

REPORT OF THE WSCUC VISITING TEAM REMOTE SPECIAL VISIT

Western University of Health  
Sciences

February 14-17, 2023

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution, its Accreditation History, as Relevant, and the Visit.....	1
B. Description of Team’s Review Process.....	5
C. Institution’s Special Visit Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence.....	7

### SECTION II – TEAMS’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Shared Governance.....	8
B. Board of Trustees .....	13
C. Equity and Inclusion.....	18

### SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS

Concerns Regarding Human Resources Function.....	24
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### SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

A. Commendations.....	25
B. Recommendations .....	26

## **SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, as relevant, and Visit**

Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) is a private, non-profit university, educating a workforce dedicated to the health of individuals and communities. The university has a main campus in Pomona, California and a branch campus in Lebanon, Oregon. Originally established as the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific (COMP) in Pomona in 1977, the Lebanon campus, COMP-Northwest (rebranded WesternU-Oregon) was opened in 2011. WesternU is a comprehensive health sciences and health professions university that enrolls nearly 3,800 students. It includes eight health sciences colleges offering degrees in 14 health professions and health science disciplines (although the Master of Science in Biomedical Sciences [MSBS] is currently being phased out). The WesternU-Oregon branch campus currently offers two programs, Osteopathic Medicine (DO) and Physical Therapy (DPT). According to the WesternU Special Visit Report, WesternU-Oregon plans to open an Occupational Therapy program in 2023.

Driven by its founding principle of humanism, the mission of WesternU is *to produce, in a humanistic tradition, health care professionals and biomedical knowledge that will enhance and extend the quality of life in our communities*. Further, according to the webpage of President Robin Farias-Eisner, who was appointed as WesternU's third president on March 1, 2022, WesternU is *a University dedicated to the health sciences and committed to research, science,*

*and biotechnology. Our distinct Colleges share a common dedication to a humanistic approach – putting the patient first – and fostering health with hands, heart, mind, and spirit. Our quest is to achieve transformative health for both people and animals, hence, to create a healthy society for present and future generations.*

WesternU was granted candidacy by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) and received initial accreditation in 1996. Since that time, WesternU accreditation has been reaffirmed three times, most recently in 2018. In reaffirming the accreditation of WesternU in 2018, the Commission called for a Special Visit in spring 2021 to address and update information related to the board of trustees and its diversity as well as WesternU’s alignment with the WSCUC Equity and Inclusion Policy. Following a chain of events in late 2020 into early 2021, in which the University’s Academic Assembly voted no confidence in the President, the Provost, and the Senior Vice President for Research, shared governance was added to the focus of the 2021 special visit. Following the special visit, the WSCUC issued a Formal Notice of Concern related to Standard 3 and identified CFR’s 3.6, 3.7 and 3.10 indicating that *Leadership at all levels must commit to ensuring shared governance and maintaining effective communication.* An interim report on Shared Governance was requested and submitted in March 2022. With all of the above in mind, the 2023 Special Site Visit Committee was charged with reviewing the progress on the recommendations from the 2021 WSCUC Commission letter of July 12, 2021, namely:

**1. Shared Governance (CFRs 3.6, 3.7 and 3.10)** Leadership at all levels (including faculty, staff, and administration), must commit to ensuring shared governance and maintaining effective communication by

- a. clarifying and agreeing to the respective roles and lines of authority of all parties involved in shared governance;
- b. ensuring the use of evidence to support decision-making; and
- c. promptly and clearly communicating decisions along with the evidence and rationale so that stakeholders have a shared understanding of the evidence and rationale underlying the decision.

**2. Board of Trustees (CFR 3.9)** Although the board responded to the previous Commission Action Letter by executing its fiduciary authority with dedication and loyalty to Western University of Health Sciences, it must:

- a. continue to seek members with the qualifications required to govern an institution of higher learning;
- b. regularly engage in self-review and training to enhance its effectiveness; and
- c. maintain and honor clear policies on shared governance consistent with the Board's oversight role.

**3. Equity and Inclusion (CFRs 1.4, 2.2 and 3.1, WSCUC Equity & Inclusion Policy)**

- a. WUHS should continue to assess and address the changing social and demographic diversity within the communities that it serves.

b. The administration, staff, and faculty should expand their efforts to create diverse and inclusive learning environments at both campuses and at community-based clinical sites including:

i. implementing and resourcing the H.E.A.R.T. Center and other DEI initiatives;

and

ii. collecting and analyzing data to track and address the extent to which the learning environments support student success and then to act on the data to improve student outcomes.

c. The administration, staff, and faculty should continue to enhance institutional policies, educational and co-curricular programs, hiring and admissions criteria, and administrative and organizational practices with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The 2022 Special Visit Report from WesternU and the 2023 Special Site Visit Committee noted that a number of significant changes have been made at WesternU since the 2021 Special Visit Report. For example, Dr. Robin Farias-Eisner was appointed as WesternU's third President in March 2022. Recently, in February of 2023 after a nationwide search, the Interim Provost, Dr. Paula Crone, was formally appointed as the Provost and Chief Academic Officer. Dr. Suresh Appavoo joined WesternU in November 2021 as its first Vice President for Humanism, Equity and Anti-Racism. Three new deans were appointed in the College of Pharmacy, the College of Dental Medicine and the College of Podiatric Medicine. In addition, there have been a number of interim appointments made including an interim CFO, a senior vice president for research and biotechnology, and interim deans for the College of Veterinary Medicine on the Pomona Campus

and the College of Health Sciences for both the Pomona and Lebanon campuses. An acting dean has also been appointed for COMP and COMP-Northwest. According to the WesternU Special Visit Report, transitions in dean appointments were mostly a result of retirement or movement within the institution, while changes in the central leadership were more closely tied to responses on shared governance and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Other changes identified in the WesternU 2022 Special Visit Report included the closing of the Graduate College of Biomedical Sciences in July 2022. This change required the Master of Science in Medical Sciences to be moved to the College of Health Sciences. The Master of Science in Biomedical Sciences is being taught out under the auspices of the Office of Research and Biotechnology and will be closed at the end of the 2022-2023 academic year. Moreover, the College of Graduate Nursing has added a new certificate program in Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners, and the Master of Science in Pharmaceutical Sciences has changed its name to Master of Science in Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Sciences.

This Special Visit was designed and conducted remotely in keeping with WSCUC's current practice of such visits being remote if the issues can be satisfactorily addressed that way.

## **B. Description of the Team's Review Process**

For the 2023 Special Site Visit, three team members and the WSCUC liaison were members on the 2021 Special Site Visit; the chair of this team was new. The members of the team received an introductory and welcoming email with assignments and a timeline for the 2023 Special Site

Visit and report from the team chair on November 29, 2022. Aligned with team members' expertise, the e-mail identified team member reviewers for each of the three lines of inquiry. The team started the review process soon after the report was uploaded to Box on December 6, 2022. The team chair and WesternU's president met on Zoom on January 11, 2023. In preparation for the visit, the team, guided by the WSCUC liaison and the team chair, exchanged e-mail communication prior to the team conference call (January 17, 2023). The team worksheet guided the conversation and team strategies for the gathering and analysis of evidence for those issues. A detailed list of questions was developed during the conference call, identifying further documents needed for the visit, which were promptly uploaded into Box by WesternU's accreditation liaison officer on February 1, 2023. The team further refined and finalized questions for the visit on the afternoon of February 14, 2023, prior to the start of the Special Site Visit on February 15-17, 2023.

During the visit, the team met remotely, via Zoom, with members of the university community on both the Pomona and Lebanon campuses. Sometimes as a group and sometimes separately, members of the team had meetings with the president, the provost, the ALO and WSCUC Special Site Visit Committee, the board of trustees, the board leadership, the vice president of HEAR, academic affairs leadership, the Dean's Council, the Academic Senate Leadership, the Academic Senate, the Staff Council, the Vice President for Research and University Research Council, the University Executive Operations Team, the College HEAR Officers, the Human Resources Advisory Committee, the Humanism SPG Focus Group Leaders, the University Council and Student Leadership. Members of the team also had open staff, student and faculty meetings with both the Oregon and Pomona campuses. The team took note of comments that

were made and added to the “chat” during the Zoom meetings as well as numerous and detailed comments sent to the confidential email account.

### **C. Institution’s Special Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence**

The WesternU Special Visit Report offered a candid, transparent, and clear update on the institution's progress since the 2021 Special Site Visit. There were specific sections for the three areas requested for the Special Visit by the WSCUC Commission. The report included links to many appendices (added to Box) that contained data, demographics, changes, and plans for change with respect to shared governance, the board of trustees, and equity and diversity. Overall, the Special Visit Report provided an honest assessment of their progress. Included in the Special Site Visit report, was a description of a WesternU Institutional Strategic Diversity Operational Map 2023-2028 or WISDOM 2023-2028 report. Calling on key sources of data related to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism, the first draft of the WISDOM report is currently scheduled to be presented to the WesternU community for comments in the latter half of March 2023 with an expected launch and deployment in September 2023. Thus, the WISDOM report was not available for review. Also behind schedule with respect to complete data analysis was the Campus Culture and Climate Survey.

In addition, the ALO was very responsive to new requests for information made by the visiting team just prior to the visit and during the visit. These documents allowed the visiting team to develop a better understanding of all of the issues laid out in the WSCUC commission letter. Moreover, administrators and faculty were open and candid with the Visiting Team during meetings in discussing their views on changes that have been made, areas where they feel WesternU is

making progress or enacting changes, and on other related issues. During the course of several of the meetings, the team heard from a number of individuals that there were persistent problems with the functioning of Human Resources at WesternU. Thus, this report has identified a fourth concern and recommendation in addition to those previously identified.

## **SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS**

### **A. Shared Governance (CFRs 3.6, 3.7 and 3.10)**

In WSCUC’s action letter dated July 21, 2021, the Commission summarized the actions required from the Formal Notice of Concern in the area of Shared Governance:

#### **1. Shared Governance (CFRs 3.6, 3.7 and 3.10)**

Leadership at all levels (including faculty, staff, and administration), must commit to ensuring shared governance and maintaining effective communication by

- a. clarifying and agreeing to the respective roles and lines of authority of all parties involved in shared governance;
- b. ensuring the use of evidence to support decision-making; and
- c. promptly and clearly communicating decisions along with the evidence and rationale so that stakeholders have a shared understanding of the evidence and rationale underlying the decision.

Beginning with Interim President Sylvia Manning and with the hire in March 2022 of its new president Dr. Farias-Eisner, WesternU had taken a number of steps to address concerns raised in the Special 2021 visit. Whereas during the Special Site Visit in 2021 there were a number of

serious concerns raised about who was responsible for making which decisions and there was evidence of overt, unresolved conflict between the academic senate and the senior administration, the 2023 Special Site Visit team found evidence of many structural and process changes and improvement in the shared governance climate. (CFR 3.6)

Of particular note has been the amendment of the University Faculty Handbook (see appendix 3.02, July 1, 2002; pages 2, 6-10) to explicitly identify principles of shared governance for decisions affecting faculty and academic matters. (CFR 3.7) An expanded shared governance committee structure has been created that articulates five pillars or stakeholder groups that includes the Academic Senate, the Dean's Council, the Staff Council, the Student Government Association, and the University Executive Operations Team. In addition, a new cross-cutting group, the University Council, comprised of representatives of the five governance entities plus student representatives is conceptualized as being a forum to address emerging concerns that cut across multiple areas and to expedite creative problem solving that may include innovative initiatives. Also, some serious problems that were highly conflictual in the last special visit, such as in allocation of research space, were reported to have been resolved in a manner that seemed satisfactory to the affected parties and that reflected a consultative shared governance process. Although many of the shared governance initiatives were relatively new—the permanent president had been in office for less than a year at the time of this visit—the WSCUC visiting team found a broad level of support and enthusiasm among many, but not all, groups in the university for the initiatives. Among the initiatives that the visiting team found particularly impressive was its first-ever Staff Council. The members of the Staff Council organized, developed, and implemented the group's operating structure and ground rules. It appeared to be being positively received by staff, the other governing groups, as well as

senior leadership. As discussed in the board of trustees section of this report, progress was reported in the board's involvement with academic and other university activities. Nevertheless, further clarification of the academic decisions with which the board will get involved either as a decision maker or in an advisory role appeared, in some instances, to be needed. (CFR 3.9)

Although the visiting team found considerable evidence of shared governance being in a different and more positive place than was the case at the time of its last visit, there were some areas of concern expressed and identified. For example, while the elaborate shared governance system (and related groups such as the University Council and the Human Resources Advisory Committee) put in place was still quite new at the time of the site visit, the visiting team learned more about a *process* for shared governance and systemic leadership than it did about evidence used or to be used by the various groups to make decisions. Missing were methods for deciding differences among groups, outcome metrics, who was the final decision maker for what types of decisions, and how and when the newly created structure and processes will formally be evaluated and, if necessary, changed.

In addition, the academic senate representatives with whom the team spoke, recognized that the shared governance revision progress as specified in the faculty handbook were detailed and thorough, some identified the need to operationalize the principles articulated in these revisions. Some faculty representatives with whom the visiting team met expressed concerns about the manner in which certain decisions in the university were being made since the leadership transition. Comments such as the shared governance process was only "on paper" or that shared governance procedures were not being followed consistently at the college level were heard from

several sources. Disagreement between some faculty representatives and some leaders on certain senior academic leadership hires were also raised. At the time of the visit, it appeared to the visiting team that these issues had not been fully worked through with the parties involved expressing quite different perspectives about both the decision-making processes and specific decisions made. This disparity suggested to the visiting team that there is still the need for further clarification of what shared governance means in the area of academically-related hires, how disputes and/or grievances should be handled, and how differences can be worked through in a productive way.

The visiting team was not in a position to evaluate or adjudicate concerns raised by a few of those with whom it met alleging adverse consequences (e.g., retaliation, bullying, not being listened to, and impeding peoples' career advancement) for certain individuals who were said to have spoken up about perceived problems in the university. The Human Resources Department, which might otherwise have been helpful in addressing such complaints, and legal staff, were seen by some as being ineffectual and, in the case of HR, by almost all, as being understaffed.

In reviewing extensive meeting agendas and minutes of various shared governance groups, the team found unevenness in the summaries that were provided of the issues being considered, the types of evidence that were being used to define problems and consider options, and whether the groups were making recommendations or decisions. Also sometimes missing was how and when feedback, including rationales for why particular decisions or recommendations were made, was provided to others affected.

The site visit team was provided with evidence from “Great Colleges to Work For” surveys, which reflected little improvement in recent years. Also, the Campus Culture and Climate Survey Report data that were shared with the team were disaggregated, only including the numbers of people choosing the two highest versus the two lowest response choices. Because such data are potentially important in evaluating how well the university is progressing in a variety of areas including, potentially, shared governance, it will be important to track how such data, when collected, are made use of in the organization, by which groups and individuals, and with what outcomes.

Of further concern, the site visit team was not provided with much evidence on how shared governance was used in major initiatives reported in the Special Visit Report including the decisions to close the Graduate College of Biomedical Sciences, the teach-out of the MSBS program, the proposed new PhD program in the College of Pharmacy and the new Occupational Therapy program in Oregon.

With respect to shared governance, the special site visit team concludes that the Faculty Handbook reflects and articulates important changes in shared governance processes. Greater attention, however, is needed to clarify the respective roles of the various shared governance bodies. (CFR 3.7) The role of the board, the academic senate, and the respective leaders in decision-making needs to be further specified and shared. Participants in shared governance activities need to be clear on whether their input is advisory or actual decision making, and how and what evidence is to be used in making decisions. Recognizing that all may not agree with decisions made, when input has been sought as part of the process, the ultimate decision made and the rationale for those decisions should generally be shared with those who are involved.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the shared governance processes will benefit from being ongoing so that corrections can be made and the process can be institutionalized and continually improved. Finally, when, as was the case in this special site visit, allegations of inappropriate behavior (e.g., retaliation, bullying, or other abusive behaviors) in response to views having been expressed, there needs to be a clearly articulated, objective, fairly and competently administered, process for addressing such complaints or grievances.

#### B. Board of Trustees (CFR 3.9)

WSCUC's action letter of July 21, 2021, stated:

Although the board responded to the previous Commission Action Letter by executing its fiduciary authority with dedication and loyalty to Western University of Health Sciences, it must

- a. continue to seek members with the qualifications required to govern an institution of higher learning;
- b. regularly engage in self-review and training to enhance its effectiveness; and
- c. maintain and honor clear policies on shared governance consistent with the Board's oversight role.

The 2021 WSCUC Special Visit team report noted important improvements in the activities of the Board. The Board has added expertise and a number of new members. Its new chair has experience in diversity and inclusion through her role as director of an advocacy organization in Pomona focused on education. The Board had also elected to its members a federal judge from

the US Court of Appeals bringing legal expertise to the Board. Through working with consultants from the Association of Governing Boards, it took steps to strengthen governance. This progress included developing updated bylaws for the Board, a term limit policy, and updated charters for all of the board's committees. The Board also introduced practices by which work was assigned to the relevant Committee for review and development. Action items or recommendations of the Committees were referred to the full board, either through the consent agenda or for discussion and action by the Board. This process was described as leaving more time for strategic discussions at the general meetings.

Although the 2021 visiting team was encouraged by the steps taken to strengthen the board, the visit occurred during a time of leadership transition. President Wilson had recently announced his retirement from the University. The board needed to oversee the transition to a new president and was also involved in the process of developing a new framework for shared governance at WesternU, which had been a major source of conflict between faculty and University leadership. A new ad hoc committee on shared governance was charged with bringing constituents from across the university together to develop new principles of shared governance.

Within this context, the 2021 site visit team made three general recommendations for the Board:

1. The Board should continue to prioritize increasing its numbers with particular emphasis on adding diversity and expertise.
2. It should continue to develop its governance capacity. The 2021 WASC Team noted that the practices of the Board did not fully mirror the expectations of the new Bylaws.

3. The Board should create a clear demarcation of responsibilities of the Board versus those of the administration and faculty. This recommendation was made within the context of disagreements within WesternU over shared governance, including the role of the Board.

As part of the February 2023 Special Site Visit, the team was provided detailed information about the activities of the board in recent years. This information included recently adopted governance documents, copies of the new bylaws for the board and its committees, agendas and minutes from meetings of the full board and the Academic Affairs and Governance committees. The visiting team also met with the board leadership (chair, vice chair and several committee chairs) and held an open meeting with the board in which over half attended. In addition, during a meeting with the University Executive Operations Team several members of WesternU senior administration, who served as advisors to particular board committees, provided information about their interactions with trustees.

Overall, progress in expanding the board's governing capacity and effectiveness was noted. The Board increased its size, diversity, and areas of expertise. Between 2021 and early 2023 the Board more than doubled in size, growing to 18 members at the time of the visit. Important progress had also been made in expanding the expertise of the Board. It recruited new trustees with experience in biomedical research as well as several alumni of WesternU who now held senior positions in healthcare. The Board also added expertise in finance, including a biotechnology-oriented venture capitalist, and added two new trustees with legal expertise. The

team also noted the increased geographical diversity with five board members located in Oregon, home of the Lebanon campus.

Trustees noted that the expanded size and expertise of the Board has had a significant impact on the effectiveness of board committees. At the time of the visit, there were seven Board of Trustees committees, each with at least five trustees on each committee. Moreover, a new bylaw was created limiting trustees to serving on no more than two committees. A review of board member bios and their committee assignments suggests that committees increasingly have board members with subject-matter expertise in the area of the committee. For example, the Finance and Operations Committee has three members with professional experience in finance, while the governance committee has three members with legal backgrounds.

The visiting team also noted improvements in Board practices. A review of documents from 2021 and 2022 confirmed that board committees regularly met and published agendas and minutes. The visiting team also found examples that committees were conducting important work for the full board. For example, the Governance Committee took on the role of recruiting new board members. In doing so it developed a process of identifying and recruiting new members. The work of the Academic Affairs Committee has also become more robust. This committee was involved in reviewing important initiatives, such as the closing of the Graduate College of Biomedical Sciences and the expansion of the Lebanon campus to include an occupational therapy program. Meeting notes also suggested that the Academic Affairs Committee had taken on information gathering functions, such as meeting with deans and members of the Student Government Association to gather information on academic programs across the colleges.

In addition to carrying out its oversight role, the strengthening of the board has improved its capacity to develop and lead new initiatives. The Board successfully led the presidential transition process by first appointing interim President Manning and then recruiting Dr. Farias-Eisner as WesternU's third president. The Board was also becoming more active in fundraising. It established a Trustee Scholarship program aimed at improving access to WesternU for underrepresented populations. At the time of the Special Visit, the Board was in early discussions with President Farias-Eisner and the university's advancement team over the planning of a major capital campaign in which the Board would take a major role.

While the visiting team commends the important areas of progress made by the Board, it also encourages the Board to continue to strengthen its governance capacity. Drawing on WSCUC CFR 3.9, it is important that the board structures governance activities in ways that will help it maintain its independence. As the Board continues to mature, it is essential that it develop a governance capacity that ensures a balancing of interests and priorities consistent with the mission and related fiduciary responsibilities of Western University. This entails continuing to recruit trustees with varied expertise relating to the activities of the university and ensuring that it has access to information needed to inform decision-making.

Related to this recommendation, the Board can further develop and strengthen an evidence-based culture to guide decision making. (CFR 4.1, 4.2) A review of the minutes of the full board meetings and the Academic Affairs and Governance Committee meetings suggests that dashboards and other sources of information that are continually updated and reviewed can be

employed more extensively. Dashboards can play an important role in helping to review the performance of an organization in reaching its goals over an extended period of time.

A final recommendation concerns the role of the Board in decision-making. Although some progress had been made in this area, there appeared to be some uncertainty as to what initiatives and policies developed by the administration and faculty need formal approval from the Board of Trustees apart from a review to offer guidance. While major decisions, such as those concerning budgeting or the opening or closing of new colleges, clearly need and receive board approval, in other areas the process was less clear. Board minutes, for example, noted uncertainty as to whether the Board needed to approve new academic programs. A clearly articulated and operationalized delineation of decision-making authority may help create a stronger shared understanding of the role of the Board in the strategic oversight of the university.

### C. Equity and Inclusion (CFRs 1.4, 2.2 and 3.1, WSCUC Equity & Inclusion Policy)

In its letter of July 12, 2021, the WSCUC Commission included a three-part recommendation regarding equity and inclusion efforts at WesternU:

- a. That the institution should continue to assess and address the changing social and demographic diversity within the communities that it serves.
- b. That the administration, staff, and faculty should expand their efforts to create diverse and inclusive learning environments at both campuses and at community-based clinical sites including:
  - i. implementing and resourcing the H.E.A.R.T. Center and other DEI initiatives; and

- ii. collecting and analyzing data to track and address the extent to which the learning environments support student success and then to act on the data to improve student outcomes.
- c. That the administration, staff, and faculty should continue to enhance institutional policies, educational and co-curricular programs, hiring and admissions criteria, and administrative and organizational practices with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In its Institutional Report of December, 2022, WesternU summarized the actions it had taken to enhance diversity and inclusion both before and after the Special Visit of 2021. That work began in the form of ten strategies developed by an Inclusion and Humanism Task Force. Those strategies were intended to help fortify the link between humanism, diversity, and inclusion and help develop institutional and data-informed guidelines for incorporating diversity and inclusion in all programs. A standing Humanism Strategic Performance Group (H-SPG) was created.

At the conclusion of the 2021 Special Visit, the WSCUC visiting team noted that various H-SPG focus areas were in line with previous recommendations and that intentions were well articulated, detailed, and appeared to have the support of most of the stakeholders they met. Nevertheless, that visiting team also recognized that plans had not been realized. According to the team, many at WesternU were hopeful that the WSCUC Team Report would recommend that WesternU make all the necessary changes to truly eliminate racism and bias from the campus culture, the curriculum, hiring practices, and the admissions process. The WesternU constituents

also indicated support for properly funding, resourcing, and empowering the individual who would fill the role of Vice President for Humanism, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Transformation (VP- HEART), as well as the Humanism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion center. Finally, the 2021 visiting team also learned that although several stakeholder groups expressed their gratitude for the support from many university decision-makers, they also expressed concern that there were still powerful administrators who had been resistant to making meaningful Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (DEIAR) changes at Western U.

In addition to reviewing WesternU’s institutional report and its appendices, and the 2021 commission and special visit recommendations, the current visiting team requested additional documents in the area of DEI, i.e., syllabi with key learning outcomes, a report of the Campus Culture and Climate Survey, retention and on-time graduation data disaggregated by ethnicity, disaggregated student survey data, and a progress report on the WesternU Institutional Strategic Diversity and Operational Map (WISDOM) 2023-2028. During the visit, the team also met with the newly hired Vice President for HEAR, (formerly HEART), the College HEAR Officers, and the Humanism SPG Focus Group Leaders. The team also discussed DEI issues in many other meetings during the visit.

WesternU’s institutional report for the current Special Visit addressed the changing social and demographic diversity within the communities that it serves by describing its longstanding efforts “to increase recruitment, matriculation, and readiness of underrepresented students in the health professions” – for example, the Health Career Ladder, Summer Health Professions Education Program, Covid-19 vaccination clinic, and the Care Harbor Clinic. They also listed the

eight faculty and staff training presentations sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). The CETL staff was hesitant to program additional DEI areas until the university filled the position of Vice President of Humanism, Equity and Anti-Racism Transformation (VP-HEART). The position was re-named to VP-HEAR and its first office holder was appointed on November 1, 2021. An initial budget of \$30,000 and an approved full-time support staff person with temporary offices were allocated for the commencement of operations.

Three new HEAR groups were created to develop a more effective network for communication, input, and collaboration across campuses:

1. College Humanism Equity and Anti-Racism Officers Group (CHO) is composed of the CHO from each of the eight colleges;
2. Director of Operations HEAR Representatives Group is represented by two designates from the Directors of Operations group from all eight colleges and one representative from WUHS Clinics;
3. Student HEAR Advisory Council (SHAC) is represented by two first and second-year student representatives from each of the colleges in Pomona and Oregon.

Evidence of the board's active concern with DEI issues was its development in Spring 2021 of a Trustee Scholarship Program to support the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students. The program provides up to 50% of tuition support for each recipient enrolled full-time in any of the eight colleges from entry to graduation. Five scholarships were awarded in August

2022. However, more specific demographic data are needed regarding applicants who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

During the site visit, the VP-HEAR described in detail his efforts over the past 15 months to establish a knowledge base and to identify immediate versus long-term needs. The HEAR office now reports to the provost as evidence of WesternU's commitment to integrating DEI issues into the academic functions of the institution. In the area of recruitment and admissions, the goal is to mirror the demographics of California (Pomona campus) and of the nation (Lebanon campus). There is one recruiter focused on these issues for all eight colleges; the numbers of under-represented groups have stayed the same or declined. The VP-HEAR has suggested piloting a new process with the College of Podiatric Medicine. He acknowledged that there is a need for more centralized data collection and analysis. WesternU is now searching for a full-time data diversity staff person, and new positions in programming and an assistant vice president for HEAR for the Lebanon campus will be requested. Additionally, the search for a suitable space for a HEAR Center continues. (CFR 4.1)

In terms of learning and the curriculum, a unifying framework based on the DEI competencies of the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) has been introduced. Work has begun with faculty to review specific content modules; at the same time, changes in pedagogy will be introduced through professional development programs. The overall aim is to build capacity in DEI. Also, Institutional Learning Outcomes will be expanded so that student learning outcomes can be aligned with them. A "Diversity Declaration" will build on the work already completed to

update the definition of humanism which made clear WesternU's commitment to all elements of HEAR.

Six to eight "signature events" in DEI are planned around which each college will create additional programming. Formal acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples' Day and Juneteenth have been established. Over 700 institutional policies are in the process of being reviewed by the VP for HEAR including religious accommodations, professional attire, and responding to crisis incidents. (CFR 1.4)

The Campus Culture and Climate Survey and meetings with students and staff made it clear to the Visiting Team that there is more work to be done in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Institutional stakeholders expressed pleasure that WesternU has moved from debating *why* DEI work is important to *how* it will be done. Spurred on by student initiatives, including White Coats for Black Lives, a foundation has been laid for developing "cultural humility." Many plans have been formulated which now need to be enacted. The visiting team recommends that WesternU prioritize and adequately fund the implementation of WISDOM including: recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups of faculty and students, on-time graduation of students, policy and programmatic initiatives, institutional and student learning outcomes, curricular and pedagogical improvements, and assessment of the effectiveness of DEI efforts. (CFR1.4, 2.10, and 4.1)

### **SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE**

**Concern Regarding Human Resources Function:** The visiting team learned from multiple sources about a persistent problem they perceived with the Human Resources (HR) function at the University. Concerns and complaints related to slowness in providing basic HR functions related to the processing of personnel actions, allegations that the processing of grievances were either not being processed in a timely manner, were being addressed by those with no or inadequate training in such activities, and concerns that the such matters were being handled in a biased matter in favor of management. The cause of such reported difficulties was widely attributed to inadequate staffing and leadership and training of personnel in the HR function. (CFR 1.7) At the time of the WSCUC Special Visit an interim HR director had been put in place and a search was underway for a permanent hire to lead the department. Although a large HR Advisory Committee had also been established by the university, its function was described in the visiting team's meeting with the Advisory Committee as being strategic and longer-term rather than to address the immediate issues and concerns.

The visiting team recommends that the HR function be permanently staffed by a qualified and experienced HR professional, that staff be appointed in a timely manner to this area to include appropriate competencies to cover all major functions of the department and that all HR policies be reviewed at the earliest opportunity to assure that the HR function is being operated in a manner consistent with legal and best practices. (CFR 3.2) It is essential that complaints be processed in a fair and unbiased manner using clearly articulated processes and, as appropriate for the specific complaints, clearly defined appeal procedures.

## **SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW**

### **Commendations**

#### **Shared Governance**

The Visiting Team commends the university for its efforts to improve shared governance by:

- delineating principles of shared governance, including in the Faculty Handbook;
- creating an expanded shared governance committee structure including five branches: Academic Senate, Dean’s Council, Student Government Association, Staff Council, and the University Executive Operations Team, with engagement and enthusiasm from many constituencies and leaders for these new approaches, and
- establishing a new and well-functioning Staff Council organized and implemented by staff

#### **Board of Trustees**

The Visiting Team commends the university Board of Trustees for its improved governance, including:

- developing its capacity to identify, vet, and recruit new Board of Trustees members;

- increasing its size and expertise in areas such as research, health sciences, and finance, while adding representation from the Oregon
- creating committees with clear charters, expanded membership, and the capacity to explore and assess issues and make recommendations to the full Board.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

The visiting team commends the university for:

- the progress made in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion through the thoughtful and ambitious planning of the university and college Humanism, Equity, and Anti-Racism offices and the continued initiatives championed by students.
- the positive evolution and trajectory of this work with the resulting emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism which has energized constituencies across the university.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Shared Governance – CFR 3.7 and 3.10**

The team recommends:

- operationalizing the Shared Governance principles that are in the Faculty Handbook;
- expanding feedback processes to assure that participants in shared governance receive timely feedback on actions taken by decision makers including the evidence and rationale for decisions made;

- conducting formal assessments of the effectiveness of the new shared governance principles, structures, and activities; and
- assuring that a culture of evidence, civility, and open communications occur as part of all shared governance activities.

### **Board of Trustees – CFR 3.9**

The team recommends that the university Board of Trustees:

- develop clear guidelines about what university initiatives need its approval versus advice;
- develop an evidence-based culture to guide Board decision-making, including the use of dashboards and other sources of evidence to assess the ongoing performance of the university;
- maintain Board independence in order to ensure a balancing of interests and priorities consistent with the mission and related fiduciary responsibilities of Western University.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - CFR 1.4**

With respect to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion the team recommends that WesternU

- Prioritize and adequately fund the implementation of the DEI/WISDOM plan including recruitment and retention of faculty and on-time graduation of students, policy and programmatic initiatives, student learning outcomes and curricular improvements, and assessment of the effectiveness of DEI programs (CFR 1.4)

## **Human Resources - CFR 1.7, 3.1, and 3.2**

The team recommends accelerating the plan to develop a fully functioning and adequately staffed Human Resources office including developing a staffing plan and a process for fair and unbiased handling of specific complaints, and, as appropriate, clearly defined appeal procedures.