

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT**

To: Fresno Pacific University

Date of Visit
March 13 - 15, 2024

Team Roster

Team Chair: Michael Beals, President, Vanguard University
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Team Members:

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The team evaluated the institution under the **2013** Handbook and Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

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

Fresno Pacific University (FPU) began as an educational extension of The Mennonite Brethren Church in 1941 and was founded in Fresno, California as Pacific Bible Institute in 1944. The Bible Institute was granted accreditation as a two-year institution by WASC in 1948. With the addition of a liberal arts curriculum to the biblical studies core, accreditation as a four-year liberal arts institution was granted by WASC in 1963, concurrent with a change of name to Pacific College. For the next 30 years, enrollment demographics and academic programs expanded until the College changed its name to Fresno Pacific University in 1997. In addition to the 50-plus acre main campus in Fresno, regional campuses were added across the San Joaquin Valley in the 2000s. In 2008, the Department of Education designated FPU as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Dr. Joseph Jones served as president from July 2017 to June 2022 and Dr Andre Stephen has served from July 2022 to the present.

The mission statement of FPU reads: “Fresno Pacific University develops students for leadership and service through excellence in Christian higher education.” That mission is manifested through a foundational commitment to ‘The Fresno Pacific Idea’ which “commits it to be: 1) a Christian university dedicated to God's Kingdom and to the perspective of the liberal arts which integrates faith, learning, and action; 2) a community of learners that recognizes learning is the result of interaction between persons, ideas and experiences; and 3) a prophetic witness to serve the church and society.”

Previous Accreditation Interactions

Fresno Pacific has been continuously accredited since 1963. Recent interactions since 2013 have included a Capacity and Preparatory Review team visit (2013) followed by an Educational Effectiveness Review team visit (2015) and a Special Visit (2018). Common themes for improvement from these visits included communication, strategic planning and processes for decision-making. In the 2015 visit fiscal stability was also identified as an area for improvement and the 2018 Special Visit focused on improvements in diversity, systematized decision-making,

and clearer communication channels. The institution was reaccredited in 2022 for 8 years, with a Special Visit scheduled in 2024 which is the subject of this report, and the next full Accreditation Visit scheduled in 2030 (Offsite Review in Fall 2029).

The Spring 2024 Special Visit addressed the following items:

- a. Issue 1: Accelerated progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion
- b. Issue 2: Program Review Processes
- c. Issue 3: Faculty's collective responsibility for assessment

B. Description of Team's Review Process

The Special Visit team for Fresno Pacific conducted two zoom calls in preparation for the Special Visit on March 13 – 15, 2024. The first team meeting occurred on February 13, 2024, and covered the Special Visit process, team assignments, the team worksheet and a draft of the Special Visit schedule. Before the team conference call, the team reviewed the FPU Special Visit Report and filled out the SV Team worksheet for each of their areas. The assistant chair compiled the team's feedback into a composite worksheet for the team to review during the conference call. The second team meeting occurred during the week of the Special Visit on March 12, 2024. During the second team meeting, the team confirmed writing assignments and the visit schedule, reviewed evidence, and identified additional materials that were needed by the team in preparation for the visit.

The Special Visit was conducted March 13 – 15, 2024. The team was able to meet with the following individuals/groups for interviews during their visit: President Stephens, the Interim VP of Academic Affairs and Provost, the President's Cabinet, the University Diversity Committee and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Staff, Data Standards and Systems Use Committee (DSSU), the Assessment and Program Review Taskforce (APRT), the Faculty Senate, and FPU students. The assistant chair monitored the confidential email account and requested additional documentation from the institution to be reviewed during the visit including the History Department Program Review documentation, Annual Assessment Reports (AARs), the new Program Review Template, and the membership roster for the President's Cabinet and the University Diversity Committee.

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

The report was organized and thorough. It was written in a clear and direct style and presented in the format appropriate to WSCUC guidelines, including CFR citations. The Special Visit Report provided an accurate portrayal of conditions observed by the team. Both the Special Visit Report and onsite interviews across the various groups demonstrated candor in areas of strength and of challenge. Representatives of faculty, staff, and administration participated in the processes of review and report preparation. After initial discussions between the former Provost, the associate Provost/ALO, and the Faculty Senate chairperson, the Faculty Senate was engaged in deliberation on Issue 2: the program review process, and Issue 3: faculty responsibility for assessment. It is important to note that, in the nomenclature of Fresno Pacific University, the term Faculty Senate is used to denote the faculty as a whole. Each issue under consideration in the special report demonstrated rigorous inquiry and evidence of searching questions, appropriate methodology, and the effective use of evidence. This effective analysis of evidence was validated by the findings of alignment by the team during the onsite visit.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

Issue 1: Accelerated progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion

In the FPU Spring 2022 Team Report, the team concluded with the recommendation that FPU “accelerate progress on key issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion; with the participation of the full range of campus stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees, Executive Leadership, Administration, Faculty, Staff and Students” and that accelerated progress should involve (a) finalizing the institution-wide definition of DEI and ensuring that this definition is consistent with FPU’s mission and purpose; (b) aligning the DEI plan with the institution-wide definition and seeing that appropriate DEI leadership, accountability and infrastructure are put in place; and (c) defining the

responsibilities, authority and reporting relationships of the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) and operationalizing the CDO job description according to the campus' DEI plan.

This concluding recommendation resulted from the team's observations of and concerns about "a fractured approach" to DEI and the resulting impacts on matters of communication, trust and transparency; the nature of DEI arrangements at the time fostering "turf wars" over implementing DEI initiatives; and deepening a conflict-ridden dynamic that pitted faculty against the administration over FPU's DEI priorities and the tactics used to advance these priorities (p.40 of 2022 Report). The role of the Chief Diversity Officer was highlighted in the 2022 Team Report, with questions raised about this role, who this position was to report to, and how the CDO was to interact with and relate to the University Diversity Committee and Human Resources in terms of roles and institutional authority (p.9 & 39 of 2022 Report). Conflict and uncertainty over the role and direction of the CDO pointed to the absence of "a strong and recognizable accountability system for DEI at FPU" (p.41 of 2022 Report) and that accountability in the DEI context ought to be better planned, more systematic and structured.

Since the 2022 Team Report, and as reflected in FPU's 2024 Special Visit Report, the campus' progress on DEI has been mixed. To their credit, FPU has strengthened its University Diversity Committee (UDC). The UDC is now codified in the Faculty Handbook and it has been restructured for greater participation from not only faculty, but from staff, administrators, and students as well. An Executive Committee within the larger group sets the DEI agenda and coordinates activity and the UDC has developed a 5-year University Diversity Plan (2020-25) with six long-term goals. Each of these goals have success indicators in addition to a "goal shepherd" who is responsible for oversight of their goal. These goal shepherds monitor progress towards the goals while reporting this progress back to the larger group. At the end of each academic year, the subcommittee for each goal submits an annual report outlining accomplishments and limitations related to the goal. A review of these annual DEI progress reports is highly encouraging, demonstrating FPU advancing DEI along multiple lines—all within a structure that promotes broadened participation, coordination, accountability and regular reporting.

Unfortunately, the campus has yet to hire a Chief Diversity Officer, a role that serves as the center of the FPU DEI strategy. The CDO role will take the form of an Associate Provost of Engagement and Inclusive Teaching and Learning who will report directly to the Provost and sit on the President's Cabinet. This position title and reporting relationship signals an explicit shift of DEI focus toward the classroom and the curriculum. It brings students' academic experience to the center, with the goal "to champion the values of diversity, equity, belonging, and justice by actively engaging faculty, staff, and students across the five FPU campuses" by expanding outwards from the classroom (p.10 of FPU Special Visit Report). FPU anticipated filling this Associate Provost position in Spring 2024, but the search did not result in a hire.

The team acknowledges the importance of the new Associate Provost of Engagement and Inclusive Teaching and Learning's academic focus, as reflected in the position title and reporting relationship to the Provost. The Team recognizes that, from this teaching and learning-centric base, the shape of the DEI work to come will be determined by questions of student learning and the classroom experience. The Team would, however, ask about the role of students' co-curricular experiences. It did not become clear, in documents and interviews, how these two aspects—the curricular and co-curricular—will be integrated under an Associate Provost tasked with concentrating on the classroom. The Team asks how such a concentration might constrain a unified effort to address the totality of the student experience and effectively bring to bear the full resources of the institution—beyond those directly involved in the classroom—to advance FPU's DEI goals.

With this in mind, the Team draws attention to the President in the context of a second round of recruiting for an Associate Provost of Engagement and Inclusive Teaching and Learning and as the job description continues to be reviewed. The Team was encouraged by clear and unambiguous statements by the President that he is "the anchor" for DEI at FPU and that he has final institutional responsibility for this important work. With this in view, the President ought to be sensitive to—and be prepared to influence—the relationship between the new Associate Provost and the University Diversity Committee. This relationship, primarily because the Associate Provost position is still unoccupied, was not clear to the team. Will the Associate Provost and the UDC stand as peers in the decision-

making process? Or will ultimate decision-making power rest with one, or the other—or with the Provost, or perhaps the President? And what, exactly, is the role of the Faculty Senate in this mix? The President has already led noticeable changes in the campus climate since the 2022 reaccreditation visit. A larger and rejuvenated Cabinet has been established and this Cabinet is self-aware as to the institution being in a different place than it was in 2022. Across multiple stakeholder groups, there is a stated sense of hopefulness, a more emboldened and anticipative mood. The President has been instrumental in creating this fresh ethos that balances awareness of the difficulty of the work with the sentiment that FPU is turning the corner and increasingly able to reach its goals. This was reflected in meetings not only with faculty, staff and administrators but with students as well. A variety of DEI-related concerns were shared when the Team held an open session for students during the 2022 reaccreditation visit. At the March 2024 Special Visit, the team met with a diverse group of students once again, and the level of satisfaction expressed was markedly improved. The students were generally satisfied with FPU's diversity efforts and when asked if they feel safe at FPU, the answer was in the affirmative. It is upon this groundwork of transforming campus climate and culture that the President may build during the transitions to come. In the coming year, FPU is expected to hire both a new Provost and a Chief Diversity Officer (Associate Provost of Engagement and Inclusive Teaching and Learning). The President has a foundational opportunity to clarify the scope and expectations regarding DEI that are essential to the responsibilities and working relationship of a new Provost and a new Associate Provost as they further the demonstrated institution-wide commitment to progress.

Issue 2: Program Review Process

The Spring 2022 Team Report concluded that FPU's program review process should be evaluated to address: (a) faculty partnership in the development of program review documentation, guides, and templates; (b) review of the data included in the program review process to ensure that it is relevant, accurate, and has integrity; (c) oversight and accountability structures that ensure the implementation of the program review cycle, including programs participation in and completion of their review in the prescribed time frame. With regards to the first of

these three points, the Team wrote, “The first and most important is the degree of collective faculty ownership, responsibility and participation in quality assurance processes at FPU. Moving forward on these matters, faculty should consider codifying their increased ownership of and involvement in quality assurance processes such as program review and assessment through modifications to the Faculty Handbook.” Building on this point, the Team emphasized that as FPU addressed faculty ownership of the program review process and that this ownership must be rooted in a learning and improvement mindset as opposed to a “compliance mindset” (p.7 of 2022 Team Report) and that reflections on program review results be grounded in “a deep understanding” (p.6 of 2022 Team Report) of the issues as opposed to a shallow one. Finally, there was the issue of data quality and integrity: “...the usefulness of the structure of the program review templates and the quality and integrity of the data provided within the template not matching with the lived reality of the faculty in the program” (p.13 of 2022 Team Report). The fact that the data provided was questionable in its relevance, accuracy and integrity led to a mistrust of institutional student data across multiple stakeholder groups (p.25 of 2022 Team Report).

In their 2024 Special Visit Report, FPU detailed the Fall 2022 establishment of the Assessment and Program Review Taskforce (APRT), which was changed with directly addressing the recommendations in the July 2022 WSCUC action letter. Three subcommittees were formed: one on systemic changes to the program review process that emphasize faculty participation/ownership and accountability; another on surveying the faculty to evaluate current supports and to identify additional support needed in the program review process; and a third on making changes to the Faculty Handbook related to program review. This work of this third subcommittee led to new language in the Faculty Handbook “that clarifies faculty participation/ownership of the program review process through the University Assessment Committee and clarifies program director accountability to the program review process” (p.12 of Special Visit Report). The work from the other subcommittees have resulted in ownership of the University Assessment Committee from the Provost’s Office to the Faculty Senate, among other changes towards responding to WSCUC’s recommendations.

FPU's 2024 Special Visit report also included a description of the creation of the Program Review Cohort Initiative (PRCI). Aimed at supporting academic program directors as they worked through the program review process, the PRCI employs a cohort model in which teams of faculty directors partner with Deans, the Directors of Institutional Research and Assessment, and Institutional Research and Institutional Effectiveness staff to engage in the work. This cohort model—through its shared experience—was meant to create a sense of collaboration and community over program review.

During the 2024 Special Visit, the team found the PRCI to have been one of the most impactful changes towards advancing program review. The cohort model had indeed created a sense of community for the programs involved, resulting in all overdue reviews being completed by the time of our visit. In our meeting with the Faculty Senate, the group pointed to the PRCI as transformative. The faculty also highlighted the following as important to strengthening program review:

- a streamlining of the process leading to a shortened timeline, improved data elements and tables to respond to, and fewer “checkpoints”;
- a reconfigured template for program reviews based on faculty feedback;
- ongoing campus efforts to address issues of data quality and integrity;
- the new language on program review added to the Faculty Handbook; and
- moving the University Assessment Committee from under the Provost's Office to under the Faculty Senate.

These changes resulted in increased faculty engagement as the work became more collaborative, meaningful and useful (and frankly, less painful). Beyond these details of program review, the effects of new campus leadership have also played a role: across multiple stakeholder groups, there is a new sense of hopefulness and trust stemming from greater transparency, openness and communication. This has nourished a feeling of empowerment among the faculty and staff. FPU's commendation around program review is well deserved, as is recognition of the President's role in shaping an enabling and supportive campus climate and culture.

While changes to the program review process are solidly underway, evaluation and improvement of issues of data quality and integrity are just now emerging. As noted in their 2024 Special Visit Report, FPU has recently created a structure for addressing these issues; a Data Standards and Systems Use Committee (DSSU) has been formed and consists of three subgroups, the Data Standards Group, the Systems Use Group, and the Oversight Group. The Oversight Group is a coordinating body while the other two subgroups have a narrower scope (i.e., the student information system and data used to measure institutional health and software platforms that ensure the appropriate flow of data and information). In a meeting with the team and the DSSU, it was acknowledged that this work centered on institutional data and data systems was in a “start-up” phase, a phase characterized by planning, organizing, staffing and the like. When asked about the long-term goals of the DSSU, in particular when the group will have reached a steady state marked by more routinization, predictability, monitoring and evaluation that reflects a more evolved state, there was not an immediate consensus. Through conversation, the group arrived at the conclusion that this steady state should be achieved in about two years.

Given the importance of data quality and integrity to the program review process, and given that the DSSU is in the beginning stages of this work, it will be important to track progress on the capability of data-informed decision making in program review and other relevant areas. This is especially the case if FPU intends on a holistic, encompassing approach that moves beyond the technical details to consider systems, processes, people and organizational culture.

Issue 3: Faculty collective responsibility for assessment

In the July 11, 2022, Commission action letter, the Commission recommended that FPU faculty take collective responsibility for establishing appropriate standards of performance and demonstrate systematic assessment of the achievement of these standards, with special attention to the following areas: a.) clarification of assessment oversight and accountability structures that ensure Faculty demonstrate ownership of assessment; b.) the review of data included in the assessment process to ensure its relevancy, accuracy, and integrity; c.) the

appropriate training of Faculty on the use of the assessment management system; and d.) the development and implementation of an appropriate assessment plan that ensures sufficient assessment data is available for use in ongoing quality assurance activities and periodic program review.

The team observed that the institution has made considerable progress in the area of faculty ownership and accountability for assessment and program review. Specifically, to address the issues raised in the 2022 team report regarding the faculty not having collective responsibility for assessment, the Assessment and Program Review Taskforce (APRT) proposed changes to the existing Assessment Committee that included moving committee ownership from the Academic Cabinet to the Faculty Senate; shifting the Assessment Committee's leadership from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) to co-leadership between Faculty and OIE and changing the development of program review documentation, guides, and templates from OIE to the Assessment Committee which now has faculty representation from all five schools. The institution also updated the language of the faculty handbook to explicitly state faculty expectations for assessment and program review. During the 2024 Special Visit, members of the faculty senate expressed optimism about the assessment committee moving under the purview of the Faculty Senate citing that they have always wanted to have ownership of the assessment process and the responsibility to ensure that student learning standards were being met. Several faculty members mentioned a shift in the institutional culture regarding assessment and program review in that faculty no longer felt that they were in silos and felt much more comfortable working with each other and in partnership with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The discussion with the Assessment and Program Review Taskforce (APRT) conveyed a similar sentiment regarding the overall satisfaction with the increased involvement of faculty in the assessment and program review processes. Members of APRT expressed that their goal was to make assessment more faculty-centered and to emphasize collaboration with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and the Provost Office. It was clear to the team that the creation of APRT helped to close the gap of lack of faculty involvement in assessment that was apparent during the 2022 accreditation visit. The APRT also discussed the revision of the assessment report templates, which is still in progress, as being a more collaborative process between faculty and OIE. There was an emphasis on

training being provided, both in terms of the use of data and templates and in terms of the overall process for assessment from members of the Assessment Committee during the team visit. Several members of the Assessment Committee were returning members who expressed commitment to continuous improvement of the assessment of student learning at FPU. Faculty members also highlighted one of the benefits of the APRT restructuring was the enhanced training of their colleagues on the assessment process and the use of rubrics and data.

It was clear to the team that the faculty at FPU are excited and fully engaged in the assessment process. While the institution is continuing to gain momentum in the accurate tracking, storing, and reporting of data, the partnering of these initiatives with the assessment committee will be key in the future to ensure data integrity.

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

1. FPU has shown considerable progress on faculty engagement and ownership of the assessment process.
2. Through the development of the Program Review Cohort model, FPU has increased faculty involvement and engagement in the program review process while encouraging faculty development through peer learning.

Recommendations

1. As the university completes the hiring of a chief diversity officer, ensure institution-wide engagement that unifies curricular and co-curricular efforts to shape FPU's culture of diversity. (CFR 1.4)
2. Recognizing that work has begun in earnest on processes, systems, and structures that ensure data integrity, FPU should sustain progress on matters of reliable and useful data to support effective decision-making. (CFR 4.2)