

**REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM**  
**EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**  
**TO POINT LOMA NAZARENE UNIVERSITY**

November 21, 2007  
(Revised December 13, 2007)

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Reaffirmation of Accreditation

**Team Roster**

Kathleen A. O'Brien, Chair, Alverno College  
John A. Hughes, Assistant Chair, The Master's College and Seminary  
Hiram L. Davis, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo  
Billy Hughes, Loma Linda University  
Betty McEady, California State University, Monterey Bay (Retired)

The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution according to Commission Standards and Core Commitments and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration.



## **PART I: Overview and Context**

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### ***A. Description of Institution and Visit***

#### **1. Brief Historical Snapshot of Point Loma Nazarene University:**

Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) was founded in 1902 in Los Angeles. The institution's first president had a long term vision for the school to develop into a substantial university of 3,000 students—with various professional schools and an undergraduate residential liberal arts college—a university vital in the Christian faith, excellent in academics, robust in scholarship, intentional about character formation, and faithful to the sponsoring denomination while remaining open to enrolling students from all denominations.

Eventually, the institution made its way to suburban Los Angeles and operated as Pasadena College (PC). Over the years, PC experienced times of both feast and famine but eventually developed into a solid, stable liberal arts institution of about 1,300 students. The College earned accreditation from the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools in 1943, and the Western College Association accredited PC in 1949. Although it was a vibrant academic community with many faculty and staff members living within walking distance, the 19-acre campus was simply too small to permit further growth and development. In 1973, the College sold its campus in Pasadena and bought a 90-acre site overlooking the Pacific Ocean in San Diego—becoming first Point Loma College, then Point Loma Nazarene College, and finally Point Loma Nazarene University.

Since its relocation to San Diego, the institution has seen unprecedented growth and development. Since the 1996 visit of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) alone, over 70 million dollars have been invested in physical plant and technology. The Master Plan for the main campus is virtually complete with the exception of renovations in the Physical Education Complex and the science and mathematics facilities. There has been a 40 percent increase in full-time

faculty (to 157), student academic background has increased substantially (the entering freshman average grade-point average is now 3.72, and the average SAT is 1134), and scholarly productivity and research are encouraged and flourishing. In late 1997, the institution elected its first lay president, signaling a serious commitment to professional management, strategic leadership, and resource acquisition. In 1998, the college moved to a university status from Point Loma Nazarene College to Point Loma Nazarene University, a further indication that many of the founder's hopes and dreams had become, in fact, a reality.

In 2000, the University's enrollment reached the cap imposed by the City of San Diego—a maximum of 2,000 full-time equivalent students, calculated as an average between fall and spring semesters of all courses offered at the Point Loma main campus. As a result of the pressures caused by the cap, all graduate programs were moved from the main campus on the Point Loma Peninsula to a newly acquired educational facility ten miles away in San Diego's Mission Valley. The main campus is now at capacity solely with undergraduate programs – approximately 2,400 students with 1,650 living in residential housing. In addition, the institution has developed new graduate programs in business and nursing, as well as new facilities for graduate education in Arcadia and Bakersfield. When this report was written, the University total enrollment was approximately 3,200 students.

## **2. Fall 2006 Capacity & Preparatory Review (CPR) Visit:**

The PLNU CPR team visit was completed in early October 2006 with the final version of the visit report being submitted to WASC at the end of that month. As documented in that report, the team felt that PLNU was a strong institution that had taken the reaffirmation of accreditation process under the guidelines in the *WASC 2001 Handbook of Accreditation* seriously, and had demonstrated that they were meeting the requirements embodied in the capacity-related aspects of the WASC

Criteria for Review (CFRs). The team report included a number of recommendations sprinkled through the main report body, and concluded with eight major recommendations that were intended to encourage the many already in-process efforts to further strengthen the institution.

On February 27, 2007, the WASC Commission acted to receive the CPR report and identify five recommendations for continuing institutional attention that built upon and extended the major recommendations made by the visiting team.

### **3. Fall 2007 Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Visit:**

The membership of the visiting team changed somewhat between the CPR and the EER visits. The CPR visiting team chairperson and assistant chairperson were able to continue to participate through the PLNU EER while the two other CPR team members were replaced with three new individuals. It should also be noted that there was a change in the WASC associate director (AD) assigned to PLNU from the CPR to the EER.

In mid-August, the WASC visiting team members received the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) self-study report from PLNU along with a CD containing a well-organized and extensive set of required support materials in electronic form. Team members completed a review and written summary evaluation of all materials prior to their teleconference meeting on September 7<sup>th</sup>, in which the self-study evaluations were discussed and an initial set of issues and questions to pursue during the PLNU campus visit was drafted.

Following the meeting a tentative list of meetings, suggested participants, and topics was developed which was shared with the PLNU Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) to provide initial direction in establishing the schedule for the campus visit which occurred on October 3-5, 2007. The resulting draft visit schedule was refined over the next several weeks to ensure that one or more

members of the team were able to meet with all necessary PLNU individuals and groups in order to gain additional information and supporting evidence to be able to draft their assigned sections of the visiting team report.

The team spent three days on the PLNU campus interviewing (individually or in groups) a wide range of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The team was able to tour the main campus and Mission Valley Regional Center campus facilities and to review additional documentation provided by the institution.

The visiting team wishes to express its appreciation to PLNU for their thorough and professional handling of all aspects of the self-study process and visit. The self-study report and extensive set of supporting materials enabled the team to develop a strong sense of PLNU culture and a broad understanding of the institution's progress relating to assessment and accreditation issues. As a result, the team was able to arrive on campus with a clear understanding of the areas and issues that they needed to pursue to expand and verify the information they had already received. The team was warmly welcomed by the campus community and discussions with the team members were thoughtful and candid.

### ***B. EER Report Quality & Alignment with the Proposal***

It was clear from the comments of the EER visiting team during the teleconference call in early September that PLNU had submitted a well-written, clearly-organized, cleanly-formatted, informative EER Report that was responsive to WASC standards and report requirements. The report included a section that presented a point by point summary of the relationship between each of the proposal goals, the institutional CPR- and EER-related activities, and the content of the final EER Report. It was

very clear that they had maintained a consistent focus on the proposed goals throughout the almost four years of this reaffirmation of accreditation cycle.

The PLNU EER Report package also included a number of additional informational items that were very useful and could be commended to other institutions as a valuable model for their accreditation efforts. Appendix A of the PLNU EER Report presented a point by point description of the progress that they had made in responding to each of the recommendations in the CPR Visiting Team Report (October 25, 2006) and the WASC Commission Action Letter (February 27, 2007). In addition, PLNU provided a CD containing electronic versions of all WASC required data elements, and virtually all of the many documents referenced in the EER Report. The web-based interface for the CD made it relatively easy for EER visiting team members to locate and access this wealth of support documentation.

### ***C. Preparatory Review Update***

As indicated previously, Appendix A in the PLNU EER Report describes the steps they have taken to respond to each of the recommendations in the visiting team report and the Commission action letter. In many cases they talk about work in progress regarding an issue, which is reasonable given the short time between the Commission letter and the EER Report submission deadline (July 10, 2007). Some of the notable steps that have been taken and currently in-process activities include the following:

1. Continuing attention to implementing assessment plans, collection and interpretation of assessment data, and completing scheduled program reviews seems to permeate almost every aspect of campus activity. Currently the appropriate institutional focus is to achieve full campus-wide departmental engagement to implement an initial set of reasonable assessment

measures. (CPR Visiting Team Report (CPR VTR) Recommendation 2 & 7, and Commission Letter Recommendation 4) While many departments have already made use of collected data to identify and make needed changes to their curricula and programs, it will be important for PLNU to transition to this data-utilization focus as they move forward.

2. In March 2007, the PLNU Board of Trustees and Administrative Cabinet participated in an intensive two-day workshop in Board development. (A response to CPR VTR Recommendation 1)
3. They have restructured the PLNU Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) to include all members of the Administrative Cabinet (the Board-defined budget committee) in order to strengthen the link between strategic planning and annual budget development activities. (CPR VTR Recommendation 3, and Commission Letter Recommendation 1)
4. The CPR Recommendations Sub-committee has prioritized the original 83 recommendations to the President. They have identified five key recommendations which have been given the highest priority, and are woven into the activities and focus of the EER. (CPR VTR Recommendation 4, and Commission Letter Recommendation 1)
5. They have established a Vice Provost for Graduate Studies position to provide for more focused attention to the policies, procedures, and support of the rapidly-growing, off-campus graduate program division. Some progress has been made to date, but continuing attention will be needed to ensure the consistency in process and quality of output across these graduate programs. (CPR VTR Recommendation 5, and Commission Letter Recommendation 3)
6. In March 2007 the Provost presented a white paper and conducted a discussion with the PLNU faculty addressing the University's policy on academic freedom. The purpose of the

paper was to re-familiarize the faculty with the details of the policy and the subsequent discussion provided an opportunity to better understand how the policy affected day to day teaching and scholarship on the PLNU campus. (CPR VTR Recommendation 6)

7. As a result of the Commission's letter subsequent to the Capacity and Preparatory visit in 2006, PLNU made a concerted effort to review its retention and graduation rates more systematically, taking actions to improve each. Its primary action was to put the tables in a common data set that is accessible to key campus departments and committees. Each of these groups was to review the data, making recommendations for changes as appropriate. It also began collecting in a more systematic fashion, data on its new graduation programs.

Retention and graduation rates at PLNU have steadily improved over that last 10 years. Table 3.2.1 in the University Data Tables section of their Institutional Portfolio notes that between 1996 and 2005 first year retention rates have improved from a low of 68.7% in 1996 to a high of 86% in 2005. According to IPEDS data contained in its data appendix to the EER Report, graduation rates for undergraduates have also improved from a low of 40.1% in 1992 to 68% in 1999. This 1999 rate compares favorably to three of their "best performers" comparator groups (California Protestant 64%, Top Tier CCCU at 66% and Nazarene Institutions at 45%) and slightly below Private California intuitions which have average graduation rates of 75%.

This assessment of PLNU retention and graduation rates is also supported by a review of the *U.S. News America's Best Colleges – 2008* data for Western Region Master's Universities. PLNU's freshmen retention rate (reported in that survey as 84%) ranks in top quartile for tier 1 & 2 institutions in that category. Similarly, the 6 year graduation rates (reported as 60%) ranks in the top 1/3 of the institutions.

PLNU charged the Diversity Committee with the task of examining disaggregated data on retention, academic performance, and graduation rates broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, and denominational background. The Academic Council also discussed the data and is in the process of assigning committees and departments to review these rates and make recommendations for changes.

The team found that PLNU is putting processes and structures in place to more systematically and carefully review its practices and programs in light of retention and graduation rates, making changes as appropriate. They have also more intentionally involved the vice presidents of Student Development and Spiritual Development in these reviews so that the co-curriculum as well as academic programs are scrutinized for their impact on the student experience. Their data gathering practices have been improved and they more regularly review the data than in the past. However, they are aware that one reason for the increase in retention rates of new, first time freshmen has been the selectivity of their admissions process. They note in their data portfolio (see page 4) that they need to track certain groups of students, for instance part time and transfer students, more carefully to see if these groups have different retention and graduation rates.

## **PART II: Evaluation of Educational Effectiveness**

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The core of the PLNU EER Report presents six integrative essays that address the key issues relating to both WASC EER-focused CFRs and the self-study goals originally articulated in the PLNU Self-Study Proposal. The first three of these essays discuss the three quality assurance processes of Assessment, New Program Development, and Program Review, while the second triad focuses on the institutional mission themes of *“To Teach, To Shape, and To Send.”* The visiting team has chosen to mirror this organizational structure in this section (Part II) of the team report.

### ***A. Assessment Quality Assurance Process:***

Assessment of explicitly stated student learning outcomes (CFRs 1.2, 2.4, & 2.6) integrated into regularly scheduled program review efforts (CFRs 2.7, 4.4, & 4.8) serves as the centerpiece of the educational effectiveness program at PLNU. While initial work toward the development of this program began in the mid-1990s, these efforts were elevated to a more systematic campus-wide level (built around use of the Nichols Model for assessment) beginning in 2001. The slow process of shifting institutional culture to have a more focused data-driven, evidenced-based approach to decision making has continued in significant part due to knowledgeable and consistent public championing of this goal by the President and members of the administrative team (CFRs 1.3, & 4.1 – 4.8).

Even prior to the CPR visit, **learning outcome statements** had been developed for almost all curricular (CFR 2.4) and co-curricular program (CFRs 2.11 & 2.13) areas. This includes both the general education, and majors/concentrations at the undergraduate level, the graduate degree programs, the student development and spiritual development programs in the co-curricular area, as well as the ten “Centers” that provide opportunities for specialized study and service in a variety of

areas. The PLNU mission goals (*To Teach, To Shape, and To Send*) served as an organizing structure around which outcome statements were consistently framed (CFRs 1.1, 1.2, & 2.4).

The visiting team's review found that there was considerable variation across departments and programs in the focus and clarity of their stated student learning outcomes. Many departments specified clearly-worded, program-level, mission- and discipline-appropriate learning outcome statements. However, some programs presented a single generally-worded statement for each of the three mission areas. In some cases, it appeared that the statement was centered more on communicating an evaluation strategy than focusing on the core skills and knowledge of the major or program which the assessment method was meant to measure. As cited in the PLNU EER Report, learning outcomes most frequently specified areas of knowledge to be mastered. Outcomes relating to career preparation, clinical skills, technical skills, and higher-order levels of learning were also identified, but somewhat less frequently.

PLNU has made significant progress in defining meaningful outcomes to serve as the basis for effective assessment of student learning. There is an inherently evolutionary aspect to this activity as faculty and staff develop a deeper, more broadly-shared understanding of the desired learning outcomes. PLNU is challenged to reexamine and further refine their outcome statements to even more clearly articulate those areas of knowledge, skill, abilities, attitudes, and values that characterize PLNU graduates. They are encouraged to express their outcomes in terms of the higher-order levels of learning consistent with what would be expected at the completion of an undergraduate or graduate degree program.

With the exception of the Centers, **formal assessment plans** have been developed to evaluate student mastery relating to the specified outcomes in each of these areas (CFRs 2.4 – 2.7). These plans typically identified some combination of direct and/or indirect methods of summative

assessment, in most cases occurring toward the completion of the student's academic program. Many included the examination of student work samples including portfolio items evaluated by faculty through use of scoring rubrics. Evaluation of student performances by juries was appropriately used in some areas. A number of majors made use of external national subject area examinations as a summative assessment technique. Passage rates for licensure exams were used in some cases along with other focused assessment approaches that are often required for specialized program accreditation.

The *Assessment Essay* of the PLNU EER Report provided a good summary of the proportion of learning outcomes for which data had been collected, and of performance targets that had been met. There was some reflection provided in this and in the other five report essays about the meaning of the data, and how it was used to change courses and programs. Campus interviews by the visiting team, as well as a review of support documentation, confirmed that the results of the assessment processes are, in fact, routinely used by faculty and staff to shape program development and revision efforts in virtually all areas (including general education, majors, co-curricular programs, student development, and spiritual development).

The visiting team encourages PLNU that as they continue to refine their program-level learning outcomes, they also look for opportunities to refine the accompanying assessment methods and, wherever possible, expand the use of methods that provide the most direct and objective evaluation of student performance. In addition, PLNU should define and implement appropriate assessment methods for those few remaining areas of campus operation that have yet to adopt an outcomes approach to quality assurance (e.g., PLNU's various Centers).

The visiting team had the opportunity to meet with the **General Education (GE)** Committee for PLNU's undergraduate programs. It is of note that in addition to faculty from the range of schools

and academic disciplines, the Vice Presidents for Student Development and Spiritual Development serve on this committee. The committee continues to work on refining its strategy for administering a series of three one-hour integrative capstone examinations designed to provide insight into the senior students' level of mastery of the six PLNU core GE outcomes.

In addition, the committee discussed their intention to begin a process to revise the current GE curriculum beginning with the formulation of a holistic set of core characteristics of PLNU graduates which are articulated in ways that span traditional departmental and divisional boundaries. The visiting team affirms PLNU's vision in pursuing this challenging (and probably time consuming) task. As these core PLNU graduate characteristics are conceptualized, PLNU is challenged to frame them in terms of assessable learning outcome statements, and to consider how it can pursue academic / co-curricular partnerships to nurture their development.

On numerous occasions during the campus visit, faculty and staff expressed the need to make stronger connections with **PLNU alumni** to systematically survey their perspectives about PLNU educational effectiveness relating to identified departmental and program learning outcomes (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, & 4.8). The visiting team found a well-developed and active Alumni Relations Department that provides opportunities for frequent interaction between PLNU and its alumni. The database of alumni demographic background and contact information is large and has been constantly maintained. PLNU is excellently positioned to make expanded use of this valuable resource for gleaning summative-level educational effectiveness data. PLNU is challenged to develop a campus-wide strategy to make substantive and systematic use of their already robust alumni community to examine outcome mastery and persistence beyond the students' time at PLNU.

Work is currently in process to develop and staff an **Office of Institutional Effectiveness** that will report directly to the President (CFR 4.6). The visiting team felt that this was a strategic action by the

University that underscores the importance and permanence of a learning-centered, data-driven approach to institutional decision making (CFRs 3.5, 3.8, & 4.1 – 4.5). In the definition of responsibilities for this office, PLNU is encouraged to give high priority to the development of tools and services that will support the breadth of the campus departments to heighten the efficiency and effectiveness of on-going assessment activities. This may include, for example, the development of an electronic portfolio system, offering of training courses and seminars on assessment topics, and development of a campus-wide coordinated approach for surveying alumni.

***B. New Program Development Quality Assurance Process:***

The number of Master's degrees granted by PLNU rose from 10% of total degrees (47/492) in 2002, to 33% of total degrees in 2006 (260/780) (p. 67 PLNU EER Report). The challenge of integrating the many new graduate degree programs delivered from off-site venues into the organizational infrastructure and strategic planning processes was cited in the PLNU CPR Visiting Team Report. The team recommended that PLNU continue and intensify efforts to build the organization infrastructure to support these fast-growing programs.

The EER visiting team found that PLNU had responded in significant ways to build the infrastructure needed to facilitate a culture of scholarship for the rapidly expanding graduate programs. First, PLNU has hired a full-time Vice Provost for Graduate Studies who assumed leadership responsibilities in February 2007. Evidence indicates that this office moved rapidly to streamline administrative functions, including: standardizing program start/stop times, tuition, and fees; publishing a graduate programs catalog; implementing performance assessment; and commencing strategic planning. Additionally, the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies has initiated strategic discussions to promote scholarly activity (CFR 2.8).

Second, New Program Development criteria and adoption procedures have been implemented for graduate programs (CFR 3.2). The criteria are outlined to insure that a new program:

1. Is aligned with mission of PLNU.
2. Addresses an existing need that is recognized by the community.
3. Contains a quality curriculum.
4. Is supported by faculty with high quality academic and/or professional credentials.
5. Is a financially responsible endeavor.
6. Has a plan for on-going assessment that will evaluate learning objectives and whether the program is achieving its mission.

Although the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies has moved aggressively to initiate and support institutional efforts to support a culture of scholarship, the team found evidence that these efforts need continued vigilance, refining, and dialog. For example, when the team met with the School of Nursing faculty, none of the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) graduate program faculty had taken a sabbatical. One faculty member commented that they were trying to change the culture (i.e., research sabbaticals).

It was also evident to the team during a meeting with graduate faculty (at the Mission Valley campus) that there are differing levels of awareness and understanding of the New Program Development Criteria (Section 4.10) which addresses workloads for faculty involved with teaching/supervision of graduate students. The team was informed that discussions were underway to insure that faculty with graduate student oversight would be given the appropriate workload reductions to insure the maturation and continued excellence of a culture of scholarship that is to be expected at the graduate program level. The Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies has

benchmarked workload reductions that should be of assistance as policies are developed to facilitate excellence in the rapidly expanding graduate programs at PLNU (CFR 3.2, 3.3).

Given the rapid rise in graduate programs and graduate students at PLNU, the establishment of the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies was both strategic and timely. It is now imperative that the Office continues to move aggressively to facilitate dialog and implement policies to insure that faculty teaching loads and scholarship expectations are adopted that properly recognize and make appropriate adjustments for faculty teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

### ***C. Program Review Quality Assurance Process:***

PLNU began the development of its Department/Program Review (D/PR) processes in 1990 with the initial cycle of D/PRs beginning in 1995. The D/PR process was originally structured to commence with an initial 10-year review (Cycle 1) followed by subsequent reviews every 5 years (Cycle 2). All Cycle 1 reviews were completed by 2001 and the Cycle 2 reviews began. The D/PR policies and activities have effectively moved PLNU toward meeting WASC expectations in the program review area especially as it relates to CFRs 2.7, 4.4, and 4.8.

PLNU has established guidelines for both the 10-year and 5-year D/PR processes. The 10-year D/PR Guidelines provide a brief but valuable framework for directing program review activities and documenting the review results. The 10-year guidelines address most of what would be considered as typical program review areas at a level that provides direction but allows for variation between departments to accommodate differences across academic disciplines. The D/PR guidelines include the requirement for an evaluation by one or two external reviewers, and define the expectations for the specific activities to be completed by the reviewer(s).

The 5-year D/PR guidelines are less detailed in their description. The guidelines address the necessary topic areas to be incorporated in the review, but do not provide much explanation of what should be included in each area. While adequate when taken in combination with the 10-year guidelines, they do not function as effectively as a standalone policy. Neither of the sets of D/PR guidelines provides clear direction for how program review activities and reporting requirements should be modified for departments that have specialized accreditation with one or more outside agencies.

As part of its EER, PLNU completed a survey of faculty across academic departments to determine the types of curricular changes made as a consequence of the D/PR process. The overwhelming majority of the faculty reported various changes to their major curricula that they felt have resulted in improved educational effectiveness.

PLNU provided four sample D/PR reports in their institutional portfolio. There was significant variation between these four reports in terms of their organization, focus, level of detail, and consistency in addressing the range of program review-related issues. To some extent, this is to be expected due to differences in the subject fields, and the timing of when each of the reports was developed. Some of the differences may also be attributed to the timing of the D/PR within the development of an institutional strategy for assessment activities. However, even when these sources of variation are taken into account, there still seems to be significant differences in the level of understanding of and engagement in the assessment process across the academic and co-curricular departments. Some departments have adopted and adapted the D/PR guidelines to complete 5- and 10-year reviews that provide significant data-based recommendations for program and instructional improvement. Other departments would be considered to be more at the initial or

emerging levels of implementing assessment and program review in a meaningful way that produces valuable results.

A review of the departmental assessment plans and the Program Review Survey Summary table give the similar sense of wide variation in the level of thoughtful, purposeful engagement across campus departments. Some departments have provided a single program level generally-worded outcome statement to match each of the University's key mission areas of teaching, shaping, and sending. Other departments have defined their expected learning outcomes more specifically, and have tailored summative assessment strategies to obtain focused data to evaluate how successfully the students have been in mastering those instructional goals. The *Program Review Survey Summary* table indicates that while all departments/programs have completed the 10-year assessment review, there are still a number of departments that have yet to complete the 5-year assessment cycle activities. In addition, there was a wide departmental variation in the use of identified standards, external reviewers, and involvement of alumni during these reviews.

Based on the above observations, PLNU is encouraged to consider the following recommendations relating to their D/PR processes:

- Consider revising and expanding the set of 5-year D/PR guidelines to incorporate more detailed descriptions of the expected activities to be completed in the program review.
- Include specific direction for how departments with specialized external accreditations can modify expected D/PR activities and reporting requirements to make effective use of that accreditation work while still ensuring that all key areas in the PLNU D/PR requirements are still being addressed.
- Develop a D/PR Report outline that defines the required report sections and contents including required data tables and appendices.

- PLNU is encouraged to develop a standard template for D/PR data tables to present departmental financial and demographic (faculty levels, student enrollments, graduation rates, etc.) information. For consistency purposes, it would be useful to have these tables developed by personnel in institutional research and finance areas, along with their preliminary analysis of trend implications for the program/department.
- Be sure to make the assessment of student learning data a significant component in the D/PR review process. Recommendations for curricular revisions and/or additional resource requests should be able to be traced back to a potential for improving the student's educational preparation and experience at PLNU.

#### ***D. The "To Teach" Institutional Theme:***

PLNU provided evidence of its "To Teach" mission by noting how it values and supports teaching in a variety of ways. For instance, it embeds teaching effectiveness into its faculty evaluation and award structure by requiring annual student evaluations of faculty (PLNU uses the IDEA evaluation system) and requiring regular peer reviews of faculty (CFR 2.6). It offers sabbaticals and funding for grants based on the relationship of the sabbatical or the proposal to the candidate's teaching. PLNU also encourages faculty development, using Boyer's definition of scholarship (scholarship of teaching, integration, application, & discovery) as a framework for awarding travel funds and grants.

Not satisfied to define teaching effectiveness only in these terms, however, PLNU noted in its EER "that the only solid measure of teaching effectiveness, remains the student learning that results" (p, 24 of EER Report). Consequently, the institution sought to inquire about faculty effectiveness by studying student learning results in the teaching of general education and in the academic majors. Analyzing three summative exams in GE over a three year period (2004-06), the institution noted,

quite honestly, the mixed success students demonstrated relative to desired learning goals; particularly the one related to developing more sophisticated levels of critical thinking.

In support of its *“To Teach”* mission, PLNU has a comprehensive set of general education and program-specific outcomes, and it continues to develop an assessment protocol that ensures appropriate alignment across criteria (or indicators), performance standards, and assessment tools in programs and relevant courses. For example, some programs have developed (and continue to refine) program and course rubrics that articulate *“dispositions and indicators of (Christ-like) noble character in a faith-affirming learning community.”* The language of the rubric, appropriate to the purposes and teaching mission of PLNU, describes the behaviors learners are expected to demonstrate as evidence of achieving the *“noble character”* outcome. In addition to indicators, the rubric defines performance levels, and since it is a self-rating inventory, the learner must also provide a brief rationale for his/her rating in each indicator. The stated outcomes in GE and programs are assessable, and each program has conducted some degree of assessment of respective program outcomes to determine what students are or are not learning and whether their learning is consistent with program outcomes.

In the review of student learning results across academic majors, the institution found that most assessments focused on knowledge goals and that the results were generally positive. Since the PLNU is only beginning to gather data on other important student learning outcomes of the academic majors, it is difficult to make a clear evidence-based relationship between teaching effectiveness and student learning. However, what is commendable is that the institution has begun to gather this information and evaluates teaching effectiveness by studying student learning.

The team was impressed by the systematic planning and follow up by the institution, and agrees with the University's own conclusions (see page 11 of the EER Report) that they have a good start on data collection, have developed a culture of evidence, and are making progress toward becoming a learning organization. On the other hand, though its assessment system is comprehensive and well organized, the team found that many student learning outcomes do not identify what students can do to demonstrate learning beyond a very basic knowledge level (CFR 2.3). Furthermore, in interviews with students on campus, none could identify overall program-level outcomes other than those specified in course syllabi (CFR2.4). However, students are very clear on the mission and purpose of the university and commend their faculty for their commitment and teaching quality. As one undergraduate pointed out, "this faculty care about the students yet never let us live in our own comfort zones, pushing us to move ahead and beyond."

The visiting team believes that the institution has made substantial efforts to embed a culture of evidence into its educational system but also needs to continue to improve the quality of its learning outcomes and assessment strategies in ways that reflect the quality of its planning, teaching expertise, and mission.

***E. The "To Shape" Institutional Theme:***

PLNU thoroughly explored its mission "To Shape" students which they describe as helping students grow and develop as whole persons, spiritually, intellectually, socially, emotionally, interpersonally, and physically. In another rendition of this same mission, they define themselves as "an institution where minds are engaged, character is developed, and service becomes an expression of faith."

The PLNU EER *“To Shape”* reflective essay comprehensively described each of the six dimensions (listed above) and examined student experience and/or engagement in each. For instance, they examined student service and social engagement in curricular and co-curricular activities using the 2000 and 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) instrument, finding that students reported increased participation and university emphasis on attendance at co-curricular events (CFR 2.11) and off-campus service projects (CFR 2.5). The essay explored student growth in each of the six *“To Shape”* dimensions.

Using the HERI College Student Survey (CSS) and Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) surveys, they found that 83% of their students strongly agreed or agreed that they have a better basis for making ethical decisions and 79% have a better understanding of what it means to be a Christian, thus providing evidence of their spiritual shaping mission. Though there is even more evidence in the *To Teach* reflective essay, they also note that the intellectual dimension of student life is further shaped by a new *Preface Reading Program* designed for all entering students (76% of incoming students read the assigned book and 90% found the ensuing discussions stimulating), a film forum series attended by over 800 students, and a new emphasis on advising that helped student declare majors sooner and more meaningfully. Students also report on the NSSE survey that project and thesis requirements provided a high level of professional experience (CFR 2.5, 2.9), 73.2% reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Describing shaping and student growth in the social environment, the physical realm and in terms of emotional well being, the report summarizes a multitude of student activities, services offered and the inception of a new learning-living option, namely the Loma Learning Communities (LLC) in which 152 students participated in 18 groups (CFR 2.8). Using the NSSE findings, the University concluded that students were enthusiastically engaged in these dimensions of campus life, meeting the *“To*

*Shape*” mission of the institution. Students interviewed by the visiting team supported these conclusions, sharing the many different activities, clubs, mission, and service opportunities in which they participate. They reported a high level of satisfaction and were able to articulate changes in themselves as a result of their participation (CFR 2.11).

The visiting team was particularly impressed with the array of off-campus service options offered to students and the enthusiastic response of students to both domestic and international service experiences in which they engaged. The team observed that the institution’s mission to help students see service as an expression of faith was amply demonstrated.

#### ***F. The “To Send” Institutional Theme:***

The visiting team found sufficient and consistent evidence that PLNU has a clear institutional identity and members of its community are fully committed to its mission, core values, and practices. As a faith-based institution, the theme “*To Send*” is well-aligned with the nature of its teaching and learning environment, and is “inextricably tied to the University’s Mission Statement” (CFRs 1.1 & 1.2).

“*To Send*” relates to the University’s desire to prepare students for vocation (measured specifically as preparation for graduate school or the professions), service to the community, and participation in a local faith community. The reflective essay centered around the “overall unfolding of our students’ lives, as they participate in this learning community, and take key aspects of that experience with them when they leave and develop a direction or calling in their lives.” As a means of examining the nature of “*To Send*” the essay looked at three facets: career, community, and church (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.8, 2.13, & 4.8).

As evidence in determining whether PLNU is successful in preparing students for graduate school and for their chosen professions, the University surveyed 1300 alumni who graduated between 1994 and 2004. Over 40% of the alumni responded to the 2005 survey. Analysis of the survey results supports the claim that the University is successfully preparing their students for graduate school and for their chosen professions. For example, of those alumni who obtained at least a master's degree, approximately 90% felt they had been well prepared. Moreover, 44% of respondents indicated they had completed some type of professional certification, a master's degree, a doctoral degree, or some other post-baccalaureate program at another institution.

As further evidence of Educational Effectiveness with respect to vocation and graduate work preparation, the University reported that PLNU places in the 85th percentile when compared with other Ph.D. production of all California institutions; in the 79th percentile when compared nationwide with master's degree-granting institutions; and in the 73rd percentile when compared with member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). In a recent administration of the College Senior Survey (CSS), 49% of the PLNU graduating seniors indicated they were frequently encouraged while at PLNU to pursue graduate or professional study. This compares favorably with 39% at other faith-based institutions and with 39.1% at private colleges nationwide.

Recognizing that not all students pursue graduate study upon leaving PLNU, 90% of those participating in the 2005 Alumni Survey indicated they were well prepared with the skills necessary for the world of work. Also, 91.5% of the responding alumni feel that their experience at PLNU had a major to moderate impact upon the development of critical thinking and analytical skills; 84.5% believe that PLNU's impact upon the development of leadership skills was moderate to major; and 87.6% judge their verbal communication skills were significantly improved at the University.

The second facet of the Reflective Essay *"To Send"* relates to service to the community. In conjunction with the goal of academic preparation, PLNU's Mission Statement also includes the words, "...where service becomes an expression of faith." Equally important to its quest for academic excellence, the University strives for the "wholeness" in the personal development of students.

The University has been able to measure the degree to which students are actively engaged in some sort of service program that embraces the larger, more diverse community during their time at the University. For example, according to the CSS given to graduating students, approximately 59% of recent graduates indicated that they frequently, or at least occasionally, performed community service as part of a class while a student at PLNU. Moreover, 80.4% of respondents indicated they had taken part in some sort of volunteer work during the past year. These percentages are significantly higher compared to other religious-affiliated institutions and at private colleges. Since service is one of PLNU's Core Values, it is there intent to foster in students a commitment to community service that extends beyond their time at the University. Toward this end according the 2005 Alumni Survey, the proportion of PLNU alumni involved in community service during the past year was nearly twice the national average of 42.1%.

The third and last facet of the Reflective Essay *"To Send"* flows from the University's statement that "Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community." As reported in the EER Report, the 2005 Alumni Survey provides a compelling picture of how graduates become a faith community when they leave PLNU. Of those responding, for example, 79.6% indicated they regularly attend a church service; 72.9% indicate they financially support a church-related organization; 32.6% report making financial contributions to various mission organizations; and 11% volunteer time in various mission organizations. In addition, the data suggests a high correlation between church attendance and volunteer work. For example, 70.4% of

respondents indicated they attend church on a weekly basis, and of this number, 51.9% perform some sort of volunteer work for a church-related organization.

In the *“To Send”* reflective essay, the University analyzed the academic preparation of students, success in inculcating students with the institution’s value of service, and connections to a faith community. The EER also provided the University with the opportunity to update contact mechanisms with respect to alumni (CFR 4.8). The visiting team concludes that while the institution is collecting useful and meaningful data related to the three facets of the essay (vocation, career, and community), the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will be able to provide the University with additional rubrics for assessing these three core value areas. Of particular importance will be data analysis related to the offices and programs of Spiritual and Student Development. The visiting team took particular notice of the University’s plans for a new home of the School of Theology and Christian Ministry that is under construction. In conjunction with this facility are new academic programs that will give the University closer working ties with local church communities. The underlying expectation is that these programs and related activities will provide PLNU faculty and students the opportunity to build even stronger faith community involvements.

The *“To Send”* reflective essay as reported in the EER underscores the University’s overall success in preparing PLNU students with the necessary knowledge, skills ,and attributes to succeed with respect to career, service, and community.

### **PART III: Integrative Summary of Team Conclusions & Recommendations**

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The visiting team saw substantial progress accomplished since the CPR as noted in the previous sections of this report. The team particularly commends the Board of Trustees for its on-going and initial board development efforts begun since the last visit. Board members continue to express strong support and passion for the institution. As one member put it, the board is trying to catch up board functioning with the quality of the university.

The institution continues to build on the revised mission of the university, especially in its *“To Teach, To Shape, and To Send”* expression. This mission is deeply embedded in the culture often expressed in student comments, assessment, curriculum, and co-curriculum plans and documents. Furthermore, the strategic planning process has continued and strategic plans have been widely disseminated, providing a clear path for the future.

As the *WASC Handbook of Accreditation* states, “the primary purpose of an accreditation review is to draw institutions into inquiry about institutional performance and to stimulate deep engagement with issues of educational effectiveness.” The PLNU documentation and interview feedback for the EER in teaching and learning demonstrate clearly its commitment to investigating the quality of its performance in outcomes-based curriculum development, teaching, and learning. The institution is to be commended for:

- Its thorough documentation and presentation of institution-wide and program-specific outcomes that are assessable and consistent with the teaching mission and purpose of the institution: *“where minds are engaged and challenged”* and *“truth is pursued.”*
- Its increasing focus on cultivating and sustaining a “culture of evidence” about institutional support for teaching and learning performance,

- Institutional commitment to systemic assessment which is evident in its support and engagement of faculty, staff, and administrators in continuous renewal and learner-centeredness in curriculum and instruction.

PLNU continues to aggressively move forward with the implementation of meaningful assessment of learning outcomes across the curricular (major and general education) and co-curricular program areas. Data gleaned from these regularized procedures serve as a foundation for institutional decision-making in areas of program revision and improvement, strategic planning, and allocation of personnel and finances.

In summary, the visiting team observed an institution deeply ingrained in a process of making assessment, both of institutional and student outcomes, a meaningful endeavor. Assessment as a concept has taken root. Intentionality has found a home in faculty and staff thinking and planning. The visiting team's major findings are listed below:

1. PLNU programs would benefit from formalizing multi-year assessment plans that identify when each outcome will be assessed, an analysis of the data, and proposed implementation for improvements.
2. While it appears that students are given reasonable opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes in the required curriculum of each program, expanding the use of curricular maps, rubrics pertinent to the mission, intended learning descriptions, and capstone assessments would foster the development of close alignment across programmatic outcomes, curriculum, and assessment.
3. PLNU's institutional-wide "culture of evidence" seems quite inclusive of most internal stakeholders except students. In a few instances, students seem to have minimal knowledge that outcomes "exist" in certain programs (particularly in majors that also seek curriculum certification

by discipline-specific agencies). The effectiveness of the teaching and learning practices at PLNU would benefit from student understanding of the outcomes (including mechanisms by which students might participate in the review and development of outcomes) so that they might become skilled at using outcomes and criteria to self-assess.

4. PLNU's documentation indicates that outcomes are available on the "website." In addition to the website, however, the presentation of outcomes, levels of performance, and assessment approaches (in General Education, the majors, and graduate programs) in course syllabi, program descriptions, the catalog, and other key documents would foster institutional-wide (faculty, staff, administrators, and students) involvement and ownership of the "culture of evidence" as defined at PLNU.
5. While many of the program documents show that outcomes and assessment mechanisms are in place, it was not clear that there is a formalized process for assessing and renewing the assessment process itself. It was not apparent from the team's review of documentation and interviews with PLNU staff that the programs in most of the majors (undergraduate and graduate) have established (or are in the process of establishing) systemic mechanisms or processes for developing, reviewing, revising, and renewing criteria for assessing student learning behaviors, levels of performance, and products. For example, is there a protocol (other than the usual five-year program review requirements) by which each program demonstrates commitment to ongoing assessment and improvement of teaching and learning practices in an outcomes-based environment?
6. PLNU is challenged to develop a campus-wide strategy to make substantive and systematic use of their already robust alumni community to examine outcome mastery and persistence beyond the students' time at PLNU.

7. The University is encouraged to continue to align resources to meet the requirements of a robust assessment system.
8. PLNU's establishment of an Office of Institutional Effectiveness and the staffing of a director position who reports directly to the President is a strategic action that underscores the importance and permanence of a learning-centered, data-driven approach to institutional decision making. In the definition of responsibilities for this office, PLNU is encouraged to:
  - Give high priority to the development of tools and services that will support the breadth of campus departments to heighten the efficiency and effectiveness of on-going assessment activities. This may include, for example, the development of an electronic portfolio system, offering training courses and seminars on assessment topics, and development of a campus-wide coordinated approach for surveying alumni.
  - Develop strategies to more effectively communicate the aggregated results of assessment activities to varying stakeholder groups (e.g., students, faculty, staff, parents, Board of Trustees, communities, & churches).
9. PLNU is challenged to continue the process of defining the core characteristics of PLNU graduates in ways that span traditional departmental boundaries, and to pursue academic / co-curricular partnerships to nurture the development of those core characteristics.
10. PLNU is encouraged to continue the conversation that will lead toward the development of policies for faculty teaching load and scholarship expectations that properly recognize and make appropriate adjustments for faculty who are teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.