

**Team Report  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**California University of Pennsylvania  
September 22-25, 2020 (virtual visit)**

***Section A: Institutional Representatives***

**Institutional representatives at the time of the visit:**

**President/CEO**

Geraldine M. Jones, President

**Chief Academic Officer**

Daniel E. Engstrom, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Chief Financial Officer**

Robert Thorn, Vice President for Administration and Finance

**Chair of the Board of Trustees**

James T. Davis, Chair, Council of Trustees

## *Section B: Institutional Context*

California University of Pennsylvania (Cal U) is a comprehensive regional public university in southwestern Pennsylvania. Its 6,800 students (6,000 FTE) pursue degrees at the undergraduate (associate's and bachelor's) and graduate (master's and selected doctoral) levels, with 36 percent of students (2,400) enrolled in Cal U Global Online offering 100% online programs.

One of 14 members of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), Cal U has served the region for 168 years as a normal school (1865-1928), teacher's college (1928-1960), state college (1960-1983), and university (1983-present). At the time of the Self-Study in early 2020, Cal U had three undergraduate colleges—Education and Human Services, Liberal Arts, and Eberly College of Science and Technology—which in recent months were reorganized into two, Education and Liberal Arts, and the Eberly College of Science and Technology. The reorganization consolidated 22 academic departments into 11. Cal U also supports a College of Graduate Studies and Research, with largely online programs.

The period since the last Self-Study in 2010 has been exceptionally challenging for Cal U. Core to the challenge is a significant decline in enrollment, dropping over 30 percent since a peak in 2011 and over 17 percent in the past five years. The same period has seen a 13 percent reduction in total employee FTE (-3% faculty FTE and -22% non-faculty FTE) from fall 2011 to fall 2019. These declines occurred concurrent with significant effort by Cal U to expand its markets (e.g., degree completion, associate's degrees, dual enrollment, graduate), menu (e.g., veterinary medicine, criminology, physical therapy) and delivery mode (100% online in some programs).

Cal U began its Self-Study effort in 2018 with formation of standard-based work groups, cross-cutting task forces for compliance, evidence inventory, and editing, and an overarching coordinating team led by the AVP for Assessment and Accreditation. Cal U's primary aim is to demonstrate compliance with the standards and requirements of affiliation of the Middle States Commission. Corollary aims are to leverage the accreditation process to integrate institutional priorities into the Self-Study, create a digital evidence inventory, develop and begin executing robust assessment processes, and outline strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement and innovation to inform Cal U's next strategic plan.

Applying the philosophy that “the process is the product,” the accreditation process together with the COVID-19 pandemic and the redesign of PASSHE institutions prompted changes to existing policies and procedures and introduction of new ones since submission of the Self-Study. These include implementation of an assessment program, reorganization of Cal U's colleges and departments, redesign of shared governance, creation of new degree programs, extensive cost containment, and rightsizing of employment. Cal U welcomed input from the visiting evaluation team as it takes stock of new dynamics and state changes shaping Cal U's future.

## *Section C: Standards for Accreditation*

### **Standard I: Mission and Goals**

**The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.**

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Cal U's mission clearly defines its purpose, the students it serves, and its intentions. The mission and the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan (Evidence Inventory I.1.1) are articulated in multiple college documents in print and online, and both are shared widely with all constituents.

The Self Study in its entirety provides ample evidence in included documents and analyses that the University embraces its mission and goals and that both serve as the foundation for all administrative, educational, and student support services planning and assessment.

The University Strategic Planning Committee, representing stakeholders from administration, faculty, staff, and students, developed the mission and established the goals of the Strategic Plan. The University Strategic Assessment Committee oversees assessment of institutional effectiveness and the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan (Evidence Inventory I.3.1).

Higher education enrollment and financial trends have had a significant impact on the University's strategic planning documents and processes presented in the Self-Study. The subsequent planning strategies, blueprinted in the Comprehensive Planning Narrative of September 2020, raise a need for clarification to all stakeholders and constituents on the direction of the University going forward.

#### **Collegial Advice**

The team provides non-binding suggestions for improvement:

- The University should follow through on its identified opportunities on page 11 of the Self-Study, especially the first two:
  - Extend the 2015-2020 Strategic plan one additional year to institute action plans that could improve the eight partially achieved and 15 failed strategic success measures,

complete a third strategic assessment cycle, and inform the development of a 2021-26 Strategic Plan with the assessment results, results of the 2020 Self-Study, and the results of the 2020 visiting team report.

- Create a specific strategic goal for the 2021-26 Strategic Plan to improve the “culture of assessment” at Cal U (per Self-Study IP 4). This includes three outcomes: sustainability of OIE personnel and assessment data, 100% compliance rates for submission of annual Assessment Plan and Results Reports (academic programs and administrative service units), and 100% compliance rates for submission of periodic assessments such as Strategic Plans, State System program reviews, and CAS Student Affairs program reviews.
- The team suggests that Cal U complete a third assessment of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan to practice “closing the loop” on its strategic planning. This would provide a more complete picture of data trends, more time to analyze trends and challenges, and the opportunity to incorporate findings from the University’s Self-Study and the Middle States site evaluation process to build a strong strategic plan for 2021-2026.

**Team Recommendation(s):** none

**Requirement(s):** none

## **Standard II: Ethics and Integrity**

**Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.**

In the team’s judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

### **Summary of Findings**

Cal U provides ample evidence that ethics and integrity are central to its operations. Students, faculty, and staff are free to learn, teach, and be the best members of the college. Core values

include integrity, civility, and responsibility, commitments evident in university materials and on social media.

The team found evidence that Cal U fosters respect among constituents, impressively codifying its expectations in its University Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, tenets embraced by students, faculty and staff. The University has policies for grievances, conflict of interest, hiring, promotion and discipline. Cal U is compliant with federal, state and Commission reporting policies. Students have access to information on financial aid and debt. The team agrees that Cal U represents itself truthfully.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement establishes procedures for determining the rights and ownership of intellectual property produced at or for the State System by faculty members. The State System does not claim ownership, interest, or share of the proceeds in publications, textbooks, courseware, recordings, fiction, and other forms of scholarly activities. Sources of evidence include: Management of Financial Conflict of Interest Policy, Technology Transfer & Commercialization Services, Social Media & Acceptable Use Policies, What's the T Survey Results, Policy Statements & Compliance Procedures, EEO & Social Equity Handbook, Collective Bargaining Agreement, Human Resources Website, Cal U Student Handbook, Academic Integrity Policy, Cal U Faculty Handbook, and Cal U Middle States Compliance Report documents.

PDF 5 of *The Campus Changes since Submission of the 2020 Cal U Self-Study Report* offers a list of how faculty can be responsible when delivering synchronous courses. Faculty are to be adaptable and responsive, provide more frequent interaction and feedback, and to take care of themselves. During the open session with graduate and undergraduate students, the team verified that the faculty and staff are responsive to student questions and show concern to the students. Face-to-face and online students are aware of the rules and expectations. Online students feel as if they are on campus because professors set the tone by being responsive and helpful.

The team learned from IRB members that students have ample opportunities to conduct high-quality, safe and healthy quantitative and qualitative research. Committee members expressed satisfaction in IRB work and noted the rewards of student conference presentations.

Staff members acknowledge that the process of going through several transitions and changes is a way to reinvent the College and be innovative. Information and communication related to the change is not shared consistently, however. A number of campus constituents reported learning about structural changes, such as department mergers, only after decisions had been finalized. Individuals expressed concern about exclusion from discussions that affect them.

Many campus resource staff have multiple roles and titles. While this results in intentional collaboration and partnership supporting student research, advocacy, and engagement, the need to wear many hats also leads to burnout and missed opportunities. Campus resource representatives report that they do their best to keep programs going and ensure that students can be their best on and off campus.

Strategic Plan Goal 3 (Diversity and Inclusiveness) is a priority at Cal U, as evidenced by review of “What’s the T” survey results, HEDS Diversity & Equity Campus Climate Survey, Fact Book, the 2015-2020 University Mission & Strategic Plan, and discussions with Title IX/Social Equity and Campus Resource representatives. Programs such as Human Aspect of Immigration, Life after War, National Human Rights Day, Intersectionality, and Women in Leadership provide an opportunity for campus members to learn about diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives.

Survey results and conversations on campus reveal variations in the perception of campus climate by race, ethnicity, status, political identity, gender, and sexual orientation, with persons of color, faculty, and liberal voices least positive about the campus climate. The survey revealed similar variation in perceptions of institutional support, insensitive or disparaging remarks, and perceptions of discrimination or harassment. Faculty indicated less transparency than desired about the data in the HEDS report, urging greater dissemination and discussion. Concern also exists about retaining and mentoring faculty and staff who have “less positive views” of their Cal U experience. For students with less positive views, Student Affairs, the Honors program, and Student Government Association offer support and opportunities for dialogue.

Cal U has responded in ongoing ways. The Universal Diversity Committee is the first of many steps to address the diversity and equity climate. Cal U actively recruits qualified candidates in underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, females, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. The University uses professional development certificates in the tenure and promotion process. It has increased community listening sessions to engage students and staff in conversations on current events. The campus food pantry was moved to help support students living in off-campus housing. Cal U strives to provide access to health, beauty and personal products sought by students of color, although acknowledges a general lack of these products in town. The American Democracy Project, responses to NSSE data, and collaboration between student affairs and student organizations create opportunities to explore co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities.

Cal U has a well-developed, clearly documented, and impartial grievance policy to address complaints from students, faculty, or staff. The team verified the breadth and fairness of policies and procedures found in the Verification of Student Identity Policy, Statement of Hazing Policy, The University Housing Resident Handbook, AFSCME CBA, Graduate Catalog, Appealing the Effective Date of Drops and Withdrawals, SAP Appeal Form, Academic Standing Policy,

Reporting Discrimination, Harassment, Violence Procedure, Online Students Complaint Process, Filing a Complaint Process, Student Rights and Responsibilities, Discrimination Complaint Form, Title IX Policy, EEO and Social Equity Policy, and Meditation Services and Conflict Resolution. Students and staff who participate in the Student Conduct process are aware of their roles and responsibilities in addressing complaints or grievances.

The team learned of student interest in including information on policies and procedures in first-year seminars for incoming and transfer students. There is support for using Starfish to make referrals, with interest in a stronger feedback loop. A number of community members cited mental health as an issue, with urgency to hire another mental health counselor and provide training for staff and faculty.

The team verified that Athletics uses ARMS software to track compliance with eligibility and other athletics regulations. Internal communication within athletics is strong. Campus Resource representatives verified that Cal U's policies and procedures are disseminated through trainings, guest lectures, emails, and flyers.

Cal U avoids conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in activities and among constituents. The Right to Know Act, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Procurement Codes, PASSHE Expenditures of Public Funds, PASSHE Procedure Standard 2016-2022, Management of Financial Conflict of Interest rules, PASSHE Conflict of Interest policy, State Ethics Commission Statement of Financial Interests, Cal U Conflict of Interest Policy, and Pennsylvania Public Official and Public Employee Ethics Act are clear. The purposes, definitions, standards, scopes, and procedures are laid out for all to understand.

The team learned during its visit that campus members have concern about information provided, including its volume, transparency, level of detail, and trustworthiness. This sentiment was shared by staff, faculty, students, and community members in some form throughout the visit. The team recognizes that in instances involving major changes directed by PASSHE, Cal U administrators may themselves be in the dark until shortly before an announcement is made.

Cal U avoids conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all activities and among all constituents. It adheres to provisions of the Right to Know Act, Pennsylvania procurement codes and ethics act, State Ethics Commission rules (financial interests, conflict of interest), PASSHE rules (expenditures of public funds, procedure standards, conflict of interest policy) and Cal U codes on conflict of interest and other ethics rules.

Cal U follows fair practices in the hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline and separation of employees. The Guide to Faculty Searches demonstrates that there is a commitment to justice and equal opportunity.

Cal U promotes affordability and accessibility as documented in online financial aid resources and consumer information, including IPEDS data, Lend EDU information and course registration materials. Team interviews suggest that students understand funding sources and options, value received for cost, debt options, and how to contact the financial aid office.

Cal U complies with applicable federal, state, and MSCHE reporting policies, regulations and requirements. Ample information provided allowed the team to assess Cal U's compliance with MSCHE Requirements of Affiliation. The University reports four-year and six-year graduation and retention rates on its website: <https://www.calu.edu/calu-difference/graduation-rates.aspx>. Other data are reported in the Middle States Compliance Report, Gender-Based Sexual Misconduct Title IX Policy, Policy for Student-funded Research, Hazard Communication Plan, and Hazardous Material Handling, Storage, and Disposal Program. The Threat Response and Intervention team and the Environmental Health Office plan for and monitor business continuity, and continue to guide the campus through the COVID pandemic.

### **Collegial Advice**

The team provides non-binding suggestions for improvement:

- Make accessible the documentation for evaluation, promotion, discipline and separation of employees.
- Provide trainings for professional and faculty advisers to ensure that they understand SAP and the different funding sources. Consider creating a page for parents on the financial aid website.
- Work with students and the business community to address the limited menu of products and services for Black students. Maintain momentum and conversations on institutional racism.
- Develop practices and a culture of regular consultation with campus constituents. Incorporate views from staff, perhaps through a staff caucus, in University matters.

**Team Recommendation(s):** none

**Requirement(s):** none

### **Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices**

The team recognizes three Cal U efforts for exemplary practice:

- Listening Circle on racial inequality and Black Lives Matter
- U.S. Department of Education grant for students' childcare
- Appreciative Advising model

## **Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience**

**An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence of all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.**

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

### **Summary of Findings**

Cal U provides evidence indicating that it provides students with learning experiences at the undergraduate and graduate level and in both face-to-face and online modalities that are of rigor consistent with higher education expectations. Academic programming is vetted and approved through a rigorous shared governance process (Curriculum Approval Process). PASSHE policy requires the institution to adhere to strict credit hour guidelines. Further, the rigor of 53 percent of the majors is assured by their accreditations.

The institution provides evidence that the faculty is highly qualified and of sufficient size to deliver its programming. Institutional support mechanisms such as the Teaching and Learning Center and the Faculty Professional Development Center are available to support faculty work. The virtual visit revealed much appreciation for these two entities, especially as the community adjusted to teaching online as a result of the pandemic. Faculty are recruited and evaluated through rigorous processes codified by the collective bargaining agreement. Faculty are required to undergo training to teach in the Global Online program. The academic deans support their faculty in their growth and faculty are mentored in support of their success.

Clear degree requirements are provided to students in a variety of formats. Students can track progress through technological supports such as DegreeWorks. The institution acknowledges declining retention and completion rates of its student body, attributed to changes in admissions standards. Cal U also acknowledges lower satisfaction with advising. It has put in place training programs for faculty advisors and has developed the advising syllabus. The institution uses Starfish, an early alert system, to support student success. Faculty and staff have used Starfish tools through the pandemic and pivot to remote learning. Students express appreciation for faculty and staff concern for student wellbeing.

Additional resources to support learning opportunities and student success include institutional support for undergraduate research, tutoring, study abroad, the library, and the Honors Program. These are all of reasonable quality consistent with higher education expectations.

The general education program has clear learning outcomes that are integrated with program outcomes. An assessment plan is in place for general education although it does not enjoy robust and consistent participation among its faculty. Cal U established the General Education Assessment Committee to strengthen assessment of the program and to recommend changes based upon assessment results. The GEAC plans several strategies for enhancing faculty participation. During its visit, the team learned that administrative support for developing and maintaining a robust general education program would accelerate and enhance this work.

Although undergraduate enrollment remains a concern, Cal U is enjoying enrollment growth in its graduate programming. Policies pertaining to graduate faculty status and library resources support this success. Reorganization has led to some confusion about who is responsible for what and graduate coordinators raise concerns about adequate marketing, customer service for students, and the lack of release time from teaching to manage these concerns.

The assessment of student learning outcomes and program alignment with institutional priorities, the institution's mission and its strategic plan have been strengthened and institutionalized by adding key staffing to the Provost's office. As a critical component of assessment, Cal U uses technology to periodically assess the state of assessment practices. Periodic five-year program reviews are reported to PASSHE. The institution is currently reviewing programs using the Dickeson model to aid in its decision-making as it faces enrollment and fiscal challenges.

### **Collegial Advice**

The team provides a non-binding suggestion for improvement:

- Cal U is in the early stages of developing a comprehensive general education assessment plan to ensure continuous improvement as the needs of students evolve. To maintain progress, the team suggests enhancing resources and communications, particularly about the vital importance of the general education program.

**Team Recommendation(s):** none

**Requirement(s):** none

### **Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices**

- Cal U faculty expressed great appreciation for the Teaching and Learning Center and the Faculty Professional Development Center, which were instrumental in helping the community adjust to teaching online as a result of the pandemic.

- The university has made substantial progress in developing a culture of assessment even amidst much uncertainty related to reorganization, the proposed integration with other PASSHE schools, and the need to pivot to remote teaching and learning during the pandemic emergency.

## **Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience**

**Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.**

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

### **Summary of Findings**

The team was impressed by the quality, devotion and collaboration of staff and faculty, many of whom wear multiple hats to help students succeed. Cal U is exceptionally focused on student outcomes.

Cal U has recruitment, admissions, and financial aid policies and practices that meet contemporary standards for the profession. The materials on the websites are informative and help to facilitate student applications. Procedures for applying are effective and ethical.

Overall enrollment has fallen steadily from a peak enrollment in 2011 and projections forecast continued decline, including online students. This puts pressure on auxiliary services including housing, residence life, and dining. There has been a decline in the number of prospects who choose to visit the campus for a tour or Open House, which correlates with the number of admitted students who decide to enroll.

Corollary to enrollment declines are significant reductions in non-faculty staff by over 22 percent, with further reductions forecast under PASSHE reorganization proposals. Staff and faculty reported workload pressures and low morale, evident also in virtual meetings and open sessions.

Policies and procedures regarding the transfer of credit from other institutions and for qualifying Prior Learning Assessments are in keeping with acceptable practices across higher education. Qualifying life experiences are appropriately assessed through the review of experiential learning portfolios by designated faculty. The Prior Learning Certificate program considers industry-recognized credentials that are pre-approved by the student's academic department.

Cal U has multiple student support programs and services to enhance the likelihood of student success. The Probationary Assistance (PASS) program, for example, is designed to assist students who were readmitted after a dismissal or for those who are on probation. At-risk students are required to visit the Success Center weekly and are encouraged to attend elective workshops. These efforts seem to be successful, as evidenced by retention rates for students who are motivated to attend the workshops. In light of declining four- and six-year graduation rates of 36.7% and 50%, respectively, the team concurs with the Self-Study report's call for a systems audit of the Office of Academic Success to enhance student persistence to the degree.

The Enrollment and Recruitment Plan notes that "recruiting non-white minority faculty and staff ... will be crucial to retain and support the diverse student body." The team notes the challenges of attaining this goal in light of reductions in personnel.

Cal U is developing the Vulcan Learning Commons to combine the learning centers for reading, writing and STEM support. It collaborates to create online study groups in response to significant increase in requests for tutoring from online students. Cal U is implementing Appreciative Advising to assist students and engage more faculty in the advising process.

FERPA policies seem appropriate. The team concurs with the need identified in the admissions documentation for additional training to ensure appropriate oversight of personally identifiable information.

Cal U has reformed the timing and programming for New Student Orientation to address yield and retention concerns. The number of service hours logged through the Center for Volunteer Programs and Service Learning program is impressive. The breadth of student programs and organizations provides ample opportunities for student participation. Student Life and Services provides robust and diverse programs and support. Leadership programs are exemplary.

Utilizing the framework provided by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in the development and assessment of programs is a contemporary best practice. Staff are well-versed on assessment practices. Implementing the CAS Self-Assessment Guide for Recreational Sports was an important step, and the five-year program review and action plan is an important component in the assessment process.

The Counseling Center has seen an increase in student visits. Staff members are stretched to meet needs, especially at peak times throughout the academic year. The visiting team concurs with Cal U's interest in reactivating a search for a full-time psychologist and developing service partnerships with a community-based Social Work Clinic to be housed on campus.

Student Wellness offers a comprehensive approach to serving students in a holistic fashion. Hiring a Director of Student Wellness Support Services demonstrates a significant institutional commitment to addressing the multiple challenges students face.

The Athletics staff with whom the visiting team met are dedicated professionals committed to the personal success of student-athletes. Athletics has recently instituted a cloud-based software program to help coaches, athletics staff, and student-athletes monitor class attendance, academic progress, and compliance. Particularly in conjunction with Starfish tools, Athletics has good capacity to help student athletes persist to their degree.

In summer 2020, Cal U implemented Consolidated Administrative Assessment Committees. It is too early to know how the reorganization will affect assessment practices and outcomes in student affairs.

### **Collegial Advice**

The team provides the following non-binding suggestions for improvement:

- The team suggests that Cal U review its priorities and staffing models in light of the “multiple hats” worn by many personnel.
- The team encourages Cal U to employ creative initiatives to enhance its applicant pool and bolster institutional vitality. Cal U may want to focus fundraising/development efforts on student scholarship to increase investment in institutional aid and scholarships to strengthen yield. Cal U may also want to offer Zoom and social media platforms for prospective and accepted students to connect and create community prior to enrollment.
- Consistent with Cal U's priority to map out-of-classroom experiences, the University may want to consider development of a co-curricular e-portfolio and transcript for students.
- Cal U may wish to consider requiring students on probation to attend a specified number of Success Center workshops. The team also suggests gathering robust data on the link between early impact practices, such as educational plans developed in a student's first semester, and persistence rates.

## **Recommendations**

- The institution should provide further evidence of improvement of key indicators of student success, including retention and graduation rates.

## **Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment**

**Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their programs of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.**

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

### **Summary of Findings**

There is convincing evidence that demonstrates that Cal U's current assessment efforts meet the criteria of Standard V. While the Self-Study acknowledges that this is an ongoing and evolving culture, a number of systemic processes are now in place to ensure academic decision-making aligns with student learning outcome data.

All significant units of Cal U are involved with collecting and analyzing data points in support of overall goals and mission of the institution. Efforts to assess student learning outcomes include direct assessment of skills through writing, problem sets, exams, and portfolio evaluation as well as indirect measures such as survey results, grades, and measures of academic progress.

A well-developed Academic Program Assessment process appears to be in place. The institutional effectiveness leadership team developed a systemic, meaningful, useful, and efficient assessment process based on the Nicholson model of outcomes assessment. This fosters continuity of process and familiarity by users in academic and support units shaping the student experience. The Director for Institutional Effectiveness and the Associate Provost for Assessment and Accreditation collaborated widely on program development. Faculty and staff had the opportunity to assist with evaluating assessment management systems (Watermark / Livetext, SPOL, Nuventive / TracDat) and a consensus decision was made to utilize Nuventive.

Assessment of student learning is clearly faculty-owned and faculty-driven. A core set of faculty and administration are assessment-savvy, embrace the value of assessment, and work with others across Cal U to develop assessment activities and solidify a culture of assessment. The system

encourages self-reflection among participants and strives for continuous improvement. Program assessment coordinators provide leadership to implement meaningful, useful, and efficient program-level assessment.

The Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness office supports and reinforces implementation and documentation of improvement activities identified in assessment action plans. Feedback on the assessment process is provided through consultations as well as training and just-in-time aid.

The University's Institutional Effectiveness website provides assessment policies, procedures, resources, timelines, and a university-wide assessment model for strategic, academic, student affairs, and administrative areas. Resources include step-by-step procedures for completing each component of assessment plans, reports with exemplars from other universities, assessment guidebooks for academic and administrative units, and helpful assessment resources and links. These initiatives have occurred with the goal of constituting a comprehensive, useful and cost effective/efficient assessment system.

Two new associate dean positions created in the merged undergraduate colleges led to progress on two opportunities for improvement and innovation. First, this personnel enhancement better ensures that the General Education outcomes are more effectively communicated throughout the university and are widely used for institutional planning. Second, the associate deans work with the recently integrated Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness office to support and reinforce implementation and documentation of improvement activities identified in assessment action plans.

The annual assessment participation rate for academic programs was 90% for the 2019-20 annual assessment cycle, up 15% from the 2018-19 cycle. This increase occurred despite additional pressures on Cal U faculty stemming from the spring mid-semester lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of June 30, 2020, the participation rate of the initial (2019-20) cycle of the revised PASSHE program review process was 87 percent for the 15 academic program majors scheduled for review. A "Program Review Assessment Survey" was administered to participants (program coordinators, primary and secondary reviewers, and deans) in the program review process. Survey results led to elimination of a performance area and several performance criteria and improvements to the program review template and program review process. Survey responses also led to technical fixes on the program review template and inclusion of "Strategic Action Plan Funding Request" applications to the non-accredited and accredited program review templates.

## **Collegial Advice**

The team provides the following non-binding suggestions for improvement:

- Develop a funding model to further build and institutionalize assessment practices and solidify a culture of assessment. This includes applying assessment findings to improve educational effectiveness, align planning and budgeting, and improve key indicators of student success
- Provide more resources to support assessment at both general education and program levels
- Invite experts from outside of the institution to conduct academic program reviews at the five-year mark.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** none

## **Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement**

**The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.**

In the team's judgment, the institution does not appear to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

### General Findings

With awareness of significant plans for reorganization, including the merger of Cal U with one or more PASSHE schools in western Pennsylvania, the team assessed whether Cal U could stand on its own and institute improvements with current and projected human and financial resources. The team did not assess financial or other resource aspects of proposed PASSHE restructurings.

Although Cal U has processes and structures sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, as outlined below, the team concluded that Cal U did not appear to have sufficient financial resources, including cash flow, to continuously deliver and improve its programs and services and respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.

After nearly a decade of enrollment and financial challenge, which resulted in substantial cutbacks and belt tightening, Cal U is clear about its central and urgent imperative to achieve sustainable operations and safeguard its remaining fund balance reserves (Sustainability Plan 2, pdf 15, Executive Summary). Cal U operates in an environment that significantly burdens its ability to address resource needs and sustainably deliver on its mission.

External pressure from state directives and reduced funding, the severe Covid-related challenges, and regional decline in the pool of graduating high school students have exacerbated the financial stress. These are compounded by PASSHE tuition policy reforms that will heighten competition within the system.

Cal U is aware of these dynamics and demonstrates determination to sustain the institution. With financial and operational expertise and focus, Cal U has invested in recruitment strategies, broadened its target markets, reorganized departments and divisions, reshaped academic offerings, moved aggressively into online learning, sharply cut back non-personnel expenditures, and reduced staff.

Enrollment has continued to drop, however, and financial metrics, notably the ability to generate sufficient resources to meet institutional needs, show fragility and remain a fundamental and ongoing concern. Cal U's Comprehensive Planning Narrative (CPN), provided to PASSHE in early September 2020, forecasts continued declines in enrollment and employment and projects annual operating deficits in coming years.

In making its determination on this standard, the team acknowledges the CPN's two-year plan for financial sustainability, described below. The team agrees that this level of reform is proportional to the magnitude of financial insecurity and thus is necessary to achieve financial sustainability. The team concludes that the need for such drastic action is itself evidence of insufficient financial resources to support operations and deliver on mission to the degree expected by students, faculty, staff, alumni, and state taxpayers.

### Specific Findings

1. **Finances.** Cal U has faced its financial challenges with determination and vigor. Over the past several years, the institution reduced spending by \$7 million. Despite these efforts, according to financial data provided by Cal U, the Total Unrestricted Fund Balance declined \$2.3 million in FY 2019 (from \$27.9 million to \$25.6 million) and by an additional \$2.3 million in FY 2020 (to \$23.3 million), an overall two year decline of 16 percent in unrestricted assets.

Cal U's Comprehensive Planning Narrative (CPN, September 2020) outlines a two-year plan for financial sustainability, a time period dictated by PASSHE. The plan requires significant sacrifice and change. Specifically, the plan has three elements.

- i. "Rightsize"—reduce—faculty and staff ranks by 105 FTE (84 faculty and 21 staff). The magnitude of necessary contraction, which represents a reduction of 25 percent of the current workforce, is notable as it comes on top of a 13 percent reduction in FTE employment in the most recent three years, mostly borne by non-faculty staff.
- ii. Reduce academic offerings. Currently 30 undergraduate programs are under review for possible curtailment or elimination.
- iii. Establish and grow new programs in the next two to five years to meet market demand in the region and state. Among these are associate's programs in Unmanned Aerial Systems (drones) and Veterinary Technology; bachelor's programs in Veterinary Technology and Health Science; master's programs in Cybersecurity, Applied Mathematics, and Accountancy; and new doctoral programs in at the masters level; and doctoral programs in Health Science, Criminal Justice and Educational Leadership for Superintendents.

Cal U's most recent audit provided an unqualified opinion of the Cal U statements for the year ended June 30, 2019. The current forecast of the Unrestricted Budget shows total all-fund losses of \$5.7 million for FY 2021, \$174,000 for FY 2022 and \$1.6 million for FY 2023. The significant loss for FY 2021 reflects lost revenue due to COVID-19 and the related impact on housing, meal plans and other auxiliary revenue sources.

2. **Strategic Planning.** Cal U's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, "Charting Our Path," outlines five primary goals that pre-date the three goals of the 2020 CPN. Cal U has aligned its operations with these five goals. They are reflected in the overall Business Plans and Annual Reports and in Annual Action plans prepared by each division. The Strategic Plan Assessment Results indicate that as of the 2019 assessment period 54% of the goals of the plan were achieved (50 percent increase since 2017), 16% partially achieved (33 percent increase), and 30% not achieved (42 percent decrease). Alignment of goals and actions is strengthened by PASSHE requirements that institutions prepare an Annualized Five-Year Outlook on University Goals, which Cal U completed for AY 2019-20.
3. **Enrollment Management.** The Strategic Plan Assessment Snapshot prepared in fall of 2019 deems as a failure the Strategic Enrollment Plan developed in 2017 in consultation with Noel Levitz. The assessment indicated a 13 percent decline in enrollment over the

past 5 years, 27 percent since 2010. (Note that information from the interviews and the Sustainability Plan prepared for PASSHE put the FTE enrollment decline since 2010 at 35 percent, 17 percent in the past five years.) Cal U appointed its first Vice President for Enrollment Management in March of 2019. Under the vice president's leadership, Cal U is developing a new strategic enrollment plan. Although undergraduate FTE continues to fall, enrollment showed an increase in graduate FTE for fall of 2020. The new vice president brings expertise to assist faculty with marketing plans for new or reorganized programs.

4. **Budget.** Cal U uses a zero-based budget approach for resource allocation, rendering budgets for the current and next two fiscal years. The two main budget drivers are tuition and fees (75 percent of revenues) and state appropriations (23 percent) with the remaining 2 percent from donations or sales. Technology and lab fees generate resources for systems maintenance and software. A Tech Fee committee allocates any remaining resources for technology projects aligned with strategic priorities.

From 2016 to 2019, Cal U and other PASSHE institutions received part of their state funding allocation based on outcome-driven performance indicators. This program was discontinued in 2019 when PASSHE rolled the final year of funding award—\$3.35 million for Cal U—into base funding for future years.

Cal U uses a state-developed Functional Cost Tool to evaluate courses, programs, departments, and academic program viability and finalize resource allocations. The tool, training for which is provided to bargaining unit leaders and others, also evaluates faculty workload, student credit hours, and direct and indirect cost for Cal U and other PASSHE institutions. The University Budget and Planning Committee, a cross functional team of administrators, faculty, staff and students, discusses budgeting generally, although not at a time in the budget process to influence outcomes. The University Strategic Assessment Committee prioritizes surplus funding for new initiatives.

5. **Community Engagement in Planning and Budgeting.** Cal U relies on a shared governance system established in May 2014 to enable campus stakeholder and community participation in in planning and budgeting. Successful instances of community engagement include the Strategic Enrollment Planning effort, which involved 60 members of the campus community, and the process organized by Institutional Research to collaboratively choose assessment tools. During the virtual visit campus community members, including those on the Budgeting and Planning Council, expressed concerns about the scope, transparency and opportunities for meaningful engagement in strategic and financial planning.

6. **The Student Association, Incorporated (SAI).** SAI is a student-owned, student-run 501c3 legal entity. With the concurrence of the University President, the Student Congress and SAI Board of Directors determine the programs provided and an annual operating budget. The SAI manages several auxiliary enterprises of the institution, including Vulcan Village off-campus housing (rental income), fee-supported student activities and programs, and the University store. SAI coordinates and provides extracurricular programs, assists recognized student clubs and organizations, maintains a recreation park, and provides financial operating and scholarship support to the University's athletic programs.

Because the economic resources received and held by SAI are for the direct benefit of Cal U and because of the influence of Cal U over SAI, SAI is listed in Cal U's audited financial statements as a "component unit" of the University and is included within the University's financial reporting entity. In FY19, SAI, which also receives donations, generated \$1.2 million in net income. The SAI once owned six additional on-campus residence halls. Due to SAI's inability to meet its debt covenants for the six buildings, it could not to refinance the properties. Cal U purchased the six residence halls from SAI in 2016.

7. **Human Resources.** Financial and Human Resource systems are managed by the state and are common to all PASSHE institutions. PASSHE is currently moving its institutions to a cloud-based Student Information System.
8. **Facilities.** Cal U's Campus Master Plan was completed in July 2019. The renovation of existing space and construction of new facilities are consistent with the Campus Master Plan.

Cal U is reducing its facilities footprint by approximately 200,000 sq. ft. in line with the reduction in student enrollment. It plans to demolish four buildings beginning in fall 2021 and repurpose a residence hall, one of the six purchased from SAI, as administrative space for faculty and staff relocated by the demolition. A new Science Center is currently in design. Two additional buildings will be demolished when the new Science Building is completed. Cal U recognizes the imperative to enroll a sufficient number of students to support the expense of maintaining these new and renovated facilities.

9. **Sustainable Energy.** As evidenced by its nationally recognized geothermally heated and cooled residence halls, Cal U is a leader in energy efficiency within PASSHE. In 2018, Cal U led PASSHE institutions with the lowest central plant fuel costs and commitment to sustainable best energy practices.

## **Collegial Advice**

The team provides the following non-binding suggestions for improvement:

- The team suggests that Cal U improve documentation of the feedback loop for financial planning and disbursement of division and departmental budgets, assess the feedback from the enhanced documentation, and, in the spirit of continuous improvement, regularly update the planning and budget processes.
- The team suggests that Cal U leverage the university-wide Tuition Pricing Task Force to assist in the development of pricing models for undergraduate and graduate students and for high demand and/or highly expensive degree programs.
- The team suggest that Cal U share with a wider audience the context and methods for analyzing department viability and return on investment as it develops an optimum mix of undergraduate and graduate degree programs.
- The team suggests that Cal U consider improvements to its engagement of and communication to campus constituents in financial assessment and decision processes to increase understanding and buy in for budget allocations. Given that execution of the Comprehensive Plan Narrative is necessary for financial sustainability of the institution, the team urges Cal U to consider a full and robust conversation with campus stakeholders about the goals and actions of the plan.

**Recommendations:** none

**Requirements:** The institution must demonstrate the sufficiency of resources to fulfill its mission and goals and to support its educational purposes and programs.

### **Recognition of Accomplishments, Progress, or Exemplary/Innovative Practices:**

The Team commends Cal U on its successful two-year pilot program offering tuition at the current Military Tuition Assistance (TA) reimbursement rate for all active duty military and their dependent spouses. The program significantly exceeded enrollment and financial revenue goals.

## **Standard VII - Governance, Leadership, and Administration**

**The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.**

In the Team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies to validate and verify compliance during the on-site evaluation visit, the team draws the following conclusions relative to this standard.

### **Summary of Findings**

The PASSHE governance structure and the general powers of the governing personnel are codified in Acts of the Pennsylvania Legislature. One of 14 universities in PASSHE, Cal U is governed by the State System Board of Governors and the Cal U Council of Trustees (COT).

The COT has 11 members appointed by the Governor and approved by the Pennsylvania Senate. At least two trustees must be alumni of the institution and one member must be a full-time undergraduate student in good standing. One trustee is elected chairperson. Trustees are subject to the Pennsylvania Public Official and Public Employee State Ethics Act and must be free from political, financial, and other influences that could interfere with governance responsibilities to Cal U. Trustees periodically perform a self-evaluation survey.

The team heard mixed assessments on the role and significance of the COT. Some see the COT as important for promoting Cal U in the local community and vetting proposals and concerns of Cal U faculty, staff and administration. Others depict the COT as an immaterial entity to receive reports and selected information from administration. The team learned from the COT that it had little input on PASSHE system redesign and was more apt to receive information and reports on Cal U business and operations than to shape them. The trustees articulated their role more as advocates for Cal U than as stewards and fiduciary overseers of the institution. The team could not establish that trustees felt ultimately accountable for the "academic quality, planning and fiscal wellbeing of the institution," as stated in accreditation standards. One trustee offered in the periodic self-assessment that, "I really don't think the Council is used effectively [...] we are well educated individuals with years of experience in many areas that can be useful to the administration, and we are rarely called upon for help."

Geraldine M. Jones was appointed Cal U's seventh president in April 2016 after having previously served the University for more than four decades as faculty member, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, Provost, and Interim President. President Jones has the authority, as outlined in Acts of the Legislature, to make and implement campus policies on instructional, research, and public service programs. The president also has authority to define academic standards in accordance with policies of the Board of Governors following consultation with the Council of Trustees, faculty, and students. The President has an annual performance review conducted by the Council of Trustees (pending due to her announced retirement), which also conducts a more extensive triennial review with assistance of an outside consultant appointed by the PASSHE Chancellor. Under the president's leadership, Cal U hired its first Vice President for Enrollment Management, prepared a Strategic Enrollment Plan, and developed new academic degree and certificate programs.

Cal U has six cabinet divisions headed by vice presidents for Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Finance and Administration, Enrollment Management, Communications and Marketing, and University Development and Alumni Relations.

#### Shared Governance

Four representative on-campus bodies—the President's Cabinet, Student Government, the local APSCUF branch of the state faculty union, and the Staff Leadership Council (leaders from non-represented managers and four staff unions)—play a role in campus governance. Other important groups include the College Councils, chaired by each College Dean and the University Curriculum Committee. The Faculty Senate, while not part of the formal governance system, has input on a variety of issues.

For the better part of a decade, Cal U has experimented with initiatives to improve campus shared governance. In 2000, the COT created the Cal U Forum "to enable greater participation in the decision-making process of the University for faculty members, students, administrators, staff and alumni." The 2010 MSCHE Visiting Team recommended additional initiatives to make the Forum more effective.

In dissolving the Forum in 2013, the Council of Trustees noted "the lack of effectiveness of the Forum" and "the requirement that the institution establish an effective system of shared governance." A President's Task Force on Shared Governance, which met from November 2013 to May 2014, prepared a new shared governance plan, which trustees approved in 2015, around the time that a MSCHE team recommended in Cal U's 2015 PPR that the University take "steps to strengthen shared governance."

Data from a 2018-19 AAUP Governance Survey, completed by 188 Cal U faculty and staff, revealed ongoing concerns about the atmosphere of trust for good faith negotiations and

communications among university constituents, the lack of sufficient time for faculty leadership to consider and provide input on administration decisions, and timely access to information on governance processes. Administrators suggested to the team that such concerns were of a time and would not likely be repeated today.

In 2020, the recently appointed Interim Provost established a new Limited Shared Governance Task Force. A key goal of the task force is to address concerns about effective and consistent means for soliciting stakeholder feedback or reviewing change. In virtual interviews, members of the task force expressed optimism about improving communication and trust between the administration and constituent entities at Cal U. That optimism was reflected as a desire to “get something started” and a focus on “solutions- based” conversations. Newly established committees including the University Strategic Assessment Committee (USAC) and the Budget and Planning Committee also bolstered the optimism about improved communication and trust around shared governance at Cal U. Through the collective bargaining agreement, labor unions may bring an agenda of topics to “meet and discuss” with administrators. Cal U is currently considering creation of an integrated governance body such as a University Senate.

The team acknowledges the institution’s Shared Governance Website, which includes a definition and history of shared governance at Cal U, the current model of shared governance, the basic principles of shared governance, and links to relevant reports and committees.

Notwithstanding these efforts, the team heard a consistent expression of concern from faculty, staff, students, and town leaders about the level and timeliness of consultation on matters of broad significance. Among examples were the decision to collapse three academic divisions to two and reduce departments from 22 to 11, PASSHE system redesign, and the lockdown browser to take exams. Faculty with whom the team spoke do not believe they have a meaningful role in institutional governance, with some lamenting that big changes are often announced without consultation. Students perceive only modest opportunity for input and voice in existing governance channels and report no formal process in which the Student Government Association has a vote on University issues. The University Curriculum Committee, for example, has no student members. Borough officials felt “blindsided” by decisions at Cal U that affect Borough interests.

### **Collegial Advice**

The team provides the following non-binding suggestions for improvement:

- The team supports Cal U’s consideration of a strategic-level integrated governance group to deliberate university-wide issues. Such an integrative governance structure may become increasingly important as PASSHE deliberates proposals for organizational change.

- Cal U may wish to consider the feasibility of embedding analytics into the Shared Governance Website to collect data concerning the effectiveness of its shared governance model.
- Cal U should consider adding a non-voting student member to the University Curriculum Committee

### **Recommendations**

- The institution should provide further evidence of a clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities and accountability for decision-making by each constituency.
- The institution should provide further evidence of systematic procedures for evaluating administrative units and for using assessment data to enhance operations.
- The institution should provide further evidence of periodic assessment of the effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration

**Requirements:** none

### *Section D: Requirements of Affiliation*

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet all of the Requirements of Affiliation based on a review of the Self-Study report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies.

### *Section E: Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Compliance Requirements*

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet all accreditation-relevant federal compliance requirements. This judgment is based on a review of the Institutional Federal Compliance Report, evidence, and interviews with campus constituencies.

### *Section F: Verification of Student Achievement Data and Institutional Data*

#### **I) Student Achievement Data**

In the team's judgment, the institution's approach to implementing its student achievement goals appears to be effective, consonant with higher education expectations, and consistent with the institution's mission. This judgment is based on a review of the institution's student achievement information provided in the Self-Study report, evidence, interviews with campus constituencies, and the student achievement URL available on its website.

In addition, in the team's judgment, the student achievement information data that Cal U discloses to the public appear to be reasonably valid and accurate in light of other data and information reviewed by the team.

Cal U has implemented multiple intra-disciplinary practices and processes to enhance students' persistence to the degree. Their efforts are in keeping with best practices utilized across U.S. institutions of higher education.

#### **II) Institutional Data**

Following analysis of materials provided and interviews with campus professional staff, in the team's judgment, the institution's processes and procedures for verifying institutional data appear to be reasonably valid and effective, and consistent with best practices in higher education.

## ***Section G: Review of Third-Party Comments***

No third party comments were received.

## ***Section H: List of Additional Evidence***

The team requested and received nine documents in the course of the virtual visit:

1. SAI Audit
2. Foundation Audit
3. CLA Management Letter
4. Goals document and projections
5. 2018-19 Performance Funding Results
6. 2 Audit Letters
7. 2017-18 Performance Funding Memo and results master document
8. Third (September 4th) version of Cal U's PASSHE Sustainability Plan
9. Revised APSCUF Collective Bargaining Agreement

## ***Section I: Self-Study Report and Process Comments***

The team commends Cal U for its impressive Self-Study process and products. The report is clear and insight-filled and the evidence inventory is voluminous. At each stage—and there have been several stages given COVID—Cal U has provided abundant information and documentation to tell its story and reflect its strengths and areas for improvement.

Equally impressive is how Cal U has leveraged the Middle States process, especially in the past three years, to make measurable improvements in areas subject to the standards. Perhaps none is more impressive than design and implementation of a robust and still-maturing assessment program. The team applauds how diligently the campus dedicated itself and how that diligence has led to insights and culture change.

The team thanks members of the Cal U community for their serious self-reflection, and for the candor, openness and thoughtfulness brought to the evaluation process. Cal U held up a mirror to the institution, welcoming fresh eyes and providing opportunities for frank input from campus constituents. In all these ways, Cal U demonstrated its commitment to at once celebrate and improve the institution. This makes it a role model for institutional hosts.