fully integrated additional Advanced Practice Education Associates (APEA) resources, including predictor exams, question banks, and a full online review course into the MSN-FNP program. From April 2024 to October 2024, the FNP597 APEA predictor exam results have increased from 58% to 67%, which exceeds the national mean of 63% for this exam.

For all MSN programs, it was noted that MSN PLO #4, “Compose professional written communication for advanced nursing roles,” was only slightly over the benchmark at 81% in 2021-2022. The MSN PLO #4 is measured in courses MSN563: Evidenced Based Inquiry for Scholarship and Practice and MSN 600: Evidenced-Based Capstone Project. The faculty team determined that students would benefit from using the Brainfuse tutoring resource, which is easily accessible in their D2L classroom. The Faculty Support Coordinator created a video for faculty to post in their classrooms to remind students to utilize this tool. In 2023-2024, the PLO #4 increased to 89%, suggesting that some interventions were successful. The program outcome data provides useful information to promote ongoing program improvements as the programs shift to incorporating the new AACN Essentials.

MSN Program

MSN Program Outcome	Timeframe	Expected Level of Achievement	Actual Outcome
MSN PLO 1	2023-2024	80% or above	97%
MSN PLO 2	2023-2024	80% or above	99%
MSN PLO 3	2023-2024	80% or above	98%
MSN PLO 4	2023-2024	80% or above	89%
MSN PLO 5	2023-2024	80% or above	97%
MSN PLO 6	2023-2024	80% or above	98%
MSN PLO 7	2023-2024	80% or above	98%
MSN PLO 8	2023-2024	80% or above	97%
MSN PLO 9	2023-2024	80% or above	98%

Considering completion rates, the RN to BSN and MSN program completion rates were below the 70% program completion benchmarks in 2022 and improved to above the benchmark in 2023, as depicted in the tables below.

BSN Program

Calendar Year of Completion	# Students Admitted	# Students Excluded	# Students Completing	% Students Completing
2022	91	14	53	68.8%
2023	45	13	30	93.75%

MSN Programs

Calendar Year of Completion	# Students Admitted	# Students Excluded	# Students Completing	% Students Completing
2022	1116	173	630	66.8%
2023	1501	331	830	70.94%

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and throughout 2021 impacted student progression due to increased RN employment workloads, undocumented medical/family emergencies, and decreased clinical placement availability. Virtual clinical experiences, such as i-Human software, were available to allow students to persist in their program of study, but BSN and MSN students were still required to complete direct clinical hours. In an effort to be more proactive with retaining students, a Student Progression Task Force was created, and the following initiatives were implemented: Student Mentor Program, Automated Outreach, and a Portal Pop-Up Window technology. The Academic Advising Model was revised to be more holistic and supportive of the entire student lifecycle. The Student Mentor Program was refined and implemented to offer peer guidance and support. The New Student Orientation content was updated and revised based on student data analytics. The Clinical Placement Model was enhanced to offer more options to students. The college anticipates that the completion rates will continue to increase as the interventions affect more graduates.

College of Education (COE) - The Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program review resulted in the following changes: offering fewer start dates, the opportunity for students to complete a Masters in Teaching with the Teacher Credentialing Preparation Program (TCPP), the discontinuation of certain specializations with low student enrollment, and the revision of

specializations that are in demand in the field of education. To date, the reduction of start dates to every two months from the previous monthly starts has resulted in the consolidation of students onto a single track, which is supportive of more students in each course. Moving the program to 30 credits rather than 36 credits has made the program more competitive in terms of both the time to completion and the cost of the degree being lower than many other options.

Additionally, as a result of the program review, we are now offering a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree program that combines the teacher credential with a Masters degree, allowing students to complete both simultaneously. In addition, based on the program review, the COE has gained approval from the California Teaching Commission (CTC) to offer an intern teaching program within the MAT, allowing students to work as classroom teachers while being supervised and supported by the university.

During the 2024-25 school year, the COE is undergoing a comprehensive program review process as required by the California Teaching Commission (CTC). Preliminary feedback on the first two submissions has been very positive and can be found here ([Exhibit 3.5.18 COE Evidence Link: https://sites.google.com/view/usu-coe/home?authuser=0](https://sites.google.com/view/usu-coe/home?authuser=0)).

College of Business and Technology (COBT) - The only program review completed since the March 2022 accreditation visit was for both tracks of the MBA program ([Exhibit 3.5.19 MBA/iMBA Program Review 2024](#)). Results of this review completed in July 2024 suggested the need for revising the PLOs so they would capitalize on how the programs are more the same than different, reducing the number of elective courses offered to MBA students (iMBA students do not have elective courses), and assessing PLOs more frequently. These findings led to the

proposal for a pilot project that is being completed as a WASC Academic Leadership Academy project ([Exhibit 3.5.08 Assessment of Student Learning - COBT Pilot](#)). As of the submission of this report, the following changes have occurred: the reduction of curriculum from 35 courses to 14 (allowing for increased course size and reduced burden related to maintaining the currency of courses), the decision to stop enrolling the three certificate programs in the college (these were being maintained primarily because the same courses were being offered as electives, but there were no students enrolled), and revision of the PLOs. In process is the development of a PLO rubric that will be embedded in the LMS and appear throughout the program so that when PLOs are introduced, practiced, and mastered, they can be efficiently assessed and tied to demographic data for disaggregation.

We continue to develop and strengthen the assessment and program review process. For example, an additional person to assist with assessment was hired in September 2024. Further, with the establishment of OIRA and the engagement of stakeholders, we have revised the Program Review Manual ([Exhibit 3.5.20 Program Review Manual](#)) and have included the addition of the Annual Progress Report to assist with “closing the loop.”

Other Data-Informed Initiatives

Increased Faculty Support

The results of the most recent Annual Faculty Engagement Survey (2023-2024) resulted in a new faculty orientation and additional professional development opportunities addressing faculty requests for more support with technical aspects, such as our plagiarism tool and learning

management system. The results of this change will be assessed in spring with the next annual survey.

Student Progression Task Force

The Student Progression Task Force (described in the previous section) was responsible for additional data-informed initiatives ([Exhibit 3.4.13 Student Progression Task Force](#)). Two prime examples are related to the development of the Student Mentor Program ([Exhibit 3.4.09 EmpowerU Mentoring Peer Program Handbook](#)) and the revision of the first course (MSN560) in the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program with the aim of reducing withdrawals.

- MSN560 - Data revealed a lower persistence rate for this course compared to others (74.7% compared to 80%). Student feedback detailed in the End of Course Surveys (EOCS) and Academic Advisor feedback highlighted various challenges encountered by students, including a decreased perception of the likelihood of success when faced with multiple deliverables within Week 1 of their first graduate course. A review of the curriculum confirmed adjustments were warranted. Adjustments included redistributing assignments to reduce load in the first week, redistributing point values more evenly throughout the course, and revising assignments to result in deliverables students could use throughout their program (e.g., an APA template). Prior to the implementation of this intervention, withdrawal rates two weeks after the start of the course (end of add/drop period) averaged 7%. After implementation, the withdrawal rate was 1.5%. The Student Progression Task Force and CONHS will continue to evaluate the student attrition outcomes for this first graduate nursing course and make adjustments as needed to maintain continuous improvement.

Assessment of Non-Academic Units

The Quality Assurance Monitoring (QM) Department is responsible for ensuring that student-facing departments meet federal, state, and university policies when conversing with students and collecting/recording required documentation. This involves screening phone calls, reviewing student records to make sure documentation occurred, providing the data to supervisors and departments, and conducting yearly training. This feedback allows departments to identify areas for improvement and help supervisors train their teams accordingly. Quality assurance helps ensure student satisfaction and compliance with regulations, including the Department of Education's new regulations, effective July 1, 2024.

The QM team audits calls for Enrollment, Academic Advising, Registrar, Financial Aid, Student Finance, Student Accounts, and Office of Field Experience. In the calendar year 2023, 3,818 inbound and outbound calls were audited. In calendar year 2024 to date, 6,213 inbound and outbound calls were audited.. Regular meetings with department managers and directors are held to review audit results and to ensure that open issues are resolved in a timely manner ([Exhibit 3.5.21 Sample Quality Monitoring Tableau Dashboard, Redacted](#)).

With the establishment of OIRA came the opportunity to engage non-academic departments in discussions related to how OIRA could contribute to their continuous improvement efforts. Each department was engaged in a conversation regarding the usefulness of data that was already being collected but not previously distributed for review to non-academic departments (e.g., Annual Student Satisfaction Survey, End of Course Surveys for both students and faculty, and End of Program Surveys). Conversations led to revising select surveys to include specific

questions that could be used to inform future initiatives. For example, questions for faculty about how often they refer students to Career and Alumni Services, questions about Student Finance (a newly formed department), and open-ended questions for some departments asking how we could improve support services (e.g., Academic Advising, OFE). The survey revision project is currently underway, with a proposed launch date of January 2025.

With the migration of IR functions and the creation of OIRA, USU has engaged both academic and non-academic departments in creating a collaborative vision for a culture of assessment and continuous improvement across the university. The result is the continued development and strengthening of the program review process and a renewed commitment to data-informed decision-making, which results in improved student learning and progression outcomes across the university. As these processes mature, we will continue to evaluate our assessment infrastructure as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

3.6. Doctoral Culture and Infrastructure

Develop a culture and infrastructure to support student and faculty success at the doctoral degree level. (CFR 2.8)

Evidence

- [Exhibit 3.6.00 Sample Doctoral Faculty Position Description](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.01 Sample Doctoral Program Huddle](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.02 Sample of a Faculty Course Guide](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.03 DNP Chair Guide](#)

- [Exhibit 3.6.04 DNP Practice Immersion Handbook Link:](#)
<https://usuniversity.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/dnp-practice-immersion-handbook>
- [Exhibit 3.6.05 DBA/iDBA Doctoral Project Handbook](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.06 Conducting a Literature Review](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.07 Research Skills Support](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.08 DNP Residency Virtual Library Orientation](#)
[Link:https://app.screencast.com/UiZheuxPDYKRS](https://app.screencast.com/UiZheuxPDYKRS)
- [Exhibit 3.6.09 Colloquium Series List of Presenters and Topics 2022 - Present](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.10 IRB SOP Link:](#)
<https://usuniversity.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/policy-and-procedure-manual/700-irb>
- [Exhibit 3.6.11 Two Minute Takeaway](#)
- [Exhibit 3.6.12 DNP Residency Guide](#)

To demonstrate our adherence to WSCUC requirement 2.8, we have developed and continue to build a culture and infrastructure supporting student and faculty success at the doctoral degree level. The domestic doctoral programs launched in 2023 (DNP in January, DBA in May, and EdD in September), with the international DBA (iDBA) launching in August 2024. Due to a financial audit in August of 2024, the decision was made to stop accepting applicants for the EdD program (see section 3.2 above). At the time of writing this report, there were 31 doctoral students. Following are key elements and initiatives that illustrate our commitment.

Faculty

Each program has established a position description for doctoral faculty, which outlines clear expectations in research, scholarship, and creative activity critical to faculty and student success. This document serves as a guideline to ensure faculty are well-prepared to support doctoral students effectively ([Exhibit 3.6.00 Sample Doctoral Faculty Position Description](#)). USU further supports our doctoral faculty through professional development, including attendance at conferences to present research, monthly doctoral huddles ([Exhibit 3.6.01 Sample Doctoral Program Huddle](#)), and guides/handbooks ([Exhibit 3.6.02 Sample of a Faculty Course Guide](#) and [Exhibit 3.6.03 DNP Chair Guide](#)). All faculty members are provided the opportunity to participate in professional development, including scholarship.

Fostering a Doctoral Community

USU supports a doctoral community for both faculty and students through doctoral community forums, library resources, program-specific handbooks ([Exhibit 3.6.04 DNP Practice Immersion Handbook Link](#): <https://usuniversity.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/dnp-practice-immersion-handbook>, [Exhibit 3.6.05 DBA/iDBA Doctoral Project Handbook](#)), the USU colloquium series, the IRB, by providing opportunities to present research/scholarship, and synchronous meetings.

Doctoral Community Forums

Each program hosts a Doctoral Community Forum within our Learning Management System (LMS), including a chat room that fosters communication and support among doctoral students

and faculty. While this feature has not yet been fully utilized owing to low enrollment, it creates infrastructure, builds a sense of community, and promotes a doctoral culture.

Library Resources

The Library plays a critical role in supporting the USU doctoral community, offering specialized resources and expert guidance to meet the advanced research needs of doctoral students and faculty. Led by Melody Hainsworth, who holds a doctorate, the library team includes professionals with American Library Association (ALA) accredited Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degrees, ensuring high-quality support for doctoral research. Students benefit from 24/7 access to a wide array of resources through a dedicated web-based library course within the university's learning management system. The library's extensive holdings include 81 licensed databases featuring over 20,000 reference ebooks, 364,000 dissertations and theses, and more than 38,000 journals. The library also provides specialized guides tailored to doctoral needs, such as *Conducting a Literature Review* and *Advanced Research Tips* ([Exhibit 3.6.06 Conducting a Literature Review](#), [Exhibit 3.6.07 Research Skills Support](#)), which cover research tools, methodologies, and instrument validation. Additionally, personalized support is available, with students able to request one-on-one consultations via Zoom, which is particularly valuable during the literature review process. Instructional webinars, like the Virtual Library Orientation for the DNP Residency ([Exhibit 3.6.08 DNP Residency Virtual Library Orientation Link: https://app.screencast.com/UiZheuxPDYKRS](#)), further enhance doctoral student success.

USU Colloquium Series

Given the launch of the doctoral programs and WSCUC's suggestion to focus on developing a doctoral culture, the USU Colloquium Series, sponsored by the Office of the Provost, was launched in June 2024. The goal was to expand our graduate culture to the doctoral level by providing an opportunity for the USU community to share their scholarship, exchange ideas, and foster collaborative partnerships within and between colleges. We leveraged an existing Professional Development offering housed in the CONHS that began in 2021. The Colloquium Series extends the invitation to present and attend to the entire USU community (faculty, students, and staff) and is recorded and uploaded to the USU YouTube Channel with the goal of increased dissemination as well as assisting with the branding and marketing of our graduate programs. For presenters and attendees affiliated with CONHS, these presentations result in 1 CEU from the California Board of Nursing ([Exhibit 3.6.09 Colloquium Series List of Presenters and Topics 2022 - Present](#)).

IRB

The launch of the doctoral programs in 2023 necessitated the creation of USU's IRB. The IRB maintains a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Manual that details IRB-specific policies and procedures ([Exhibit 3.6.10 IRB SOP Link: https://usuniversity.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/policy-and-procedure-manual/700-irb/](#)).

Handbooks for both doctoral students and faculty and staff were developed. These documents ensure that the rights and welfare of human research subjects at USU are overseen and protected uniformly.

Opportunities to Present Scholarship

Opportunities to present scholarship include the USU Colloquium Series, Nursing Honor Society meetings, and presentations at in-person residencies for iDBA. In preparation for our first doctoral graduates, we have proposed an alternative to The Three Minute Thesis (3MT®founded by The University of Queensland) called the Two Minute Takeaway ([Exhibit 3.6.11 Two Minute Takeaway](#)).

Synchronous Meetings

Our DNP program includes two synchronous, three-day residency experiences: an early residency (Residency 1) and a mid-program residency (Residency 2). These residencies are designed to facilitate students' progress toward achieving their doctoral learning objectives and prepare them for their DNP projects ([Exhibit 3.6.12 DNP Residency Guide](#)). Students are also invited to monthly Coffee with the Director sessions where they can discuss any concerns or seek guidance. The iDBA program requires monthly in-person residencies, and options are currently being explored for the DBA students to attend select sessions virtually or in person.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate our commitment to developing a culture and infrastructure that supports the success of both students and faculty at the doctoral level. The university is committed to scaling its newly formed doctoral culture as program populations increase.

4. Other Topics

4.1 Response to Focus on Finances in WSCUC Response dated July 28, 2024

On December 1, 2017, United States University (USU) was acquired by Aspen Group, Inc. (AGI). As part of this acquisition, WSCUC approved a Service Level Agreement (SLA), which assigned final approval of the university budget and the university treasury function to AGI. The initial SLA also included services related to Business Operations, Finance and Financial Aid, Human Resources, Marketing, Regulatory Affairs, and Institutional Research and Technology. At the March 2022 Accreditation Visit, USU estimated the value of these services to be 1.5 million. Between 2017-2021, as USU was achieving financial sustainability, AGI did not formally book these charges and instead focused on investing in the university and securing the university's financial future. In early 2022, Aspen University, USU's "sister institution" also owned by AGI, experienced a series of challenges that resulted in Aspen University being placed on heightened cash management level-two by the Department of Education. Subsequently, cash became constrained at the AGI level, resulting in overall cash constraints across the universities (note that Aspen University recently was moved from HCM2 to HCM1 reimbursement method as of August 2024). WSCUC requested that USU provide quarterly financial updates relative to enrollment, budget, accounts payable, and hiring ([Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#) and [Exhibit 1.13 Follow up to USU Response 7-28-2024](#)). Prior to August 2024, cash was constrained at the AGI level, although not at the university. Due to these constraints, it is noteworthy that USU did not spend on marketing during the past two years as it did in the previous five years. However, the university has managed to remain stable relative to enrollment thanks to grass-roots business development efforts at the college level and organic

lead flow. This has resulted in the university remaining financially stable. According to the most recent report, in the fiscal year ending April 30, 2024, the university reported a total revenue of \$25,144,395, with operating expenses amounting to \$18,989,209 and a net income of \$7,054,180. Total assets increased to \$40,599,290 from \$36,023,996 the previous year. While the accounts payable reflect apparent delays, all accounts are on payment plans, which means the university fully complies with current Department of Education financial sustainability regulations. At the most recent Board of Trustees meeting on September 13, 2024, USU reported that projected revenue for FY 24-25 is anticipated at \$24,925,298, and the university is outperforming revenue projections for the current fiscal year (budgeted vs. actual \$23,114,418 vs. \$24,925,298; +\$1,810,880) ([Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee](#)).

5. Reflections and Synthesis of Insights

This report reflects United States University's commitment to open and transparent communication with the Accrediting Commission referenced in CFR 1.8. In addressing each of the issues raised by the Commission in its July 11, 2022 Action Letter, USU has attempted to provide substantive responses with appropriate evidentiary documentation. We believe the university has responded to the issues identified by the Commission. Upon reflection, we have learned that, as a community, we are able to simultaneously manage a rapidly evolving university while adhering to our student-centered mission.

As discussed in this report, despite unexpected challenges over the past two years, USU has successfully evaluated and updated its strategic plan; conducted a thoughtful programmatic ROI and made sound financial decisions for the university; obtained a clean financial aid audit;

implemented co-curricular activities resulting in improved student life cycle outcomes; bolstered the program review and assessment process leading to increased understanding of university effectiveness; and built an infrastructure supporting the university's doctoral students. The institutional commitment to our students, demonstrated by the Board of Trustees, university leadership, faculty, staff, and all members of the university community, account for the outcomes demonstrated herein.

As USU looks to the future, strategic priorities include successfully relocating the university, exploring new programmatic opportunities (including the launch of a pre-licensure program), responsibly growing programs in all colleges, and continuing to improve student progression outcomes and enhancing our assessment process to ensure disaggregated data, while demonstrating a secure and sustainable financial future.

The USU community is on a demonstrably progressive track to provide its students with a supportive and relevant educational experience. We look forward to welcoming the Visiting Team virtually on February 19, 2025.

6. Appendix - Exhibit List

1. Institutional Context and Major Changes Since the Last WSCUC Review

[Exhibit 1.00 Commission Action Letter](#)

[Exhibit 1.01 About USU: https://www.usuniversity.edu/about/](https://www.usuniversity.edu/about/)

[Exhibit 1.02 USU Programs: https://www.usuniversity.edu/colleges/programs/](https://www.usuniversity.edu/colleges/programs/)

[Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee Deck](#)

[Exhibit 1.04 State Authorization Disclosures](#)

[Exhibit 1.05 State/Territory Boards of Nursing Program Approvals](#)

[Exhibit 1.06 2024 Fall Enrollment, Persistence and Retention Rate Information](#)

[Exhibit 1.07 Student Satisfaction Survey 2022 and 2023](#)

[Exhibit 1.08 BPEE and Gainful Employment Survey - 2021](#)

[Exhibit 1.09 BPEE and Gainful Employment Survey - 2022](#)

[Exhibit 1.10 Original SLA](#)

[Exhibit 1.11 Revised SLA](#)

[Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#)

[Exhibit 1.13 Follow up to USU Response 7-28-2024](#)

[Exhibit 1.14 USU Organizational Chart](#)

[Exhibit 1.15 Vadim Levitin Resume](#)

[Exhibit 1.16 Dean E. Barbieri Resume](#)

[Exhibit 1.17 Chad Ricks Resume](#)

[Exhibit 1.18 Rosario "Chato" Calderon Resume](#)

2. Process to Prepare the Institutional Report

[Exhibit 2.00 WSCUC Special Visit Steering Committee](#)

[Exhibit 2.01 Initial Meeting Agenda](#)

3. Response to Commission Requirements from Previous Visit

3.1. Mission-Driven Strategic Plan and Current/Planned Programs

[Exhibit 3.1.00 Minutes BOT](#)

[Exhibit 3.1.01 Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)

[Exhibit 3.1.02 Strategic Plan Assessment June 2024](#)

3.2. Financial Analysis and Strategic Planning

[Exhibit 3.2.00 COBT Undergraduate Program Concentration Review Fall 2022](#)

[Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee Deck](#)

3.3. Financial Aid Policies/Compliance - Narrative only; no linked exhibits

3.4. Co-curricular Services/Programs

[Exhibit 3.4.00 Alumni Engagement Survey 2022](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.01 List of CAS Workshops](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.02 Career Cafe Sample Newsletter](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.03 Career Services Website: <https://www.usuniversity.edu/career-services>](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.04 Outcome and Data Tab:](#)

[<https://www.usuniversity.edu/career-services/outcome-and-data>](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.05 JCPenney Suit-Up Program Usage Data Fall 2024](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.06 Career Services Impact Report](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.07 CAS Feedback Survey Reports - Appointments](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.08 CAS Feedback Survey Reports - Workshops](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.09 EmpowerU Mentoring Peer Program Handbook](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.10 Fall I 2024 Cohort_KPI Tracking](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.11 Peer Mentoring Program Fall 1 2024 Program Overview and Outcomes](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.12 WSCUC ARC 2024 Presentation](#)

[Exhibit 3.4.13 Student Progression Task Force](#)

3.5. Assessment and Program Review

[Exhibit 3.5.00 Director of Institutional Research Job Description](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.01 Director of Regulatory Compliance, College of Nursing & Health Sciences
Job Description](#)

[Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.02 OIRA Year in Review](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.03 Sample Audit: Board of Nursing Audit Worksheet](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.04 Sample Petition February 7, 2024](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.05 Sample Tool 2023 Completion Rates](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.06 CONHS Compliance Year in Review](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.07 Sample - Signature Assignment Rubric](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.08 Assessment of Student Learning - COBT Pilot](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.09 Assessment Committee Policy](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.10 Assessment Materials Approval Process Policy](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.11 Assessment Handbook](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.12 RN-BSN Program Review 2021-2022](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.13 MSN-NE Program Review 2021-2022](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.14 MSN-HCL Program Review 2021-2022](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.15 MSN-FNP Program Review 2021-2022](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.16 CCNE CIPR 2023](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.17 CONHS Systematic Plan for Evaluation](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.18 COE Evidence Link:](#)

<https://sites.google.com/view/usu-coe/home?authuser=0>

[Exhibit 3.5.19 MBA/iMBA Program Review 2024](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.20 Program Review Manual](#)

[Exhibit 3.5.21 Sample Quality Monitoring Tableau Dashboard, Redacted](#)

3.6. Doctoral Culture and Infrastructure

[Exhibit 3.6.00 Sample Doctoral Faculty Position Description](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.01 Sample Doctoral Program Huddle](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.02 Sample of a Faculty Course Guide](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.03 DNP Chair Guide](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.04 DNP Practice Immersion Handbook Link:](#)

<https://usuniversity.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/dnp-practice-immersion-handbook>

[Exhibit 3.6.05 DBA/iDBA Doctoral Project Handbook](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.06 Conducting a Literature Review](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.07 Research Skills Support](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.08 DNP Residency Virtual Library Orientation Link:](#)

<https://app.screencast.com/UiZheuxPDYKRS>

[Exhibit 3.6.09 Colloquium Series List of Presenters and Topics 2022 - Present](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.10 IRB SOP Link:](#)

<https://usuniversity.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/policy-and-procedure-manual/700-irb>

[Exhibit 3.6.11 Two Minute Takeaway](#)

[Exhibit 3.6.12 DNP Residency Guide](#)

4. Other Topics

4.1 Response to Focus on Finances in WSCUC Response dated July 28, 2024

[Exhibit 1.12 Response to Requested Information 6-30-2024](#)

[Exhibit 1.13 Follow up to USU Response 7-28-2024](#)

[Exhibit 1.03 September 2024 BOT Finance Committee Deck](#)

5. Reflections and Synthesis of Insights - Narrative only; no linked exhibits