

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT

To Academy of Art University

March 15 – 16, 2018

Team Roster

Denise DeZolt, Senior Vice President, Laureate Education (Chair)

John Hofmann, Director of Assessment, Saint Mary's College of California (Assistant Chair)

Jeffery J. Keith, Chair Board of Trustees, Sterling Partners, Alliant International University

Kotaro Nakamura, Director/Professor of the School of Art and Design, San Diego State University

Mark Goor, Vice President & Staff Liaison for the Special Visit, WSCUC

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

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

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

(Use a separate heading and subsection for each major issue from the Commission’s previous action letter or other document that established the issues to be addressed on this visit.)

- Issue 1: Institutional decision making, transparency responsibilities and communication
- Issue 2: Faculty model, Governance roles and responsibilities
- Issue 3: Institutional research and evidence based decision making for continuous improvement
- Issue 4: Strategic planning and data driven changes

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE

- Issue 1: Prospective litigation

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

- A. Findings
- B. Commendations
- C. Recommendations

APPENDICES (if applicable)

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

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

Academy of Art University (AAU), a for-profit institution, is among the largest regionally accredited art and design universities in the United States, offering associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees in 22 areas of study. AAU's mission focuses on preparing professionals in design, communications, and the arts, through undergraduate and graduate degree, certificate, and portfolio development offerings. With an open admissions policy, AAU hosts a large and diverse student body including a substantial number of international students, serving approximately 13,000 students in online, on-site, or combined modalities.

According to AAU's fall 2017 census (September 18, 2017), 59% of the student body consists of minority or international students; students are drawn from 114 countries, all 50 of the United States, and the District of Columbia; 62% enroll in at least some of their coursework online; 38% enroll exclusively in online classes; 59% of students are full time; 8% of undergraduate, degree-seeking students are first-time, full-time freshmen; 51% of new undergraduate, degree-seeking students are transfers; and 37% are enrolled in graduate programs.

AAU holds the following recognitions and/or accreditations:

- National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)
- National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) for the Bachelor of Architecture and Master of Architecture degrees
- Council on Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) for the BFA and MFA degrees in Interior Architecture and Design.

The institution has also been accredited by WSCUC since May 2007. Following the Accreditation Visit of April 1–3, 2014, and findings from the resulting team report, the Commission acted on June 20, 2014 to

- receive the team report and reaffirm accreditation for seven years;
- schedule the next comprehensive review with the Offsite Review in fall 2020 and the Accreditation Visit tentatively in spring 2021;
- require a Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2018; and
- issue a Formal Notice of Concern and schedule a Special Visit in fall 2016 focusing on the institution's responses to the Commission Action Letter (CAL) dated July 7, 2014.

The Special Visit was conducted September 27-29, 2016, and the Special Visit report addresses the following issues, as outlined in the CAL and elaborated by the Special Visit team:

1. Issue 1: Leadership and Organizational Structure and Effectiveness
2. Issue 2: The Faculty Role
3. Issue 3: Student Success (including Persistence Challenges, Student Support, Retention, and Graduation Rates)
4. Issue 4: Student Life
5. Issue 5: Strategic Plan and Financial Condition

According to the March 2017 CAL, the Commission acted to

1. receive the Special Visit team report that focused on (a) leadership and organizational structure and effectiveness; (b) faculty roles; (c) student success; (d) student life; and (e) strategic plan and financial conditions;
2. continue the Formal Notice of Concern through spring 2018; and

3. schedule a Special Visit in spring 2018 to assess progress on the five recommendations contained in the letter, by which time the concerns must be fully addressed or the Commission will be required to issue a sanction.

Recommendations specifically included the following:

1. Continue to clarify the institutional decision-making process and provide greater transparency to all key stakeholders; continue defining management roles and responsibilities and communicating these to the community (CFR 3.6, 3.7).
2. Continue to engage with the whole faculty (full time, part time, online, onsite) in a participatory manner to further evolve and formalize structures and processes for genuine shared governance, consistent with the institutional mission and type (CFR 3.10).
3. Further define and codify the faculty roles, levels, and responsibilities (including directors, level leaders, and coordinators, etc.) to foster an institutional faculty culture (CFR 3.10).
4. Build on the emerging institutional research function to analyze, synthesize, and use data to make evidence-based decisions for continuous improvement, particularly related to persistence and graduation rates beyond students' first year, consistent with the institutional mission (CFR 2.10).
5. As the strategic plan is updated, sustain the bottom-up approach taken to planning and inform it more deeply through systematic use of the institutional research function and resulting data to make data-driven changes (CFR 4.6).

The Commission also commended AAU for the following:

1. Responsiveness to the findings and recommendations of the 2014 WSCUC team report
2. Reduction of the number of direct reports to the president, the reorganization of the management structure, and recent additions to the management team
3. Formative efforts toward the engagement of faculty through a more participatory process
4. Ongoing integration of co-curricular programs with the curriculum and the further development of a co-curricular review process to enhance student life
5. The systematic approach to the forming of a university-wide team that produced a comprehensive five-year strategic plan with appropriate goals, tracking, and feedback loops.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

In advance of the Special Visit, the team conducted a conference call on February 13, 2018, reviewing the areas of responsibility for the members of the team and setting the process for the visit, and later drafting the report sections. In advance of the conference call, the team reviewed the CAL and AAU Report, evaluated the report's content in light of the CAL's stated issues of concern, and identified areas of inquiry and initial responses based on evidence presented within the report and its appendices. The team agreed the report narrative was detailed and concise, provided substantive analysis and reflection supported by relevant evidence, and demonstrated AAU understood the significance of the recommendations outlined in the CAL.

While AAU appeared to have made meaningful progress clarifying how decision making takes place, creating clearer communication channels, leveraging their emerging institutional research (IR) function to support student success, and sustaining their bottom-up approach to strategic planning, the team ended their conference call with lingering questions about AAU's progress in creating an effective faculty governance structure. These initial assessments prompted the team to request additional materials that

would help them evaluate AAU's progress in developing resources and structures that supported and promoted faculty decision-making authority. These materials included a faculty decision-making chart illustrating and explaining how faculty subcommittee work feeds into or informs the work of the Academic Steering Committee (ASC), the principal faculty governance body, and clarifying where faculty have or exercise decision-making authority. The team also requested a copy of AAU's faculty survey and any executive summaries or action plans based on the survey results. The institution responded promptly to these requests by sending a decision-making chart along with a copy of the faculty survey. They also ensured that a summary of findings and action plan would be available by the time of the visit following their approval by the ASC. These additional materials were largely supplied more than a week in advance of the special visit.

Prior to the visit, the team scheduled and structured their meetings with various committees, groups, and individuals according to the priorities they set following their pre-visit conference call. The team decided, for example, to meet as a group with the ASC, and to extend the meeting time from the normal 45 minutes to 90 minutes. This meeting was then followed by a private team lunch that would allow members to share and summarize their perceptions and findings from the meeting with the ASC and to prepare for the subsequent meetings with the four ASC sub-committees: Curriculum Subcommittee, Library Resources Subcommittee, Online Education Steering Committee, and Technology Subcommittee. These discussions with faculty were followed by separate meetings with the Strategic Planning and Student Success committees, the IR support staff, and a presentation on AAU's new faculty data dashboard. In addition, the team chair and assistant chair met privately with Jim Sober, AAU's executive vice president, who is leading IR.

The team identified the following issues to explore during its visit with AAU:

1. Assess the degree to which communication about decision making is happening in all directions at the institution (across departments, down and up the hierarchy), and that it includes full-time, part-time, and online faculty.
2. Determine the faculty's understanding of their decision-making authority. While AAU approved an ASC charter in fall 2017 and drafted the Faculty Roles and Responsibility Chart, which help clarify the roles of the committees, they did not make clear in their report what if any decision-making authority faculty actually have.
3. Assess AAU's progress in establishing a faculty culture. The Commission Action Letter referred to the need for AAU to "institutionalize faculty culture." The report, however, did not make clear whether faculty believe they have made progress on this front or whether they perceive a gap between the current culture and the kind of culture they want or expect. The report also did not make clear the professional development training available to faculty to promote better teaching and learning or the ways in which feedback from the faculty survey drives planning. These are also aspects of faculty culture. The team also sought to explore what an "institutionalized faculty culture" at AAU would look like and to what degree faculty culture has been institutionalized.
4. Further explore how findings from the faculty survey are being used for decision making.
5. Conduct a review of the IR and business analytics unit led by James Sober (a) to understand his role and function, his approach to data driven decision making, and the unit's current reporting structure; (b) to further clarify how data are actually being used and how data requests are prioritized; (c) to learn what data types, sources, and cycles are envisioned moving forward; (d) to learn how well integrated IR is and what plan exists for further integration; and (e) to understand how faculty are using and benefitting from Tableau and other new data tools.
6. Ascertain the extent to which faculty, staff, and students believe they are being adequately apprised of the progress with implementing the strategic plan.

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

AAU's report was the product of a collaborative effort involving a cross-section of executive, faculty, and staff leadership. Drafts of the report were reviewed and approved by teams comprised of stakeholders with knowledge and expertise of the themes outlined in the CAL, and a final report was reviewed and approved by AAU's WSCUC Steering Committee.

The team agreed the report narrative was detailed and concise, provided substantive analysis and reflection supported by relevant evidence, and demonstrated AAU understood the significance of the recommendations outlined in the CAL letter. The report not only provided a full accurate account of the challenges facing the university, but also reflected a sincere attempt by AAU to engage the underlying issues or challenges thoughtfully.

AAU structured their institutional report to address each recommendation with descriptions of the initiatives and provided detailed summaries of how they have made meaningful progress addressing the issues highlighted in the CAL letter. These include clarifying how decision making takes place, creating more clear communication channels, leveraging their emerging IR function to support student success, and sustaining their "bottom-up approach" to strategic planning. The University provided numerous reports, graphs, and other exhibits to support their claims of adequately addressing each of the WASC recommendations, and this evidence appeared to align well with their conclusions. The team was especially pleased to see research reports concerning numerous key initiatives focused on retention and graduation.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

Issue 1 Continue to clarify the institutional decision-making process and provide greater transparency to all key stakeholders; continue defining management roles and responsibilities and communicating these to the community (CFR 3.6, 3.7)

AAU's progress in clarifying decision-making processes, defining management roles and responsibilities, and providing greater transparency to their community can be assessed in part by the work of key institutional committees. These include the ASC, Strategic Planning Committee, Student Success Committee, and the WSCUC Steering Committee. Each committee has outlined a mission statement describing their respective purpose or charge and their roles and responsibilities (CFR 3.6). These documents also list committee members, provide committee contact information, and are published in the university catalog. AAU also reports that these documents have been distributed to student and external audiences and added to their learning-management-system portal page, which is accessed by students and faculty members. Team members conclude from their respective meetings that these committees appear to be gaining traction as decision-making bodies (CFR 3.7).

AAU's systems and processes to facilitate and promote communication around decision making continue to improve. The Executive Cabinet (EC), which serves as a hub for the four institutional committees, provides a forum to support communication among senior managers and a conduit through which information about the operations and improvement initiatives are communicated up and down the university's hierarchy. AAU describes how communication circulates throughout the organization via EC

members who “represent, report progress on, and communicate back to and receive input from the main institutional committees” listed above. During their meeting with the team, EC members reported that both the composition of the cabinet and how they have worked together has helped to break down departmental silos and fostered more collaborative, expedited, and inclusive decision making.

The EC meets in weekly *scrum* meetings to discuss operational and strategic initiatives, which are informed by their review of a weekly report of key admission and enrollment metrics (CFR 4.2; CFR 4.3). Topics regularly discussed in the scrum meetings include the following:

- Regulatory compliance and accreditation
- ASC and faculty
- Student Success Committee (student experience, satisfaction, feedback) and initiatives
- Enrollment, marketing, and admissions
- Campus safety
- Staffing (new positions, changes, promotions, reorganizations)
- Data and reporting (weekly executive report, data analysis reports) and strategic analysis
- Finance and budget

Examples of EC decisions include the following:

- Implementing a new student portal in 2018 that connects students to each other and fosters communication across the university community
- Restructuring of the Student Services Department with the addition of three lead advisors
- Purchasing and distribution of Tableau software licenses for each academic department in order to provide data to all faculty at the department level
- Adding staff retention to the key priorities for 2018 given the competitive nature of the San Francisco Bay area labor market
- Developing various reports by IR to facilitate decision making at the EC level
- Approving new withdrawal procedures to track reasons why students withdraw in order to address the top reasons students were leaving

AAU also provided evidence of their progress in defining management roles and responsibilities to support more efficient decision making. As reported in the 2016 team report, the university has moved away from a centralized decision-making model in which all personnel decisions related to hiring, terminations, and salary increases were made by President Stephens. Since the last special visit, AAU’s Organizational Structure and Decision-Making Committee, an EC ad-hoc committee, has continued their work of clarifying and expediting decision making by reassigning decision-making authority to the appropriate executive member. For example, AAU reports the following:

- Termination can now be approved by the vice president (VP) of Human Resources, executive VP (EVP) of Financial Aid and Compliance, CAO, EVP of Finance and the EVP of Enrollment. All employees with either an executive (EVP, VP) or director titles must first be approved by the president.
- The EVP of Finance can now approve the hiring of temporary employees.
- The CAO and VP of Human Resources can now approve all personnel matters related to faculty, which includes all hires, terminations, leaves of absence, and salary increases.

- All raises up to 5% will be approved by the VP of Human Resources with increases above 5% going to the EVP of Finance and VP of Human Resources first and then to the president.
- The CAO and VP of Human Resources approve faculty course load reductions.

Issue 2 Continue to engage with the whole faculty (full-time, part-time, online, onsite) in a participatory manner to further evolve and formalize structures and processes for genuine shared governance, consistent with the institutional mission and type (CFR 3.10)

Since the last Special Visit, AAU has engaged in efforts to consolidate its management structure, clarify lines of decision-making authority, and streamline decision-making processes. In addition to the work of institutional committees developing charters and disseminating them among faculty and staff, these efforts have also informed faculty work of formalizing structures and processes for genuine shared governance. The results of these reforms are most notably in the work of the ASC and its faculty subcommittees and in the new Faculty Roles and Responsibility Chart.

Since the 2016 Special Visit, the ASC has made significant progress asserting itself as a central decision-making body for AAU. The ASC serves as a governing body that provides a forum for faculty to deliberate and make decisions or recommendations about curriculum, professional development, new programs, and other areas related to the academic integrity of their programs. Recently, the ASC drafted and approved a charter that defines membership selection criteria, outlines the scope of committee responsibilities, and describes meeting protocols and processes, all of which help the committee validate and achieve these core purposes.

Prior to the site visit, however, the team noted that this charter states members are appointed by AAU's president rather than faculty. This matter concerned the team, since such a policy contravenes standard faculty governance practices whereby faculty themselves exercise such decision making. During their meeting with the ASC, the team learned that faculty now do decide committee membership independent of the president and are exercising other types of decision-making authority. The team recommends that the ASC charter be updated to reflect this change.

During their meeting with the ASC, the team witnessed enthusiasm and excitement among the faculty. Faculty provided numerous examples of how the steering committee has matured as a decision-making body and helped improve their practices surrounding faculty development and faculty evaluations. Team members were also impressed by the ASC's enthusiastic report of a recent curriculum-based, inter-program collaboration, which exemplified the deliberative, circumspect, and collegial work that governing bodies like the ASC are intended to support.

The team also noted that ASC membership has expanded. In addition to permitting all faculty (and not just program directors) to serve, the Chief Academic Officer is also an ASC member who provides reports from the EC meetings and serves as a conduit through which faculty questions or concerns are delivered to the EC. The online program director has also become a member, which allows the ASC to discuss issues concerning online learning.

Faculty subcommittees that report to the ASC have also been formed and focus on subject matters concerning academic quality and integrity, such as curriculum, library, technology, and distance learning. Some subcommittees report their statuses as faculty governance bodies have legitimized their work and

expedited resource allocations. AAU has also improved communication with its faculty (and staff) through its weekly email newsletter, *Top 5 Weekly Updates*.

Such progress was also cited by the array of full-time, part-time, and online faculty who participated in the meeting with faculty. Several faculty and directors reported with great enthusiasm how access to data in real time had facilitated their work in such areas as discussions with faculty about performance, ensuring appropriate levels of staffing, and managing load. For the most part, faculty in attendance were able to describe aspects of the roles and responsibilities document, as well as the emerging governance structure, and were able to point to progress in participation. There were some faculty who were less clear, yet upon voicing that, they were advised or guided by other faculty to the location of the resources.

The newly developed Faculty Roles and Responsibility Chart clarifies the functions of the faculty groups. This detailed chart describes the responsibilities of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, Curriculum Leadership Teams (CLT), Department Action Teams (DAT), ASC, Online Education Steering Committee (OESC), academic department directors (ADD), and coordinators and track leads. In addition, the chart clarifies the scope of the groups' responsibilities as they relate to issues concerning operations, policy, and curriculum, as well as faculty and student affairs.

The team observed, however, that this new roles and responsibilities chart does not clearly explicate or illustrate the hierarchical relationship between the ASC and its subcommittees or the lines of authority these groups command (CFR 3.7). This prompted the team to request that AAU provide a supplemental decision-making chart that illustrates the relationship between these faculty groups and their decision-making authority and that moreover provides clarity and greater transparency about how subcommittee initiatives and recommendations make their way to the EC or the ASC for approval. AAU provided this decision-making chart, although in a mostly rudimentary form. While a good beginning, the team recommends that leadership further develop, refine, and promote both of these communication tools as a means to educate faculty about their intentional approach to describe and operationalize governance at AAU.

The Faculty Roles and Responsibility Chart indicates that the ASC's role is mainly advisory except for approving new program development and creating its subcommittees. However, the ASC meetings also serve as a venue for communicating among different programs and finding opportunities to collaborate between activities and to exchange ideas, all of which help build a stronger sense of community. Ideas and propositions generated by faculty or programs are discussed and vetted during ASC meetings and discussed with the EC or its members for support and implementation. The team recognizes that these ASC activities are sturdy developments that enhance the unique culture of AAU and are strong assets for their self-governance model.

Issue 3 Institutional research and evidence based decision making for continuous improvement (CFR 2.10)

AAU's fall 2016 site visit showed an institution making progress but still in the early stages of developing an effective IR function. Data were being collected but not used to inform or drive institutional planning or decision making, particularly in the areas of retention and student success. The Commission recommended AAU build upon its emerging IR capacity to analyze, synthesize, and use data by directing these functions toward more focused research on the issues or factors affecting persistence beyond the

first year and graduation. Moreover, the university was encouraged to develop new initiatives, programs, and policies that promote and support student success.

The team's initial review of the self-study and appendices found that AAU had completed a number of research studies and initiatives during 2017 that have informed both operational and academic planning. These activities focused on important issues concerning data integrity, attrition, enrollment trends, and student satisfaction, and the team found AAU's reports insightful and easy to read. For example, AAU developed more precise definitions of key performance indicators to help them analyze enrollment trends. These new definitions, which clearly differentiate new versus continuing students, re-entries versus returns, and final enrollment census collection dates, are based on specific and operationalized criteria that allow for more accurate and comprehensive analyses of student body flow.

While these institutional reports provided the team with some understanding of how much AAU's IR function has matured and become more disciplined in its research and analytical practices, team meetings with IR leadership and the groups using the products of this work helped confirm these impressions. Through the leadership of their IR director and new EVP of Business Intelligence and Analytics, AAU is starting to build effective and efficient systems for planning and decision support. As noted elsewhere, the EVP has introduced to the regular EC meeting a weekly report of key admission and enrollment metrics, which is used to monitor operational processes and evaluate strategic initiatives. IR leadership and support staff report they continue to be engaged with ongoing projects and that their data support-services and expertise are both highly regarded and requested more frequently by decision-makers in the university. And as the EVP summarized, they are taking a more proactive approach to research by producing both timely and real-time analyses that report not only what *has* happened but also what *is* happening.

The team's meeting with the Student Success Committee (SSC) provided more concrete demonstrations of AAU's continued growth in using institutional data to inform and evaluate key retention initiatives. Team members discussed the process and preliminary outcomes of a course pairings initiative to improve course completion rates. This two-phased initiative, which grew out of course pairings analysis conducted in the spring of 2017, involves SSC members working with student advisors and faculty to improve communication with students about the purpose and thematic unity of certain course pairings. The outcomes assessment of this study will be based upon a number of key data points, including course completion rates, grades, and comparisons with comparable cohorts from previous years, as well as student feedback about the communications and advising they received about the course pairings.

The SSC also discussed the results of their annual Student Satisfaction Survey and provided concrete examples of how IR research on student satisfaction and persistence led to action items that sought to address specific student needs. These initiatives are listed and monitored on a SharePoint intranet site and document key elements of project implementation, including start and completion dates, project leads, deliverables, and progress updates. Many of the committee members also commended the excellent work of the IR team in providing data, analyses, and summaries that not only helped to catalyze these and other initiatives but also helped break down departmental silos. The team also noted that during their 45-minute meeting, nearly every member of the committee contributed to the discussion about these retention initiatives, which suggests the SSC is a well-informed and collaborative contingent.

AAU's capacity to support data- and evidenced-based decision making has also extended to academic review. For example, data visualization tools such as Tableau are helping faculty interact with their data to study assessment results, grade distributions, and retention rates. Working with the director of

assessment, academic directors are learning to filter, search, and disaggregate data to facilitate their analyses and interpretations, a practice that will serve them well during their data-intensive program reviews.

Issue 4 Strategic planning and data-driven changes (CFR 4.6)

AAU was directed by the Commission to inform their planning activity “through the systematic use of the institutional research function.” Based on the team’s review of the report, and from feedback shared across stakeholders, AAU appears to be very deliberate and intentional in using data to inform their strategic plan. In every meeting held with senior leaders, the board, faculty, and staff, the team heard context-relevant examples of improved data collection, data management, and data-driven decisions. The phrase “closing the loop” was often cited when referencing not only the use of data to effect change, but also a critical path to assessing the impact of change. They are using an array of measures, including admissions, enrollment, and benchmark comparisons, to set performance targets that will help them evaluate outcomes.

The Commission also directed AAU to “sustain the bottom-up approach taken to planning,” and their progress in this area is also evident. For example, AAU is in the early stage of implementing a plan to enhance the communication around the strategic plan and its execution. This plan has identified a number of groups, occasions, and meetings where the strategic plan can be promoted and discussed. Some of the initiatives include the following:

- The strategic plan is a standing agenda item at each board of directors meeting where the president provides focus-area updates.
- The monthly new hire orientation conducted by Human Resources provides information on the strategic plan, including where to find it (portal page of the learning management system) and how to learn more.
- Each fall semester, a student representative meeting focuses on the strategic plan.
- The CAO updates the ASC and the faculty on the strategic plan and its progress at the ASC meetings.
- The student representatives are updated and give feedback on the progress relating to the five institutional strategic initiatives.

The strategic plan tracking process that was implemented in July 2016 continues to be implemented and refined with a focus on key institutional priorities. The priorities include the following:

- Student Success – Improve student persistence and drive graduation rates
- Graduate Success – Strengthen alumni network and increase internships
- Enrollment Growth – Increase new student enrollment
- Talent Management - Improve key-employee turnover rate
- Business Practices – Improve operational effectiveness

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) meets quarterly to review and refine the strategic-plan tracking sheets, which bring the key institutional priorities down to the department level and tie into the budget. The results inform updates on accomplishments, project updates, and resources needed. The process has been enhanced by the use of SharePoint as a communication platform to track and inform key stakeholders in the institution and a critical-success-factor template to report out on the progress and impact of plan implementation.

Overall, the SPC is productive, engaged, and effective in its effort to advance the 2016–2021 Strategic Plan. The EC, board of directors, Student Success Committee, and ASC give feedback and support the work of the SPC to ensure the strategic plan is advanced and communicated to the AAU community. The faculty, staff, and administration continue to become more informed, savvy, and effective in using data to make decisions to drive operations and strategy. A tremendous advancement has been in the use of Tableau as a tool to help interpret data to improve decision making and communication about the institution.

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE

On February 10, 2018, an article appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle regarding a potential federal lawsuit involving AAU dating back to 2009. This lawsuit was brought against AAU by former Admissions Officers who alleged illegal enrollment practices and fraud. The team agreed they needed to follow up about this matter as part of the special visit. During discussions with AAU’s president, executive team, and board members, the team learned that this legal matter has been a burden to the university, given the ongoing “bad press” about the allegations and the university’s association with similar lawsuits against other for-profit schools. However, AAU leadership expressed confidence that this legal matter will be resolved soon and that they will prevail. They specifically referenced the fact that, while the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) did provide an attorney to argue in collaboration with the plaintiffs at a hearing in December 2017 with the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, this matter has not resulted in any formal action from the Department of Education or the DOJ, which likely would be the case should they have evidence of concern.

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

Based on their careful review of AAU’s institutional report and appendices and their meetings with a cross-section of executive, staff, and faculty leadership, the team concludes that the university has made significant progress addressing the recommendations outlined in the CAL. Specifically, the team found substantial evidence that AAU is moving away from a compressed and overly-centralized decision-making model to one that empowers executive leadership to exercise authority and make decisions in a timely manner. The university has also made progress operationalizing decision making that is clearly communicated, more expeditious, and more distributed across the university to key executives, faculty, and other key stakeholders.

The process of decision making should be appropriate for the type and size of the organization. As AAU has successfully developed its own governance model by clarifying the rights and responsibilities of the faculty group committees, they have removed structural ambiguity and promoted actions that are in the best interest of its organization. These developments evidence significant improvements since the team’s last visit and underscore AAU’s sincere effort to improve and clarify its governance model and exercise effective academic leadership, and moreover provide evidence that a culture of faculty authority and decision making is taking root.

Overall, AAU provided more than adequate evidence that they are committed to using data for decision-making purposes. Their research projects have addressed the most salient issues affecting the university, and these projects have occasioned new initiatives designed to improve retention and promote student success. Data appear to be regularly and widely circulated throughout the organization, and community members spoke consistently of their confidence in and appreciation of the IR team.

Lastly, AAU has made major strides in becoming more adept at using institutional data to organize, implement, and evaluate their strategic plan. They have also made progress in streamlining their communication of the plan to the community and finding multiple outlets or forums where the impact of their initiatives can be shared and discussed.

COMMENDATIONS

1. Embracing the spirit and intent of the WSCUC standards and processes that has led to improved transparency, communication, collaboration, and evidence-based planning and decision making
2. Discovering the importance and value of institutional data to drive decision making and empowering stakeholders to engage in evidenced-based planning and decision making
3. Engaging with all faculty in a participatory manner to develop further and formalize structures and processes for genuine shared governance, unique to the institutional mission and type
4. Progressing impressively with operationalizing decision-making processes that are clear and distributed to key stakeholders across the organization, most notably in the ASC's planning, deliberations, and decision making
5. Defining, codifying, and communicating the faculty roles, levels, and responsibilities (including directors, level leaders, and coordinators, etc.) that is fostering an emerging and vital institutional faculty culture

RECOMMENDATIONS

The team recommends that AAU continue their positive momentum in the areas of:

- Collaborative and institute-wide efforts with data-informed and evidenced-based decision making
- Supporting and encouraging the growth of AAU's emerging faculty governance structure in which decision-making authority is clearly defined and academic leadership is exercised
- Promoting transparency and collaboration within the university around decision-making processes

APPENDICES (if applicable)

N/A