

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

To Dharma Realm Buddhist University

October 4-6, 2023

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section I – Overview and Context	3
Section II – Evaluation of Institutional Essays	9
A. Component 1: Response to Previous Commission Actions	9
B. Component 2: Compliance: Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements	12
C. Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, Quality and Integrity of Degrees	23
D. Component 4: Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation	26
E. Component 5: Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation	29
F. Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review, Assessment, Use of Data and Evidence	34
G. Component 7: Sustainability: Financial Viability, Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment	36
H. Component 9: Reflection and Plans for Improvement	38
Section III – Findings, Commendations, and Recommendations from the Team Review	41
Appendices: Federal Compliance Forms	43

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution and its Accreditation History, as Relevant Overview

Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) is a private, non-profit university located in Ukiah, California. It offers one undergraduate degree (BA in Liberal Arts), one graduate degree (MA in Buddhist Classics), and one graduate certificate program (Buddhist Texts Translation). The degree programs are modeled on the “Great Books” tradition, with each cohort of students pursuing an all-required, sequentially arranged curriculum that centers the close reading of classical primary texts. Professors serve as advanced learners teaching by means of a dialogic approach. Integrated into this curriculum is a contemplative component designed to foster students’ development of intrinsic wisdom, a core tenet of Buddhist belief and practice. DRBU does not offer distance education programs.

In fall semester 2023, the university has a total student enrollment of 45 students (21 BA, 19 MA, and 5 Certificate), 43 of whom are full-time, while employing 11 FTE faculty, including the president and other faculty with administrative functions, and 29 FTE staff members. Since inaugurating the two degree programs in 2013 and 2014, the university has graduated 65 students from the master’s and 25 students from the bachelor’s program.

Founding

Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) was founded and is sustained by Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA), a California 501(c)(3) organization. DRBA was established in 1959 by a prominent 20th-century Buddhist monastic reformer, Venerable Master Hsuan Hua (1918-1995), as a “religious and educational corporation for the purpose of bringing the orthodox teachings of the Buddha to the entire world” (DRBA website). In 1976 DRBA established Dharma Realm Buddhist University with the intent “to advance the educational mission of DRBA and its founder: to reanimate the spirit of

Buddhist learning and practices in the contemporary world” (Institutional Report, page 5). Until the present, DRBU has remained part of its parent organization, DRBA, and is not separately incorporated.

Mission

DRBU publishes the following statement in its academic catalog and on its website and promotional materials: “Dharma Realm Buddhist University is a community dedicated to 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 makes one free in the deepest sense and opens the opportunity to pursue the highest goals of human existence.” (CFRs 1.1, 1.6)

Location

DRBU is located in Ukiah, California on the DRBA property known as The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, which comprises an area of 488 acres, of which 80 are developed. This property also houses a nunnery, a monastery, a vegetarian restaurant, and girls’ and boys’ elementary and secondary schools. The university occupies numerous buildings on The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas property: the DRBU main building, DRBU building, DRBU library, and the administration building, and utilizes several other buildings, including, among others, a women’s dormitory, an art studio, a vegetarian restaurant, and the Buddha Hall. The university also has a satellite campus, the 5-acre Sudhana Center, located 3 miles away in Ukiah, which houses the men’s dormitory, a fitness center, and other activities spaces.

Pre-WSCUC Accreditation History

From 1984 to 2013, DRBU offered the following degree programs with State of California Bureau for Private and Postsecondary Education (BPPE) approval: a BA in Chinese Study, an MA in Buddhist

Education, and BA, MA, and PhD programs in Buddhist Study and Practice and in Translation of Buddhist Texts. In 1994, the institution terminated the two PhD programs as it transitioned to a primarily teaching institution. Embarking on its path towards regional accreditation, DRBU began a reassessment of its purpose and programs in 2010, leading to the discontinuation of the six BPPE-approved legacy degree programs, completed in 2015.

WSCUC Accreditation History

In fall 2013 DRBU was granted eligibility to pursue WSCUC Candidacy. That same semester, it launched the new MA program in Buddhist Classics and in fall 2014 began enrolling students in the BA program in Liberal Arts. DRBU had two Seeking Accreditation Visits in 2016 and 2017, with the Commission granting Initial Accreditation for a period of six years in 2018. Subsequently, in January 2019, the Commission allowed the date of Initial Accreditation, February 16, 2018, to be applied retroactively back to May 17, 2017. In 2022, DRBU submitted its Institutional Report for reaffirmation of accreditation, followed by this review team's Offsite Review in March 2023 and, most recently, the Accreditation Visit in October 2023.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

The team's review process was guided by the six lines of inquiry (LOI) resulting from the Offsite Review (OSR) conducted in March 2023:

1. Relationships between ILOs, PLOs and course-level learning outcomes; the faculty's accountability towards them, including how faculty collaborate to implement the different developmental levels. What are goals for the learning outcome metrics and how do outcomes results inform pedagogy, curriculum, student services and support, and strategic planning (closing the loop)?
2. DRBU's plans to refine and deepen assessment of learning outcomes that are less tangible, such as ethical awareness/sensibility, flexibility of mind, etc.

3. Plans to sustain the high-touch approach for ongoing feedback from students, both informal and formal; impact of this process on faculty workload and scholarly activities.
4. Enrollment and marketing plans and strategies, including market research and the institution's concurrent plans for resourcing for growth.
5. Plans for developing mental health services, alumni relations, career services, and tracking type of graduate employment.
6. DRBU's relationship with DRBA, including plans for decreasing dependence and diversifying revenue.

Team members carefully reviewed DRBU's Institutional Report and its linked evidence comprising 149 attachments, along with previous accreditation actions and recommendations. Following the OSR, the team requested additional materials, which DRBU provided expeditiously. These additional documents included course evaluation template and sample evaluations; sample meeting minutes/notes from Board of Trustees and various committees and faculty meetings; annual student survey template; marketing strategy and marketing materials, and a more detailed organizational chart showing the staffing of each office/area.

In preparation for the visit, writing assignments were distributed according to team members' areas of expertise, experience, and interest. The team met on the eve of the visit to formulate interview questions and followed a two-day interview schedule allowing for 45-minute meetings between team members and the following constituent groups:

- Students: undergraduates, graduates, alumni (3 meetings)
- Directorship: board of trustees, board committees for finance and development (2 meetings)
- Executive leadership: president, president's senior administrative staff, vice president for finance and administration (3 meetings)
- Academics: full-time and adjunct faculty, Instructional Committee, Contemplative Immersion Exercise Committee, academic resources (tutoring, library) (5 meetings)
- Institutional research staff (1 meeting)

- Development: development and strategic planning staff, enrollment & marketing staff, planning/facilities staff (3 meetings)
- Student support services: campus life, residential life, disabilities services, nurse, mental health, chaplains (3 meetings)
- Student administrative services: admissions, financial aid, registrar (1 meeting)
- Staff (1 meeting)

A team member reviewed the student complaints procedures and was shown the secured location within the records office where such complaints would be filed. The complaint procedures are robust, and information is appropriately accessible to students; at present, there are no records of student complaints. (CFRs 1.6, 1.7) The team also monitored WSCUC's confidential email account during the visit, with no significant issues to report. Team members completed the federally required worksheets, located in the appendices of this report.

C. The Institution's Reaccreditation Report and Update: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

DRBU's Institutional Report was well organized and clearly written and presented, leading the team, at the time of the OSR, to commend the institution for the "Quality of the institutional report, including its presentation, use of evidence, and the response to previous recommendations (MA and BA program reviews, presidential review, and role of the board)." Overall, the report and supporting evidence accurately portrayed the condition of the university. In a small number of incidents where the report was less specific than the team would have wished, such issues appeared to be the result of a lack of available evidence/data or structures/processes rather than an omission or obfuscation of fact—issues which are elaborated in the relevant sections of this report.

Institutional involvement in the self-study process and writing of the Institutional Report filtered from the top down through the faculty and other university stakeholders, with the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), who is also a permanent faculty member, playing an invaluable role in guiding the self-study

process and the preparation of the report. The university president appointed and sat on the accreditation steering committee along with the ALO and other members of her administrative council, composed of the administrative faculty members as well as three professors representing teaching-only faculty. Since the ALO holds both an administrative and a faculty role, he was able to keep teaching faculty informed of accreditation work and advise them through relevant discussions in various meetings. Consequently, the team experienced the faculty as both aware of the review process and involved in contributing to it through their committee, assessment, and program review work. Board members, student support, and other staff, as well as students and alumni were also involved in reflective and evaluative processes related to the review and prepared to support the visit and participate in meetings with the team. (CFRs 3.10, 4.5)

In sum, DRBU's Institutional Report represents a mostly comprehensive and robust inquiry into its performance as measured against the WSCUC standards, criteria for review, and guidelines as well as against the institution's own mission-driven goals and expectations. The methodology DRBU employed was appropriate and demonstrated a concerted attempt to utilize relevant evidence transparently and effectively. During its review of the Institutional Report and data and its interactions with DRBU stakeholders, the team was able to perform the required analysis of DRBU's educational effectiveness, financial and structural stability and sustainability, and efficacy of evidence-based practices to ascertain the institution's strengths and the areas requiring further thought and development.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

A. Component 1: Response to Previous Commission Actions

DRBU reported in detail on its progress towards addressing the three Commission recommendations recorded in the March 2018 Action Letter granting Initial Accreditation:

1. “Move forward with reviewing and implementing the recommendations cited in the MA program’s external reviewers’ team report, complete the process articulated in the DRBU Academic Program Review Handbook, and apply the same review processes for a program review of the BA program in 2019. (CFR 2.4)”

The MA program’s external review resulted in ten recommendations, which the university tackled by creating an Instruction Committee (IC). This committee exercises faculty governance by providing input on academic administration; faculty appointments, promotions, reviews, and development; and curriculum revisions. By implementing the IC, the university addressed the peer reviewers’ recommendation “to improve decision-making mechanisms that balance DRBU’s value of shared governance and transparency with operational efficiency.” (CFRs 3.7, 3.10)

The Institutional Report provided a detailed table linked with evidence outlining the external review recommendations, subsequent actions taken, and progress made until fall 2022. (CFR 4.3) Many of the areas for improvement are discussed in the relevant components below. In summary, the team observed that the institution has taken seriously the recommendation to implement the MA program review findings and has made measurable progress in most of the areas, notably by creating a robust institutional research function (CFR 4.2); improving the integration of the contemplative exercise (CFR 2.11); systematizing faculty review processes; beginning to implement strategic enrollment management processes; and increasing housing capacity while making other significant plant improvements (CFR 3.5). One area remaining to be addressed adequately is compensation and benefits, which continues to be flat and comparatively modest across the institution.

The BA program review, originally scheduled for fall 2019, was delayed by the institution's desire to wait until the first two cohorts had graduated in order to have comparative data and was additionally slowed by the global pandemic. The review was eventually carried out in 2022 and comprised a self-study and an external review carried out by peer evaluators from two prominent "Great Books" colleges. (CFR 2.7) Outcomes from this program review led to an action plan targeting five areas: BA curriculum revision for better mission alignment; refinement of the contemplative exercise component; enrollment growth; staffing, development and retention of teaching faculty; and making the learning outcome assessment process more efficient and improving follow-through.

2. "Continue to develop and refine the comprehensive review process, while developing and implementing an annual presidential review. (CFR 3.7) This effort should be led by the board, ensuring the process to be fair, independent, and objective, using the WSCUC Governing Board Policy Implementation Guide."

The current president has been in office since 2014. Presidential evaluations are conducted once per presidential term, most recently in 2017 and 2022. DRBU has been commended by the Commission and evaluation teams for its commitment to shared governance and democratic decision-making practices. The institution approached the Commission's second recommendation by increasing board involvement in the presidential review process and refining the annual review component in accordance with the WSCUC Governing Board Policy Implementation Guide. Compliance with WSCUC guidelines for presidential review is evidenced by the fact that the president, as an *ex officio* board member, cannot influence her evaluation; that the board has the ultimate decision on the presidential evaluation; and that all constituents have a voice in evaluating the president. (CFR 3.9)

Board involvement in the presidential review process was increased for the 2022 review by including feedback from the entire board, developing and updating the review criteria, and adding an interview between the president and the board's presidential review committee. An annual review

component was also added, which requires the president to deliver a state of the university report at the board's annual spring meeting and receive oral feedback from the trustees. This process was enhanced in 2022, when the board determined a set of procedures that include a written response to the president's state of the university report.

3. "Continue to foster a clear understanding of the board's role in a higher education organization, CEO evaluation, and conflicts of interest, using outside help such that provided by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB). (CFR 3.9)"

Since 2018, the board has added a trustee with prior university governing board experience. The ALO, a non-independent board member, has deepened his knowledge of board governance by serving on two WSCUC evaluation teams. Board members have access to Association of Governing Board (AGB) training materials, such as webinars, including AGB's board member orientation course. Finally, the board adopted a procedure for periodic self-assessment, which they undertook in 2016 and 2022. (CFR 3.9)

The team notes that the board's self-assessment survey questions do not touch on several crucial areas of board responsibility and desirable expertise such as resource development capacity, oversight expertise, and knowledge of higher education trends and challenges. The board is encouraged to consider including such items in future rounds of assessment. (CFR 4.7)

Major Changes Since the Last WSCUC Visit

Since the 2017 SAV, DRBU gained Initial Accreditation (2018), allowing the university to begin enrolling international students. While faculty FTE numbers have remained stable over this time period, the university added two new assistant professors, advanced one instructor to the position of assistant professor, and promoted four assistant professors to the rank of permanent professor. (CFR 3.1)

Significant changes took place in facility capacity: the renovation of the university main building tripled the number of available classrooms, office spaces, student lounges, and reading and computer

rooms. In 2021, further renovations led to an expansion of men's and women's housing facilities, increasing the number of dormitory rooms from 55 to 104. (CFR 3.5)

DRBU mounted an exemplary, compassionate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, quickly transitioning to all-online teaching while sustaining a small "residential bubble" so that students with housing needs could continue to live on campus. The pandemic caused a delay in the presidential review and the strategic planning process and seriously impacted undergraduate enrollment; overall enrollment remained stable, however.

B. Component 2: Compliance: Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements

Standard 1

Institutional Purposes

In the ecology of higher education in the United States, DRBU is a relatively young institution. Founded in 1976 to advance the educational mission of DRBA to reanimate the spirit of Buddhist learning and practices in the contemporary world and granted initial accreditation by WSCUC in 2018, DRBU describes itself in its mission statement that it is "a community dedicated to liberal education in the broad Buddhist tradition—a tradition characterized by knowledge in the arts and sciences, self-cultivation, and the pursuit of wisdom." It seeks to educate the whole person and to nurture individuals who see learning as a lifelong endeavor in the pursuit of knowledge, self-understanding, and the creative and beneficial application of that learning to every sphere of life. Its liberal arts education, patterned after the "Great Books" model of higher education, includes the following key features: an all-required and sequentially built curriculum; a strong focus on classical primary texts; a shared inquiry pedagogical model where faculty facilitates students' own understanding; and a contemplative exercises immersion in the "pursuit

of wisdom.” (CFRs 1.1, 1.2) Throughout the self-study and campus visit, the institution’s sense of mission and clarity of its educational enterprise were readily evident, vis-à-vis the institution’s website, University Catalog, Faculty Handbook, and University Bylaws. Conversations with trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni all attested to a deep commitment to the mission of the school. Students and alumni spoke about their transformational experience in being a part of such a community of learning. DRBU has a strong Institutional Research Office, consisting of an associate director and three research associates, invested with the collection, analysis, and reporting of information on key aspects of the institution’s activities to support institutional planning and decision-making. Data related to student retention and graduation are published on the website.

DRBU holds academic freedom as one of its central tenets. (CFR 1.3) A statement of academic freedom is published on its website, University Catalog, and Faculty Handbook. The statement articulates clearly that “No student is subject to any pressure, overt or otherwise, to subscribe to a particular ideology,” and that “Professors are free to hold any view and are not subject to any pressure, overt or otherwise, to subscribe to a particular ideology.” In myriad ways, the shared inquiry model is rooted in and supports academic freedom. Likewise, diversity is highly valued at DRBU, demonstrated by a clear statement on diversity that can be found on its website, which includes “ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, ability/different ability, sexual orientation, geographic region, socioeconomic status, and more.” In addition, it also has a “Notice of Non-Discrimination” and a “Policy on Harassment” in its University Catalog. (CFR 1.4) In terms of trustees, administration, faculty, and staff, the institution’s ethnic diversity consists primarily of people who are White or Asian. The board of trustees includes non-Buddhist members. The 2021 Key Indicators show that the student population was 39% Asian, 7% Hispanic, 2%

Multiracial, 30% Nonresident, and 23% White. The institution acknowledged in its self-study that its commitment to diversity is an area which could benefit from greater attention. While diversity has increased in the student population—in 2017 there were 62% Asian and 29% White students—less intentionality has been placed on diversifying the faculty, staff, and administrators. Even with student diversity, there is still room for growth. The team met a Hispanic alumna, who is a non-Buddhist, who spoke glowingly of her transformational experience at DRBU. Can recruitment of Hispanic and African American students be duplicated to work toward greater diversity? Another aspect for growth is the recruitment and support of non-binary students, an aspect of diversity in the institution's statement. During the conversation with students, a concern was expressed about housing for transgender students, in light of the segregated housing for women and men. The team encourages the institution to review its policy regarding housing as a part of its commitment to diversity. As for faculty and staff diversity, there needs to be more intentionality and planning to make it happen.

Integrity and Transparency

DRBU is chartered under the umbrella of its parent organization, DRBA. It does not currently have its own 501(c)(3) status. Through the charter established in 2012, the DRBU board of trustees was established to further DRBA's educational mission. The DRBU board is a self-perpetuating body with the power and authority to govern the university, to manage the affairs, and to ensure the quality, integrity, and financial sustainability of DRBU. (CFR 1.5) While granting autonomy to the university, DRBA continues to provide substantial financial support to DRBU, at 47.6% of its FY2024 revenue budget (21.3% in-kind contribution and 26.3% grant), in addition to the free use of the facilities. As DRBU looks toward significant growth in the next decade, the board and administration are beginning to explore the benefits of a legal

separation from DRBA. DRBU thinks that this could provide the university the flexibility to live out its educational mission and align its values and needs more closely to that of an institution of higher learning, including less dependency on a parent organization and the ability to diversify its fundraising and revenue. If the benefits to DRBU are significant and clear, the team encourages the administration and board to work more intentionally toward a legal separation, with a timeline toward achieving that goal.

A review of all the relevant material confirms that DRBU operates with significant integrity and transparency. (CFRs 1.6, 1.7, 1.8) Academic programs and curricula are clearly defined. Student support services are strong. With a highly sequential curriculum, it is important that students do not fall behind so that they can graduate in a timely fashion. The highly praised semesterly student conference is an important mechanism to support student progress. While it is a high-touch mechanism involving all faculty teaching the particular student, it helps to ensure student success. Nonetheless, as the student population grows, the feasibility of such conferences will need to be evaluated. Integrity and transparency are evident too in the way that the institution engaged the reaffirmation of accreditation process. The self-study, while capably led by the ALO, involved the entire university. Input to, and review of, the Institutional Report were sought from faculty and staff. Additional material when requested were readily provided. Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni all engaged the onsite conversations with seriousness and candor. The self-study is self-critical and reflective, with identification of areas for growth.

Standard 2

DRBU's programs are appropriate in content, performance, and rigor, and there are currently sufficient faculty for the curriculum offered. (CFR 2.1) The team noted that some faculty have administrative duties in conjunction with their teaching responsibilities, which is a consideration for the

university as they work towards the enrollment goal of 120 students. The team noted during their visit that a degree from DRBU is clearly more than an accumulation of courses, but rather an integrated course of study at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and is strongly aligned with the philosophy and mission of the institution. (CFRs 2.2, 2.2b) The “Great Books” curriculum, contemplative exercise immersion, and shared inquiry approach to teaching actively involve students to deeply reflect, practice, and refine knowledge and skills. (CFR 2.5) The team also noted that a majority of students and alumni mentioned the transformative experience of the curriculum and approach to teaching and learning. Noteworthy are the alumni who have directly translated lessons and skills developed at DRBU into their current careers. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.2b)

The traditional curriculum is supplemented with student activities. (CFR 2.11) Campus Life has made significant improvements in activities for students outside of the classroom environment, such as “pizza nights,” karaoke, and game nights. The team encourages Campus Life to continue to develop and refine co-curricular programming as the institution grows.

DRBU has institutional, program, and course learning outcomes, all of which link with the mission of the university. (CFR 2.3) The institutional learning outcomes are tied directly to the mission; however, it was noted by the faculty and the review team that the “less tangible” outcomes have been a challenge to assess. The team noted that although faculty are involved in development of course learning outcomes, Institutional Research (IR) is heavily involved in assessing student learning outcomes. The team encourages the faculty to increase their participation in all levels of learning outcome development and assessment work. (CFR 2.4)

In order to demonstrate that graduates achieve learning outcomes, DRBU has made substantive changes to their program review process. (CFRs 2.6, 2,7) The most recent program review of their BA was in 2022, which led to the creation of an action plan based on the findings. The team noted that the

institution is in the process of making faculty more aware of tools such as rubrics; however, as mentioned, there have been challenges with assessing skills that are “less tangible.” The institution would benefit from having more strategic closing the loop processes in order to increase the proficiency of graduates.

The institution has a clearly articulated retention and promotion process. (CFR 2.8) The team noted that faculty expressed concern about bandwidth to participate in outside scholarship activities but noted that the administration was supportive of work outside of the university. For example, the university currently employs a Fulbright scholar, who is on a year-long leave to conduct research. The team encourages DRBU to consider developing policies and procedures for sabbatical leave. (CFR 2.8)

DRBU demonstrates that students make timely progress towards the completion of degrees. (CFR 2.10) The university disaggregates retention and graduation data according to gender and race; however, given the very small student body, IR expressed that disaggregating further was difficult, and perhaps not very meaningful. In 2021, the retention rate for the MA program was 100% (n=15), while the retention rate for the BA program was 50%, although there were only two students in the incoming class. The two-year graduation rate for the 2020 MA cohort was 78% while the 2018 BA cohort’s four-year graduation rate was 75%.

The institution ensures that all students understand the requirements of their academic programs and receive timely, useful and comprehensive information and advising. (CFR 2.12) The team was impressed with the “hands-on” approach, beginning with the recruitment and admissions process to ensure that students were prepared not only for the requirements of the institution but also for the ongoing advising and feedback process. Individual student conferences are conducted each semester, with the student meeting with all current professors to discuss progress and areas for improvement.

DRBU offers a variety of support services to their students. (CFR 2.13) The students have access to the Academic Resource Center (ARC), the work-study program, and activities within residential life. The

team commends DRBU on their commitment to graduate students debt-free. This is accomplished primarily with their work-study program, with students working on-campus up to 13 hours per week. DRBU also recognizes the importance of mental health services and has invested in hiring mental health professionals. DRBU currently employs a nurse practitioner, three licensed mental health therapists, and two chaplains. The health services team has a projection and plan for service use and for increasing services as the campus grows. The team commends DRBU on not only recognizing these needs but acting quickly to increase services and resources.

Standard 3

DRBU has assembled an impressive group of faculty and staff who are committed to the institution and its mission. (CFR 3.1) Most of the staff members are alumni of DRBU, which should lead to loyalty to the organization and mission alignment. The team commends DRBU for assembling and maintaining such a strong overall team. (CFRs 3.2, 3.3) It was noted, however, that internal communication issues exist, so it is important for management to improve their communication skills and pathways both within their departments and between departments.

Morale also appears to be high among faculty and staff, and the team commends DRBU for maintaining such a strong and positive spirit. That said, DRBU lacks human resources personnel, and during interviews significant numbers of employees seemed to be unaware of where to turn should there be a human resources issue. There appeared to be only one person who performed a limited set of human resources functions, such as completing forms. The team **recommends that DRBU continue to develop human resources policies and infrastructure to address regulatory compliance, compensation and benefits, performance review, and professional development.** This would likely lead to improved morale and retention.

DRBU is located in a beautiful area in Northern California, but the location also is quite a distance from larger metropolitan areas and populations. As DRBU improves its human resources, it should be able, as needed, to better attract individuals with strong backgrounds from outside the DRBU alumni community to join its staff. During these efforts, improved communications and organization structure will be needed as well. As DRBU strives to achieve certain ambitious growth targets in the coming years, it will need to improve its infrastructure and operations to help meet these targets. (CFR 3.2)

DRBU is financially stable. (CFR 3.4) The university has never operated on a deficit, given the support of DRBA, its parent organization, which has committed to cover any shortfall. The expense budget for the current fiscal year is \$3,326,679. 26% of the revenue income to cover the expenses come from DRBA and 21% from in-kind donations, the majority of which are in the form of services performed by DRBA monastic members. It has a small endowment of \$4.8 million. The university is not reliant on tuition income, which for this fiscal year is budgeted at \$118,282, representing 4% of total revenue. This comes primarily from its master's level students, as its bachelor's level students generally matriculate through a generous scholarship program. With a strong overlap of executives and board members between the two organizations, DRBU seems confident that DRBA, which is fiscally strong, will indefinitely support DRBU financially as needed. DRBU has plans to grow its endowment as well as enrollment and increase its tuition income in the coming years, which should help DRBU reduce, but not eliminate, its reliance on DRBA.

DRBU's rather unique curriculum is supported by sufficient information and technology resources (CFR 3.5), and in this regard it is helpful that DRBU's needs in this area do not appear great relative to those of other institutions of higher learning.

The team was impressed by the institution's leadership, who demonstrate integrity, performance, responsibility, and accountability. (CFR 3.6) However, DRBU should look into increasing the efficiency of its organizational structures and decision-making processes through improved operations. (CFR 3.7) DRBU

lacks a chief operating officer or director of operations, although the current ALO seemed to cover this role (and a number of other functions). There are many staff members with multiple titles and roles, and while the team appreciates the effort and work ethic of employees who wear multiple hats, DRBU should consider its operations and human resources to allow employees to concentrate on more clearly delineated and related areas rather than being thinly spread across multiple departments. The team believes it is not possible for most staff members to work a realistic number of hours each week while filling so many disparate roles. For example, many employees with important, at times high-level staff duties, also have concurrent teaching responsibilities, producing a significant workload. Consequently, the team suggests that DRBU re-think this approach and perform a needs assessment of current and future personnel and capabilities. In sum, the team **recommends that DRBU improve operational efficiency and consider streamlining staff responsibilities after performing an in-depth review of the organization's functional needs and employee capabilities. (CFRs 1.7, 3.7)**

There appear to be sufficient qualified administrators and educational leaders as well as a dedicated and loyal governing board. (CFRs 3.8, 3.9) DRBU has recently added board members who have skill sets that may benefit the university and its growth plans, e.g., through better management of its investments and endowment. The team encourages DRBU to continue to explore the bolstering of its board, including having members with diverse expertise.

The team was impressed by the institution's faculty and its academic leadership. It is clear that the faculty are dedicated to educational quality and sustaining the institution's mission and educational purposes. (CFR 3.10)

Standard 4

With a small group of faculty, staff, and students, DRBU naturally finds itself engaging in frequent, informal institutional reflection among colleagues and peers. And, as a young institution that grounds

itself on the principles of self-reflection and self-cultivation, the outward aims of assessment and institutional research are welcomed and valued, even if the details and mechanics behind such activities plus their strategic impetus are still taking root over time.

The importance of self-assessment at DRBU is evident from multiple vantage points, including the faculty's use of rubrics and survey tools, the president's teaching commitment, affording a pulse on the classroom experience, and the campus-wide interest in the WSCUC visit. (CFR 4.1) However, as noted in Standard 3, the lack of a formalized HR function has also created informality around staff self-assessments and performance evaluations, which have the potential to provide staff and supervisors alike with more insight into individual and department-level performance and even strategic planning. (CFRs 4.3, 4.6)

Multiple academic program reviews have been conducted involving faculty and external peer reviewers with reports subsequently published on the university's website. Through their reviews, it appears that DRBU has sought ways to improve processes and timelines to produce more efficient or effective results. For example, the roles of the faculty (Instruction Committee) were further defined, additional Institutional Research (IR) staff were added, and handbooks were updated. (CFR 4.2, 4.3) While many detailed action items are noted in the program review reports, DRBU's approach to formally track their progress and resolutions could be strengthened with clearer alignment to the strategic plan. This formality is also needed on other IR reports sent to faculty and staff to ensure the data is used (i.e., to close the loop), especially on curricular matters to improve educational effectiveness. (CFR 4.4)

The IR function has grown in size and scope over the years, initially supported by just the ALO up until 2018. As it further matures, it should shift its orientation from compliance to strategy. (CFRs 4.2, 4.6) It was said that the IR function is an extension of the accreditation responsibilities, further reiterated by the placement of the university's IR and assessment documents on the webpage titled "WSCUC Institutional Reports." Many staff and faculty readily acknowledge the work and value of the IR office's

reports, but most activities are initiated by the IR office. DRBU can encourage a more strategic IR approach by soliciting, or initially suggesting, ideas from its board, leadership team, strategic planning committee, and faculty, as well as considering key questions that the university is trying to answer, such as how to draw in more applicants or how to assess the intangible. While the door of the IR office is always open, it can also proactively knock on the doors of other offices to ensure it is strategically meeting the needs for institutional planning. (CFRs 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

Moreover, such proactive engagement with stakeholders may even result in a reduction in some IR activities or other efficiencies, as institutional needs are specified and key performance indicators are further refined. It also appears that many types of data are collected, but not always in a deliberate, strategic manner. For some activities, the IR office will send data to its stakeholders for review, yet not all recipients respond to indicate whether or how they have benefited and used the data. As another example, the semesterly student conference was recognized by both faculty and students as a beneficial activity that regularly and progressively captures the achievements and development areas for each student. The faculty record their insights in paragraph form, but it cannot be used as longitudinal data until it has another structured and streamlined component, such as an accompanying rubric. Consequently, the IR office only has the bandwidth to sample a few reports to get a glimpse of key indicators of student success. (CFRs 4.2, 4.4) In short, the IR office has strengths in quantitative analysis, but more attention should be given on the university's strategic lens over assessments and data analyses from project initiation to data collection to the final feedback loop. (CFR 4.1) Such a proactive, deliberate, and measured approach may also reduce knee-jerk reactions when incidental or anecdotal feedback is examined, especially when sourced from ad-hoc interactions with students.

The self-study demonstrated multiple streams of recurring assessment initiatives aimed at continuous institutional learning and improvement of academic and non-academic operations (e.g.,

residential life, health services, etc.). While DRBU maintains a focus on Buddhist liberal arts programs, it is also aware of the evolving trends and elements beyond itself that may influence its position in the higher education community, as highlighted in its strategic plan. Over the years, its student body has become more diverse, and DRBU has occasionally been presented with a new demographic as it expands its outreach, whether in geography, religion, or personal ambitions. As DRBU attempts to draw in more applicants from the different parts of their recruitment funnel, they will benefit from more data-driven and research-based marketing. (CFR 4.7) And, as DRBU faces the challenge of growing enrollment, it should remain mindful of and guided by its original mission to ensure it does not inadvertently compromise on its ideal student standards or profile. Its 45% admission rate is encouraging in that regard. In sum, the team **recommends that DRBU continue to build out and implement data-driven enrollment management and research-based marketing plans, aligned with the institution’s strategic growth planning and resourcing. (CFRs 3.4, 4.6)**

DRBU appears committed to institutional learning and recognizes that it has more room for improvement with its quality assurance capabilities and institutional culture. As it continues to mature and grow, it will naturally shift its focus from compliance to strategy, as well as going from intuition to sustainable data-driven practices that support or challenge its intuition.

C. Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, Quality and Integrity of Degrees

The meaning of a degree from DRBU is clearly reflected in the institution’s mission as “a community dedicated to liberal education in the 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....” The mission not only guides the policies and practices at the institution, but the degree programs were a direct result of the mission. (CFRs 1.1, 1.3)

The team noted that a degree from DRBU is much more than a sum of courses and requirements. (CFR 2.2) Although students obtain knowledge and skills in a scholarly setting, students have the opportunity for deep self-reflection and inter-cultural experiences to inspire their future endeavors for a life with meaning and purpose. The DRBU graduate accumulates coursework that aligns with more “traditional” general education; however, the content is imbued with deep reflection and inner exploration in order for students to not only contribute to society but live meaningful lives. Students and alumni were clear during the team visit that the curriculum and commitment to shared inquiry were transformative for their development as individuals and professionals. Alumni shared numerous examples of how the skills acquired while at DRBU translated directly into their current careers, which varied from nursing to marketing. Although the BA program in Liberal Arts does not define a specific discipline, it was clear from the testimony of alumni and current students that they were obtaining success in their chosen careers due to the curriculum and teaching approach at DRBU. (CFR 2.2a)

DRBU is a “Great Books” institution, meaning their curriculum places emphasis on primary texts, along with the belief that the instructor steps away from the role as expert and employs teaching methods other than lecturing. In addition to the “Great Books” texts and methodology, DRBU includes contemplative exercises into the curriculum. These exercises are incorporated into class time through introspection, immersion exercises, and other modalities. The contemplative component is highlighted each semester through a multi-day activity called the Contemplative Exercise Immersion (CEI). This 3–5-day experience is held campus-wide, with classes and non-essential services suspended during this time.

In order to ensure the integrity of the degree, DRBU has both institutional and program learning outcomes that were created by faculty. (CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4) The learning outcomes for each program (BA and MA) are aligned with the institutional learning outcomes. DRBU conducts learning outcome assessment and program reviews for continuous improvement purposes. Levels of proficiency have been

defined as a score of 3 (out of 4) on the rubrics used to assess each PLO. (CFR 2.6) The team noted that course learning outcomes (CLOs) are developed by faculty in a collaborative manner, particularly when individual or co-teaching assignments shift.

IR is directly involved in direct and indirect assessment of learning outcomes, program review, presidential and faculty reviews, and dissemination of data to the public. The office has implemented a comprehensive and rigorous data collection process for these activities. However, IR should evaluate their processes for efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, the faculty should continue to align the course learning outcomes to the PLOs and ILOs and the institution should evaluate and strengthen their closing the loop activities to ensure that the curriculum changes are consistent with the findings.

Every semester, each student takes part in a student conference with their current instructors. This was noted as a powerful learning tool by students, alumni, and faculty. This “high-touch” approach is to be applauded, but the team noted that the institution may need to evaluate the time commitment as the student body increases. The team suggests that the information gleaned from the student conferences be used to inform curriculum development and revisions in a more systematic manner.

Indirect assessment data is also collected following the CEI activity. Students voluntarily complete a survey regarding their experience, and the CEI committee reviews that data for future improvement purposes. For example, faculty found that the quiet time provided during the CEI (1 hour) was too long for most students, so it was shortened to 30 minutes. The team noted that this may be an area in which to assess the previously identified “less tangible” PLOs, and working to align the CEI with PLOs may be a worthwhile activity.

The institution conducts academic program reviews on a five-year cycle. (CFR 2.7) The program review cycle is well defined and includes self-study, external review, and program improvement plans. Action plans for both the MA and BA programs have been developed, and there are comprehensive

responses to the actions taken. The team encourages the faculty to continue to adapt and refine the identified rubrics for all learning outcomes, and that IR continue to hold professional development workshops for the faculty related to learning outcomes assessment.

D. Component 4: Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation

DRBU offers two degree programs, a BA in Liberal Arts and an MA in Buddhist Classics. Each program has clearly delineated Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), in line with the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). There are nine (9) PLOs in the BA program and four (4) in the MA program. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4) The majority of the BA PLOs are also aligned with the five core competencies: quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, oral communication, written communication, and information literacy. In addition to the five core competencies, there are four PLOs that seek to measure ethical awareness, flexibility of mind, appreciating and defending different systems of thought, and fluency in the use of tools and methods of inquiry. The Institutional Report describes quite succinctly the institution's assessment processes and findings of the BA program (Institutional Report, pages 32-36). The faculty has designed detailed rubrics to measure each of the PLOs. A review of sample syllabi indicates that the PLOs that each course attends are matched with corresponding student learning outcomes. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4) In most of the syllabi reviewed, there is significant weight given to attendance and participation, as high as 60% of the course grade. There is also an ambiguity on the type of assignments students are graded on. A major aspect of assessment is the student conference conducted each semester with individual students, during which all the professors who teach the student during the semester would get together with the student to discuss the student's progress in learning and invite the student to reflect and respond. Each professor would then provide written feedback about the student's coursework during the semester. In addition,

assessments of graduating seniors were conducted in 2019 to 2022. Two instruments have been used. The first is a senior oral examination based on the student's senior thesis, assessed by two thesis advisors, where PLOs 7 and 8 are measured. The second is a representative sample of papers from two courses in their senior year where other PLOs and core competencies are measured. A report of the graduating class of 2020 shows the students achieving close to a 3.0 on a scale of 0-4 in all the PLOs as well as the core competencies. (CFR 2.6)

The highly sequential MA program in Buddhist Classics is built on four strands: Buddhist Texts, Comparative Hermeneutics, Buddhist Hermeneutics, and Language Tutorials. Given a strong emphasis on texts and interpretation, the four PLOs are designed to measure students' mastery of the textual and hermeneutical skills in their progress toward completion of the degree requirements. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4) These PLOs are also aligned with the ILOs. For example, PLO 1 relating to ethical sensibility corresponds to ILO 1, while PLO 4 relating to creating sustained, coherent expositions and reflections corresponds to ILO 3. Pedagogically, the goal is that through close reading, contemplative reflection, shared-inquiry discussion, and writing, graduates of the program will develop mastery over their engagement with primary sources and the techniques for self-reflection, the ability to analyze and experience texts' meaning and articulate their understanding to others through verbal and written communication. A review of sample syllabi indicates that the PLOs that each course attends are matched with corresponding student learning outcomes. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4) To assess students' achievement of the PLOs, the institution turned to both direct and indirect assessments. In 2022, the faculty engaged in a direct assessment workshop to assess students' achievement of the PLOs. Faculty members read and scored papers sampled from the Class of 2020 and the Class of 2022 in order to measure instructional modality (in-person versus online) on student

learning. The result was that students in primarily in-person modality scored better. (CFR 2.6) In terms of indirect assessments, annual student surveys and faculty surveys both indicate a high percentage of students achieving all four PLOs when they graduate. In addition, the average graduation rate and retention rate of the MA program are relatively high—88% and 92% respectively for 2020 to 2022. (CFR 2.10)

Given that the Contemplative Exercise Immersion (CEI) is a core part of both the BA and MA curricula, qualitative and quantitative data have also been collected. A CEI Committee was formed in 2019, tasked with making improvements to the CEI program. In conversation with the CEI Committee, the team reminded the committee that it is important not only to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback from students, including anecdotal feedback, but to remember to close the loop in the evaluation process.

Clearly, much care and work are being done in the assessment processes at DRBU. The institution has established an Institutional Research Office, led by an associate director with a strong background in educational assessment and statistical analysis. (CFR 2.7) Through the Institutional Report and onsite conversations, the team discerned that while a lot of data, both qualitative and quantitative, have been collected, how the data are being used is less clear. Even more so, there is the lack of strategic and systematic approach to the use of the data for program review and revision, including review and revision of ILOs and PLOs. In the meeting with the Institutional Research team, it was mentioned that faculty had engaged in a reactionary response to revise the curriculum based on challenges some students encountered in certain courses instead of engaging in a more systematic process driven by data collected over time. In addition, the team struggles to understand how the faculty is measuring less tangible and non-quantifiable PLOs like ethical awareness (PLO 1) and flexibility of mind (PLO 2). Hence, the team

recommends that DRBU approach assessment and educational effectiveness with a more strategic lens, driven by the faculty's identification of institutional needs and key indicators of student success through the deliberate collection and analysis of evidence; develop processes for faculty to systematically work towards closing the loop. (CFRs 2.4, 3.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

E. Component 5: Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation

DRBU measures student success through retention and graduation rates, published on the university's website. The institution benchmarks its undergraduate rates against national averages, which it surpasses, and against the rates of two "Great Books" peer institutions, to which it compares favorably for the most part. (CFRs 1.6, 2.10)

The cohorts that matriculated in the BA program from 2015 to 2021 show an encouraging average first-year retention rate of 78%. The team notes the average rates for the first four cohorts (92.75%) were higher than those for the subsequent four cohorts (66.75%). However, headcount numbers have been small; therefore, minor changes skew statistical reporting. Moreover, it can be assumed that the retention of more recent cohorts was impacted by the global pandemic. The institution has published graduation rates for the first four BA cohorts, showing an average four-year rate of 73%.

DRBU disaggregates its retention and graduation statistics in terms of race/ethnicity, gender (male/female), and citizenship/residence status. Aside from Asian and white students, there has been no significant enrollment of other races/ethnicities (five Hispanic students, one student identifying as two or more races, and no Black students in the years reported). DRBU has the IR capacity and the institutional commitment to continue to track and analyze these disaggregated data. (CFR 2.10)

The Institutional Report and team interviews with enrollment staff indicated that DRBU has identified a lower retention rate for non-traditional BA students. As DRBU targets the enrollment of more traditional undergraduate students, the team encourages DRBU to be more intentional about diversifying

the student body and ensuring the success of various types of students. Additionally, the institution would do well to track and support the success of non-binary gender students. DRBU staff and students identified during interviews that a small number of transgender students have encountered challenges with the male/female segregation of living quarters and spiritual care services. (CFRs 1.4, 2.10) The institution should also explore whether female students experience disadvantage in comparison to male students given the relative isolation and restrictiveness of their living quarters in a monastic environment compared to the male living housing, located 3 miles away in the heart of Ukiah.

The university also tracks, disaggregates, analyzes, and publishes retention and graduation rates for its MA program students (87% average retention rate for the 2013-2020 cohorts and 83.5% average 2-year graduation rate for 2013-2020 cohorts). The Institutional Report included bar charts comparing aggregated BA and MA retention and graduation rates. This kind of visual, longitudinal, contrastive presentation is helpful. DRBU may consider presenting the data in this form on its website as well and disaggregating it. (CFR 1.6)

The website publishes a table of basic post-graduation data by program level and year, according to whether graduates are employed or pursuing advanced study. These data could be disaggregated and the categories of employment, for example, refined as the institution continues to graduate and track students after they leave DRBU. This would be helpful in supporting the need that the institution has identified to formalize alumni data tracking and further develop career placement services. (CFR 2.13)

DRBU promotes student success holistically by means of high-touch practices and services throughout its curriculum and the student experience. Over the past five years, the university has expanded its facilities and taken on additional staff in various student support areas including Campus Life (residential life, student activities, work-study, dining services, and new student orientation), health, and spiritual life. At the time of the visit, the staff dedicated to student wellness consisted of a licensed nurse

practitioner, two campus chaplains, an assistant, trained campus chaplain, and three mental health therapists on contract with DRBU to provide mental health care services as needed. Plans are in place to increase such services as student numbers increase. Co-curricular programming has been expanded over recent years and is typically aligned with academic plans. Assessment plans have been developed and shared with the team, and DRBU should move forward with evaluating student life programming in terms of DRBU's mission-driven student success outcomes. (CFR 2.11)

The university provides personalized academic support through the Academic Resource Center and library services. Financial aid deserves to be highlighted as the university has consistently graduated all students debt-free. In return for the generous institutional support, students are required to perform up to 13 hours of work-study service per week. This is an excellent opportunity for them to gain work experience in a variety of areas and develop an array of soft skills sought after by employers. The team recognizes the challenge of coordinating so many student workers; both students and relevant staff reported that, at times, students can be assigned to as many as three or four different areas/supervisors. This arrangement can be taxing on the students. The team encourages DRBU to continue to streamline work-study assignments in a more formalized process tailored and sequenced according to the developmental arc of students throughout their programs. IR should continue to work with student support offices to collect and analyze student success data from co-curricular and other areas supporting student success. (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 2.13)

Student support staff show awareness of and are actively planning to address increasing student numbers and diversity in their programming and assessments. Changing undergraduate student characteristics, especially among the undergraduate student body, necessitate plans to reassess support for the personal growth of traditional undergraduates. Young adults are in definable stages of psycho-emotional development, often just beginning to live on their own and engage independently with the

world around them. Involving mental health professionals and relatable mentors (peer mentors perhaps) in programs and services targeting these areas may be useful. With growing student diversity as well as WSCUC's increased focus on DEI, the institution should continue to explore and plan the capacity and ability of its staff and faculty to identify and support the needs and interests of students from diverse backgrounds. (CFR 1.4)

Overall, the team was impressed by DRBU's ethic of care towards its students, including the investment in student support services such as mental health and the ongoing commitment to graduate students debt-free.

DRBU has defined student success in the specific context of the institution's mission "to convey knowledge and to activate an intrinsic wisdom possessed by all individuals." The institution views its role as developing students' skills and knowledge "in all aspects of their lives—professional, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual." As they describe it, "A successful DRBU graduate gains knowledge presented in their program and is also deeply transformed through their self-exploration of methods of inquiry presented in primary texts" (Institutional Report, page 49).

The university recognizes that while these student success goals are central to its mission and self-understanding, they also touch upon mental, spiritual, and emotional characteristics that are difficult to measure developmentally over a student's time at DRBU. To this purpose, DRBU avails itself of contemplative, self-reflective practices that are integrated into the student experience, examining specifically the Contemplative Immersion Exercise, the final-term student conference, and student graduation speeches. Qualitative data from these activities are used to assess where the DRBU curriculum has led to an "activation of intrinsic wisdom" and its related transformations. This assessment is based on students' reports of perceived development in the areas of personal well-being, inherent wisdom, and interpersonal growth. Notably, these self-assessments are extricated from students' spontaneous

responses rather than answers to specifically targeted questions. The institution's analysis of these data shows that the majority of students perceive overall growth in these three targeted areas and that they strongly attribute such development to the DRBU curriculum.

While the institution is justified in interpreting the results from this qualitative analysis as compelling evidence that its self-defined student success outcomes are being achieved, it might consider employing student survey questions specifically targeting these less readily quantifiable outcomes over the course of the students' programs. It may also be instructive to develop a faculty assessment that gauges student growth in such areas that lie at the heart of the institution's mission. For example, DRBU has recognized the potential for extracting quantifiable data from reports on student conferences conducted each semester. So far, IR has not had the opportunity to systematize this type of inquiry; however, the Institutional Report references plans during the next review cycle for IR and faculty to collaborate on exploring how to garner feedback from student conferences to measure student success more comprehensively. Systematizing faculty assessment of these mission-focused learning outcomes is a commendable goal. Yet the team also observes that in the face of targeted enrollment growth, the ability for faculty not only to continue to engage in these personalized, high-touch practices but also to work with the complex data output from them may be difficult to achieve and sustain over time. (CFRs 3.1, 4.1, 4.3)

Based on the data presented by the institution as well as team interviews with representative groups of students and alumni, the team finds that DRBU has made a thoughtful, concerted, and transparent attempt to measure student success in light of its mission and values. The team commends the institution on the transformational impact of the DRBU education on the students and alumni through the pedagogy of shared inquiry and personalized learning experiences such as contemplative practice, work study, and student conferences.

F. Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement

To examine and improve the quality of its academic programs, DRBU deploys several processes to periodically conduct formal degree program reviews with its faculty and peer evaluators. DRBU centers its academic reviews around its institutional and program learning outcomes (ILOs and PLOs), as published on the university website. It also conducts multiple non-academic reviews that center around the student experience or initiatives that support student success. (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 2.10)

The program reviews have a corresponding report that highlights key insights and next steps, ranging from program adjustments, staffing requirements, and conclusions on learning outcome achievement, if specified in the review's scope. Although the format varies from report to report, it often ends with a series of questions that the university can reflect upon for continued discussion. It was evident from the files and conversations that the reviews are distributed among many stakeholders. Since some of these reviews are the first instance, DRBU has yet to create a systematic approach whereby there is a continuous feedback loop from one report to the next one or to a larger grand plan (i.e., the strategic plan) to facilitate continued acknowledgement and monitoring of action items, milestones, and performance metrics. (CFRs 2.7, 4.1) Hence, the team **recommends that DRBU develop the strategic plan with measurable outcomes of identified priorities and a regular assessment process including timelines, milestones, ownership of tasks, and key performance indicators. (CFRs 1.7, 4.1, 4.6)**

Looking forward, DRBU will benefit from implementing more structure and formality around its quality assurance reviews with protocols to establish and periodically revisit its timelines and priority levels, thereby ensuring that each area receives reasonable attention over the years. Today, multiple decisions are and can be made from the sincere examination of each assessment report. And, when several iterations of each dataset and assessment report are available, DRBU can strengthen its data-driven decision-making abilities with years of meaningful and relevant information. (CFR 4.2)

DRBU's data acquisition has been wide-ranging. The team suggests that the IR office lead the institution in conversations about what data is necessary to accumulate and at what frequency. As they work with other stakeholders, they may determine that some datasets are less necessary than others, and more effort could be instead spent on acquiring stronger data, given the available resources.

Standard 4, above, presents an analysis of the adequacy of DRBU's institutional research function. In short, it has increased its number of staff to meet the immediate needs of assessment activities and to share the expertise beyond the accreditation liaison officer, who had primarily conducted and managed all IR activities in the initial years. (CFR 4.2) The office engages in periodic academic and non-academic reviews in a wide range of areas, taking in general feedback on stakeholder satisfaction and sometimes specific feedback on a particular activity or program (like CEI, work-study, or the academic resource center). DRBU is to be commended for both its formal and informal engagement with faculty and students to better understand institutional needs. (CFR 4.5) To grow further, it can shift its focus from compliance to strategy, by aligning its activities more with the strategic plan, soliciting input from key stakeholders more proactively, and being more deliberate and selective in data collection. (CFR 4.6)

As noted in earlier sections of this report, DRBU needs a stronger and more intentional alignment between its course learning outcomes (CLOs) and program learning outcomes (PLOs). Although a curriculum map exists to depict where PLOs are covered in the curriculum each year, it is not yet aligned to the course-level (e.g., specific courses, texts, assignments, etc.). The faculty have been tasked to independently map their CLOs to the PLOs. This endeavor should be done collectively to ensure the appropriate balance and sequence of each PLO (i.e., curriculum scaffolding), while avoiding gaps or redundancies throughout. The faculty could prioritize the PLOs with lower student achievement scores to determine where, when, and how they could be better achieved during the programs. (CFRs 2.6, 4.4)

A big question remains: how does one measure the intangible? The team encourages that the faculty begin with the end in mind. Consider the few PLOs with relatively lower scores (such as flexibility of the mind) and determine whether the low score is attributed to an actual lack of achievement or due to a lack of clarity or measurability in the outcome itself. Faculty engagement in dialogue will hopefully bring more clarity to the levels of achievement (e.g., below average versus excellent, or different levels in a rubric).

As a small institution, DRBU maintains the luxury of knowing each student intimately. Before enrollment advances in number, the faculty and staff can experiment with different formative and summative assessment approaches to test the validity of such methods by comparing their findings with other direct observations or anecdotal feedback, also known as triangulating the data, to corroborate results. (CFR 4.1) DRBU faculty also have an intuitive understanding of the kinds of students that tend to successfully complete the program. The IR team could then be mindful of such groups and work towards more disaggregated data analyses. In other words, DRBU could take advantage of any intuitive insights now in order to develop objective approaches for the future.

G. Component 7: Sustainability: Financial Viability, Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment

DRBU's executive management stated its strong belief that support from DRBA would continue indefinitely and hence provide the institution with needed financial stability. This conviction notwithstanding, the team was not aware of specific written documentation regarding DRBA's indefinite commitment to this support and did not speak or meet directly with DRBA to confirm. DRBU is attempting to expand its recruiting efforts, including for its revenue-generating master's level program, but even were it to meet these relatively ambitious targets, some level of continued support from DRBA would be needed to ensure financial stability.

DRBU is also attempting to improve its endowment and investment returns, which presently contributes to the budget in the 2% range. Its executive and management teams understand the importance of improving this return in order to improve financial stability, both in terms of the direct returns the endowment generates and the confidence it would foster in potential donors to give more to the institution, trusting that DRBU would properly invest its donations. As a non-profit entity, DRBU has advantages over for-profit entities in generating such investment returns as it is exempt from state and federal income taxes and can secure reduced property tax rates for any real estate investments as well. Thus, the team encourages DRBU to enhance its efforts in its investments. DRBU has recently added a board member with substantial investment experience, which will hopefully be of benefit to its investment endeavors.

The team also encourages DRBU to seek to obtain a written agreement with DRBA to provide indefinite support, as such written documentation may be helpful in the event of leadership changes at one or both organizations.

The team raised the issue of changing global, national, and regional events that may affect the future of the institution, such as the evolution of artificial intelligence (AI), its impact on society, and the resulting evolution in the potential career landscape of what employers seek in students. It is suggested that DRBU may be better positioned to market its liberal arts education as being applicable to real-world business needs in this regard. The team suggests that DRBU increase its awareness of the changes in the broader society and seek opportunities to advance its message and attract more students and top quality staff members, as needed.

Succession planning was also raised by the team, and DRBU is advised to increase its efforts to ensure that the organizational and operational structures are in place to move the institution forward in

the coming years. The team encourages DRBU to invest substantial efforts into succession planning throughout the organization, from the board level on down, to ensure its continuing success.

DRBU is committed to its educational effectiveness, and with the talent and resourcefulness of its staff, the team believes that it will commit the appropriate efforts and resources to maintain its educational effectiveness. As previously stated, however, the team recommends that DRBU improve its operational efficiency and rethink staff roles and responsibilities in order to better position itself in the coming years and attract and retain top performing talent across the organization. The team also reiterates its suggestion to DRBU to continue to bolster its board in terms of considering the addition of board members with practical, real-world experience and/or training of its existing members.

During the latter part of the onsite visit, the team learned of a decision-making council that convenes regularly to make important decisions for the organization. Due in part to time constraints, the team did not delve into the composition of this council, its decision-making history, or its efficacy. DRBU staff members expressed confidence in this council, but evaluation and potential enhancement of the decision-making process, efficiency, transparency, and potential decision-making delegation by this council may be warranted as the organization seeks to grow and expand.

Finally, the team also restates its suggestion for DRBU to improve its communications throughout the organization, including its meeting efficiency, which may be beneficial in enhancing organizational productivity and morale.

H. Component 9: Reflection and Plans for Improvement

To begin with, the team would like to reiterate that the Institutional Report was well organized and clearly written and presented. The self-study process was well executed, led by a very capable ALO, and had the support and buy-in from all the constituencies. The Institutional Report is both reflective and self-critical.

In their reflection of the last accreditation review and in preparation of this reaffirmation of accreditation process, DRBU has grown its capacity in anticipation of an enrollment growth by expanding its faculty and staff, reviewed its academic programs, and initiated and concluded a strategic planning process. Like all institutions of higher learning, DRBU was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but was able to navigate the disruption admirably.

While clearly cognizant of its own strengths, DRBU is also keenly aware of its work ahead and areas needing improvement. Listed below are the areas for improvement DRBU identifies for itself:

- Work toward separation from its religious parent organization, DRBA, to position DRBU as a stronger liberal arts college
- Greater attention to diversity
- Increase faculty facility in the use of the rubrics and PLOs in assessment and quality improvement activities
- Grow communication and career placement services
- Ongoing efforts on growing student enrollment toward 100-120 students
- Plan to improve the education quality and student success of the BA and MA program during the next review cycle
- Increase nonacademic offerings
- Add to its endowment as ways to strengthen the university's long-term financial sustainability

These areas for improvement and plans ahead are confirmed by the team as areas that, when attended to, will strengthen the institution. Finally, DRBU certainly has positioned itself to contribute to the public good, as one of the few accredited institutions of higher education in the U.S. with a Buddhist

affiliation and in the tradition of the “Great Books” institutions. Importantly, DRBU has continued to work hard to ensure that its students graduate debt-free, an institutional commitment to equity that is both impactful and rare.

SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

On the basis of the Institutional Report, the interviews during the onsite visit, and other relevant material the institution produced, the team agrees that DRBU has engaged in an intentional, comprehensive, informative, and effective review process involving all its constituencies. The Institutional Report was well-crafted and balanced, with clear delineation of strengths and identification of areas for improvement. It is both descriptive and self-critical. The institution also responded to requests for additional documents in a timely manner. All these aspects assist the team to come to a better understanding of DRBU's mission and its distinctive and high-touch approach to delivering its BA and MA programs.

Commendations

The team commends DRBU for the following accomplishments and practices:

1. The serious, thoughtful, and transparent approach to the review process, including the quality of the Institutional Report, presentation of evidence, responses to previous recommendations and to the team's requests for evidence, and the engaging conversations during the visit.
2. The deep commitment of the board, faculty, staff, administration, and students to the mission of the university.
3. The highly qualified faculty and student services personnel, whose values-driven, student-centered focus informs curriculum, co-curriculum, and student support.
4. The transformational impact of the DRBU education on the students and alumni through the pedagogy of shared inquiry and personalized learning experiences such as contemplative practice, work study, and student conferences.

5. The ethic of care from the recruitment and admission process through post-graduation, including the investment in student support services such as mental health and the ongoing commitment to graduate students debt-free.

Recommendations

The team recommends that Dharma Realm Buddhist University:

1. Develop the strategic plan with measurable outcomes of identified priorities and a regular assessment process including timelines, milestones, ownership of tasks, and key performance indicators. (CFRs 1.7, 4.1, 4.6)
2. Approach assessment and educational effectiveness with a more strategic lens, driven by the faculty's identification of institutional needs and key indicators of student success through the deliberate collection and analysis of evidence; develop processes for faculty to systematically work towards closing the loop. (CFRs 2.4, 3.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
3. Continue to build out and implement data-driven enrollment management and research-based marketing plans, aligned with the institution's strategic growth planning and resourcing. (CFRs 3.4, 4.6)
4. Improve operational efficiency and consider streamlining staff responsibilities after performing an in-depth review of the organization's functional needs and employee capabilities. (CFRs 1.7, 2.1, 3.1, 3.7)
5. Continue to develop human resources policies and infrastructure to address regulatory compliance, compensation and benefits, performance review, and professional development. (CFRs 1.7, 3.2, 3.3)

APPENDICES: Federal Compliance Forms

1. Credit Hour and Program Length Review Form

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.)
Policy on credit hour	Is this policy easily accessible? YES NO
	If so, where is the policy located? Course catalog.
	Comments:
Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour	Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)? YES NO
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? YES NO
	Comments: Professors and Instructional Committee review syllabi and approve their content. Credit hours are also reviewed during program review.
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours? YES NO
	Comments: The semester course schedule and course syllabi indicate the length of times and days that courses meet.
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? DRBU does not offer hybrid or online courses.
	What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)? N/A
	What degree level(s)? AA/AS BA/BS MA Doctoral N/A
	What discipline(s)? N/A
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? YES NO N/A
	Comments:

<p>Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated)</p> <p><i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i></p>	<p>How many syllabi were reviewed? There are no courses not meeting for the prescribed number of contact hours.</p>
	<p>What kinds of courses? N/A</p>
	<p>What degree level(s)? AA/AS BA/BS MA Doctoral N/A</p>
	<p>What discipline(s)? N/A</p>
	<p>Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? YES NO N/A</p>
	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)</p>	<p>How many programs were reviewed? The two degree programs offered by DRBU.</p>
	<p>What kinds of programs were reviewed? BA in Liberal Arts; MA in Buddhist Classics</p>
	<p>What degree level(s)? AA/AS BA/BS MA Doctoral</p>
	<p>What discipline(s)? Liberal Arts and Buddhist Classics</p>
	<p>Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length? YES NO</p>
	<p>Comments: The program information is found on pages 11-41 of the course catalog and on the DRBU website.</p>

Review Completed By: **Jeffrey Kuan**

Date: **October 6, 2023**

2. Marketing and Recruitment Review Form

Under federal regulation*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's recruiting and admissions practices.

Material Reviewed	Questions and Comments: Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this table as appropriate.
**Federal regulations	<p>Does the institution follow federal regulations on recruiting students? YES NO</p> <p>Comments: The Director of University Relations has a fixed salary, is not incentivized for enrolling students, and is not evaluated based on enrollment. Admissions is on a rolling basis. Note also that DRBU has at present not sought Title IV eligibility. All student financial support is provided through institutional aid, which is generous and allows DRBU to meet its goal of graduating all students debt-free.</p>
Degree completion and cost	<p>Does the institution provide information about the typical length of time to degree? YES NO</p> <p>Does the institution provide information about the overall cost of the degree? YES NO</p> <p>Comments: DRBU provides length of degree information in its catalog (pages 11-41) and on the website. They also publish graduation and retention data for the two degree programs on the DRBU website. The cost of attendance is presented on pages 49-51 of the 2023-24 DRBU course catalog and on the DRBU website.</p>
Careers and employment	<p>Does the institution provide information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable? YES NO</p> <p>Does the institution provide information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable? YES NO</p>
	<p>Comments: DRBU provides information on graduates' employment on its website ("After DRBU" page at https://www.drbu.edu/student-life/after-drbu).</p>

*§602.16(a)(1)(vii)

**Section 487 (a)(20) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) prohibits Title IV eligible institutions from providing incentive compensation to employees or third party entities for their success in securing student enrollments. Incentive compensation includes commissions, bonus payments, merit salary adjustments, and promotion decisions based solely on success in enrolling students. These regulations do not apply to the recruitment of international students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive Federal financial aid.

Review Completed By: **Vanessa Karam**
Date: **October 6, 2023**

3. Student Complaints Review Form

Under federal regulation*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's student complaints policies, procedures, and records.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)
Policy on student complaints	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints? YES NO
	If so, is the policy or procedure easily accessible? Is so, where?
	Comments: DRBU publishes policies and procedures for student complaints and grievances on its website and in the catalog (pages 78-80 in the 2023-24 course catalog. They are easily accessible.
Process(es)/ procedure	Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? YES NO If so, please describe briefly:
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? YES NO
	Comments: DRBU has a formal procedure that addresses student complaints. A student contacts the Associate Dean of Campus life, who tries to resolve the complaint. If not successful, the Dean of Students will form a grievance committee to hear the complaint and formulate formal actions. Records of the complaint and the proceedings are maintained in the DRBU Office of the Registrar on campus. Paper records are filed for a minimum of five years after a student completes a degree.
Records	Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? YES NO N/A If so, where? The policy is to maintain paper and electronic records of complaints and grievances by the office of the Registrar; the records are to be physically stored in the Records Room of the Registrar's Office. At the time of the visit, there were no records of student complaints, however. When a

	<p>team member requested to review them, she was taken to the records room to show her the physical location for keeping such records and informed that there currently no complaints on file as there hadn't been any.</p>
	<p>Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? YES NO</p> <p>If so, please describe briefly:</p>
	<p>Comments:</p> <p>Complaints filed with the Dean of Students are kept on record for a minimum of five years after a student completes a degree; statistical information to evaluate trends will be compiled and reviewed on a yearly basis.</p>

*§602-16(1)(1)(ix)

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission's Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.

Review Completed By: **Vanessa Karam**

Date: **October 6, 2023**

4. Transfer Credit Policy Review Form

Under federal regulations*, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's recruiting and admissions practices accordingly.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)
Transfer Credit Policy(s)	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for receiving transfer credit? YES NO
	If so, is the policy publicly available? YES NO N/A If so, where?
	Does the policy(s) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education? YES NO N/A
	Comments: Because the BA and MA programs consist of an all-required, fully integrated, sequentially built curriculum, students must complete all coursework at DRBU and cannot transfer credit into the programs there. Students enter the BA program as freshmen and the MA program as first-year students. This is indicated on page 65 of the 2023-24 course catalog.

*§602.24(e): Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that--

1. Are publicly disclosed in accordance with 668.43(a)(11); and
2. Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

See also WASC Senior College and University Commission's Transfer of Credit Policy.

Review Completed By: **Jeffrey Kuan**

Date: **October 6, 2023**