TABLE OF CONTENTS
1. Introduction
2. Vision and Mission
3. The University’s History and Today’s Context
4. Long-Term Goals
5. 2018 Strategic Priorities
6. Planning Process: Implementation and Assessment
7. Summary and Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

As Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) readies itself to launch two new degree programs, this strategic plan aims to lay out a roadmap that the University will follow through 2018. To that end, we reaffirmed and interpreted the University’s mission in today’s context, carefully teased out its core values and long-term goals, and identified the most critical objectives we want to achieve. These exercises, which involved the entire University community, were part of an intensive and searching self-study process that has helped to inform our choice of a proposed pathway toward ultimately realizing the University’s long-term vision and goals.

This document will also help to illustrate the University’s planning process; we will briefly describe how trustees and the faculty of DRBU will implement the 2018 Plan and how DRBU will evaluate its own effectiveness using criteria and indicators the trustees and the faculty set up. Like other documents of its kind, DRBU’s 2018 Strategic Plan is iterative and dynamic—and subject to minor revisions as we monitor and assess its progress along the proposed pathway amid a changing external environment.

2. VISION AND MISSION

The mission of DRBU is to provide liberal education in the broad Buddhist tradition—a tradition characterized by knowledge in the arts and sciences, self-cultivation, and the pursuit of wisdom. Its pedagogical aim is thus twofold: to convey knowledge and to activate an intrinsic wisdom possessed by all individuals. Developing this inherent capacity requires an orientation toward learning that is dialogical, interactive, probing, and deeply self-reflective. Such education aims to make students free in the deepest sense and to open the opportunity to pursue the highest goals of human existence.

The founding of DRBU is based on the ideal that all individuals possess a latent knowledge of ultimate things and that education serves as a catalyst that helps precipitate and release that knowledge into consciousness. Therefore, at its best, liberal education properly conducted does not indoctrinate, but simply disentangles. At DRBU, this ideal manifests itself in a deep engagement with primary texts from both East and West and an orthopraxic approach to learning. This engagement and approach provides students with the tools to gain understanding of themselves and the world around them and to kindle the desire to pursue a lifelong inquiry into the abiding questions of human existence. We entrust students with the responsibility for...
their own learning because ultimately it is up to each individual to activate his or her own inherent capacity for an expansive and penetrating wisdom.

We are confident that this type of serious learning fosters sharp analysis, sound judgment, and informed choices—essential qualities for becoming active, responsible, and reflective citizens of the world. More importantly, students develop a nimble responsiveness to shifting possibilities in an ever-changing and increasingly complex world—a flexibility to constantly assess new and evolving conditions, both of the external world and within themselves. Accordingly, they can reconsider, adjust, alter, or even abandon their course or stance. This flexibility sustains the students’ lifelong learning and growth.

Dharma Realm Buddhist University, therefore, has the capacity to develop into a leading institution of its kind—a teaching university that provides an integrated liberal education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels centered around the probing examination of classical primary texts from both Buddhist and other traditions. We strive to form a community of students, faculty, staff, and trustees united in an earnest and active pursuit of wisdom, where careful listening, deep self-introspection, a sense of personal responsibility, candid and skillful communications, and kind regard and respect for oneself, others, and the environment are valued and practiced by all members and extended to all facets of campus life.

3. HISTORY AND TODAY’S CONTEXT

Under the direction of founder Master Hsüan Hua, Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA), a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, established Dharma Realm Buddhist University in 1976 to help advance DRBA’s educational mission. Between 1977 and 1984, DRBU operated with the Authorization status granted by the California Postsecondary Education Commission. DRBU obtained State of California Approval in 1984 in Buddhist Study and Practice (BA, MA, and PhD), Buddhist Education (MA), Chinese Studies (BA), and Translation of Buddhist Texts (BA, MA, and PhD).

DRBU has maintained State approval in these three areas since then with two significant changes: in 1994, the University terminated its doctoral-level degree programs to focus on being a teaching institution, and it renamed its Translation of Buddhist Texts programs to Translation and Language Studies.

In 2010, the DRBU community began an intense self-study with an aim to reaffirm and interpret the University’s mission and to lay out a roadmap that DRBU will follow to realize its long-term educational vision. The creation of two new academic programs and a strong commitment to attain WASC accreditation are a result of this self-study. DRBU submitted an application to the California Bureau of Private Postsecondary Education in May 2012 to add these two programs, and DRBU plans to complete its WASC eligibility application in Spring 2013.

Currently, in addition to our main activities of planning and implementing our two new programs, DRBU continues to offer academic and general interest classes to a small number of degree students and others in the community. DRBU plans to sunset our six existing degree programs after all currently enrolled students complete their studies.
The timing of DRBU’s self-study seems to coincide with much reflection that is taking place within higher education. Uncertainties and changes both in the external environment and within higher education have brought about challenges and opportunities. These challenges include an increasing demand for accountability and transparency in student learning from government and the general public; changing student demographics; a stagnant and recessive economic landscape; and new patterns and methods of participation such as online courses. WASC itself is undergoing some changes and implementing new processes and policies for accreditation that will go into effect in the summer of 2013. One of the key areas that institutions will focus on under the new accreditation process is articulating the meaning, quality, and integrity of their degrees. We believe that through our self-study we have examined this focus area carefully and thoroughly and are therefore well equipped to address it.

Part of the task of assessing the external environment for us is to study our peer institutions, such as St. John’s College (MD and NM), Thomas Aquinas College (CA), and St. Mary’s College’s Integral Program (CA), which offer integrated liberal education centered around the reading and discussing of classical texts. We have been encouraged to discover that through much of the changes in and around higher education, these institutions continue not only to attract students to their programs, but to thrive in terms of development of students’ basic intellectual skills and student retention and graduation rates. We look forward to joining the ranks of these institutions while bringing something new to the table: close reading of Eastern classical texts and the blending of texts East and West in an integrated liberal arts curriculum. We think DRBU, with these unique aspects to our programs, will help to expand the niche of institutions providing text-centered integrated liberal education to meet the growing interest in Eastern cultures, traditions, and languages.

Figure 1: History of DRBU
4. LONG-TERM GOALS

Looking further down the road, DRBU strives to become a leading teaching university that provides an integrated liberal education at both the undergraduate and graduate level. This liberal education will remain centered around the probing examination of classical primary texts from the East and West, including those from the broad Buddhist tradition. The University will grow to its capacity of 350 residential undergraduate students in Liberal Arts and 100 graduate students in Buddhist Classics while maintaining the best possible educational experience supported by the appropriate level of administrative, facility, and financial resources.

Figure 2: Projected Student Growth

Realizing this long-term vision requires careful planning and laying out clear near-term strategic priorities. The following section will describe those priorities through 2018.

5. 2018 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

DRBU’s 2018 Plan has four strategic priorities:

1. Obtain WASC candidacy
2. Implement academic programs
3. Recruit and retain the initial cohorts of students
4. Develop buildings and infrastructure of our university campus

5.1. Obtain WASC Candidacy

DRBU is currently working on obtaining eligibility with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the accrediting agency for the Western region, which includes the state of
California. Regional accreditation is a long and arduous process that can take anywhere from five to eight years. The WASC accreditation process requires an institution to sequentially obtain the following status:

- Eligibility
- Candidacy
- Initial Accreditation

**Eligibility** is the initial screening process that any institution seeking accreditation must go through so that WASC can determine whether the institution is eligible to apply for candidacy and subsequently initial accreditation. DRBU submitted its letter of intent to apply for eligibility in April 2012, and it plans to submit its completed eligibility application to WASC in Spring 2013. The University looks forward to receiving an affirmative response from WASC on its application before or in Fall 2013.

**Candidacy** is an indication that the institution is at least compliant with all of WASC’s standards at the most basic level and progressing toward initial accreditation. This status is a formal but preliminary affiliation with the WASC Commission and is awarded for a maximum period of four years. Candidacy is not accreditation and does not ensure eventual accreditation. However, the Candidacy status is an important intermediate step and one that DRBU aims to obtain in the latter part of this planning cycle. As a formal affiliation with WASC, the Candidacy status conveys to DRBU’s current and prospective faculty and students and its community of supporters the seriousness of the University's commitment to its long-term vision. In addition to providing assurance to current and incoming students about the externally validated legitimacy of their degrees, the Candidacy status also renders students who attend DRBU (a subsidiary of Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, a California nonprofit organization) eligible for government financial aid.

**Initial Accreditation** signifies that an institution is fully compliant with all of WASC’s standards. This status is critical to the long-term sustainability and prosperity of DRBU. The University will begin planning to work toward Initial Accreditation immediately after it obtains the Candidacy status toward the end of this planning cycle.

5.2. **Implement Academic Programs**

Students will be pursuing the following two primary text–centered integrated degree programs at DRBU:

1. Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts
2. Master of Arts in Buddhist Classics

Development of these two new academic programs came about as a result of a searching self-study and careful analyses of several peer institutions. While staying true to our mission, we looked to a handful of successful peers for inspiration, clues, and best practices when designing our new programs. DRBU is committed to maintaining a high level of rigorous learning in its
students by offering instruction carried out by qualified teaching personnel and supported by appropriate administrative infrastructure and learning resources.

We have confidence in the educational model and philosophy on which our programs are based and will not deviate from them in the programs’ implementation. However, as a relatively young institution launching two new programs, we expect to make changes and refinements throughout this planning cycle based on our experiences and on evidence we gather regularly. We will be implementing a carefully crafted assessment plan to gauge our effectiveness in bringing about student learning. We will also be conducting regular program reviews with clearly defined criteria of alignment, quality, and efficiency. DRBU will use the results of these regular assessments and reviews to refine and improve its programs.

5.3. Recruit and Retain the Initial Cohorts of Students

At DRBU, we entrust students with the responsibility for their own learning, and this translates into seminar-style classes where much instruction takes the form of a discussion and where students are active participants and careful listeners. To allow ample opportunities for every student to participate in these conversations, the class size is necessarily small. Further, to develop trust and rapport among fellow students and their professors and therefore open up the conversations in and beyond the classroom, each student studies with the same cohort throughout each academic year.

DRBU intends to cap each undergraduate cohort at 15 students and each graduate cohort at 10. A university is nothing without its students, and DRBU intends to devote significant resources both to recruit interested and adequately prepared students and to retain them by providing the best educational experiences: stimulating, relevant, and rigorous academic studies; enriching co-curricular activities; a functional, peaceful, and comfortable living environment; and responsive and supportive student services.

For the first four years, DRBU aims to recruit and enroll at least one undergraduate and one graduate cohort per year. For the fifth year, the University plans to begin recruiting and enrolling at least two cohorts each for the BA and the MA programs. Therefore, we aim to have an approximate student population of 75 undergraduate and 30 graduate students at DRBU by 2018.

Although much of the learning at DRBU depends on the activity and initiative of the students, a qualified and dedicated teaching faculty is an indispensable, integral, and invaluable part of students’ learning process. DRBU will refine and improve its human resources policies and procedures and solidify a compensation and support system to recruit and retain qualified and dedicated faculty. Based on a full-time teaching load of three to four classes and a 1-to-11 professor-to-student ratio, the University plans to have approximately ten full-time-equivalent professors by 2018.

5.4. Develop the University Campus
Developing basic buildings and physical infrastructure is essential to realizing the University’s educational vision. Through the year 2018, DRBU aims to implement the initial phases of the campus master plan, which includes the following priority projects:

- **Renovation of the Women’s Residence Hall**: The women’s dormitory building will house 70–80 female students upon renovation. The 28,000-square-foot facility will provide single and double dormitory rooms, common living areas, study spaces, multifunctional activity rooms, and a laundry facility.

- **Renovation of the Main University Building**: The 65,000-square-foot structure has been designated to house a majority of the classrooms, faculty and administrative offices, and student activity spaces. The renovation will take place in phases, commensurate with student growth and University resources.

- **Renovation and relocation of the University Library**: The Library will move from its current facility into a new location on campus. The future Library building is a 14,500-square-foot single-story structure with high ceilings, ample natural light, and an open floor plan.

- **Renovation of Wonderful Words Hall**: This 5,500-square-foot building is a historically significant space on campus. The founder of the University taught many courses here. The building will be renovated to provide medium and large lecture spaces. This multifunctional space also supports special events and student activities such as arts performances, guest lecture series, and community gatherings.

- **Planning and renovation of the Men’s Residence Hall**: A designated men’s dormitory is needed to support the growth of the student body of the new academic programs. The campus master planning process will identify and provide a facility to support housing needs and related functions for 60–70 male students by 2018.
6. PLANNING PROCESS: IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

The DRBU planning process consists of three main phases—**strategic planning, near-term planning and implementation, and review**. The process starts with the appointment of an ad hoc planning committee consisting of a small number of trustees and members of the faculty, typically a year before the end of the current planning cycle. The committee is charged with working with the community to review the University’s progress on the current plan and to compose a draft of the plan for the next planning cycle. The strategic-planning phase consists of the following sequential tasks:

- Reaffirm and interpret DRBU mission and long-term vision
- Understand context and describe near-term vision
- Identify near-term strategic priorities and high-level criteria for review

After the strategic plan is adopted by the trustees and the faculty of the University, the two groups share responsibility for overseeing the dissemination and implementation of the plan. For example, through 2018, the faculty, which includes senior administrative leaders of the University, is responsible for carrying out the tasks of obtaining WASC candidacy, implementing the academic programs, and recruiting and retaining students. The trustees play an integral role in the development of the University campus and a lead role in resource development.

In the second phase of the planning process, near-term planning and implementation, the senior administrative leaders (the Administrative Council) work with the rest of the administrative and teaching faculty to select yearly initiatives and compose annual action plans for each group and office based on the near-term priorities in the strategic plan and in consideration of the current
status of those priorities. Each organization within the University then works to implement its respective action plan throughout the year.

The third phase of the planning process consists of two different but closely related types of review activities. First, each program or operational unit evaluates its own performance annually on the progress it has made on projects and initiatives in its action plan. Second, each program or operational unit also collects evidence to be evaluated and analyzed during its more comprehensive program or unit review that takes place at least once every five years.

Given the small size and integrated nature of DRBU and its programs, these reviews will be organized around the University’s three main functions—academics, student affairs, and finance and administration. The program or unit review process includes both a self-study as well as an external review by a peer reviewer from outside the University. When conducting reviews, each unit or program evaluates and analyzes evidence gathered against criteria in three areas:

1. Alignment to DRBU’s Mission and Educational Goals: How well do the functions of a program or unit align with the University’s overall mission and strategic priorities? How well does a program or unit serve the needs of the University community?

2. Effectiveness: How well does a program or unit carry out its stated functions? How effectively does a program or unit contribute its part to the University’s strategic priorities? What is the quality of programs and services offered by the program or the unit?

3. Sustainability: How efficiently does a program or unit carry out its stated functions? How well does a program or unit manage its resources? How well does it plan? Does the program or unit have sustainable practices?

Even though different individuals or committees will coordinate review activities for particular functional units at different times, the faculty—administrative and teaching—as a collective body is responsible for all the program and unit reviews at the University. For these reviews, members of the faculty will participate in the gathering, evaluation, and analyses of evidence; deliberate on the results; choose and set indicators of progress; and make recommendations for changes to different programs and units.

Therefore, collectively all the program and unit reviews make up the institutional effectiveness review for the University, and their results will inform activities for the next strategic planning cycle. These program and unit reviews take place at regular intervals, typically between three and five years dependent on the program or unit, and each review shall take place at least once during the University’s five-year strategic planning cycle.

7. SUMMARY AND CHALLENGES

The DRBU 2018 Plan has four critical strategic priorities, and they are in some ways the most significant indicators of the University’s progress toward realizing its long-term vision. Although establishing the two academic programs according to DRBU’s founding spirit is primary,
obtaining WASC candidacy is of particular strategic importance for the institution during this planning cycle and is inextricably linked to other priorities. These priorities certainly present significant challenges to DRBU:

- Accreditation is a long and arduous process that requires effort and focus from the whole University community. Further, the accreditation commission is revising its policies and procedures. To become eligible, DRBU needs to present to WASC essential elements and a blueprint for building the institution. To become a WASC candidate, it needs to further develop and bring all aspects of the institution to a basic level of competence and compliance with WASC standards, and to do so in a way that is consistent with its mission and spirit.

- Launching two new programs is difficult in and of itself. The fact that these two programs are instances of a unique educational model and philosophy brings additional challenges. In many aspects of the programs’ implementation, DRBU will have few role models and peers to look to for inspiration and guidance. In some areas—such as the studying and translating of Buddhist primary texts from within their own hermeneutical structure and the blending of classical texts from different traditions in an integrated liberal arts curriculum—DRBU will serve as a pioneer. Recruiting interested and suitable teaching personnel to staff such a unique educational program will require careful effort.

- Recruiting interested and adequately prepared students to earn a degree before we have attained regional accreditation will be difficult. Carefully selecting students who can excel in these unique programs will also be an ongoing challenge, as will providing an enriching and rigorous educational experience to retain those who enroll.

- DRBU is blessed to have an existing campus and large buildings allocated to support its programs. However, in addition to the need for financial planning and development to secure funds for capital improvement projects, retrofitting old buildings presents a different set of challenges from constructing new buildings designed for the University’s intended use. Relocating to new locations once the renovation projects are completed also requires careful logistical planning and precise execution.