

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

To: Academy of Art University

April 6-9, 2021

Team Roster

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

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## **APPENDICES**

### **This report includes the following appendices**

- A. Federal Compliance Forms
  - 1. Credit Hour and Program Length Review
  - 2. Marketing and Recruitment Review
  - 3. Student Complaints Review
  - 4. Transfer Credit Review
- B. Off-Campus Locations Review, as appropriate
- C. Distance Education Review, as appropriate

## SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

### *Description of the Institution and Accreditation History*

#### Background, Mission, and History

Academy of Art University (AAU), a for-profit, proprietary institution, is located in San Francisco, California and offers associate, bachelor, and masters degrees and non-degree certificates in 24 areas of study. Program offerings range from fine art and illustration to industrial design, architecture, game design, fashion design, jewelry & metal arts, and motion pictures and television. AAU offers 50 degrees at the Associate level, 67 at the Bachelor level, 99 at the Master level, and 13 non-degree certificates. AAU has been offering an option for distance education since 2002. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic all programs are conducted via distance education but generally 102 programs are offered via distance education (asynchronous) and 127 programs are offered on-site.

AAU was founded in 1929 by Richard and Clara Stephens as the Academy of Advertising Art. Since 1992, the founder's granddaughter, President Elisa Stephens, has led the institution. AAU is owned by the Stephens Institute. AAU's mission is to "prepare aspiring professionals in the fields of design, communication and the arts by delivering excellent undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificate and portfolio development programs." With a philosophy that aspiring commercial artists could learn the skills needed to become successful professionals, Stephens hired established professionals and artists to teach the future professionals and attracted practicing artists to serve as faculty. (CFR 1.1)

Since 1929, the university's student body, degree programs and methods of educational delivery have evolved but the mission remains the same. AAU is committed to unrestricted and equal access to education by artists for artists and maintains its inclusive admissions policy at the undergraduate level which conveys the university's commitment to equal access to higher education in the arts (CFR 1.5). Students enroll with mixed levels of skill and academic preparedness.

AAU has had a noticeable presence San Francisco for over 90 years. Students, faculty, and staff contribute in many ways to the good of the community and the city at large. AAU reports that it has 9,800

students who are studying both onsite, online, or a hybrid. This census is down from approximately 13,000 students reported in 2018. AAU serves a highly diverse study body with no discernable majority as well as international students (CFR 1.4). With an open-admissions policy, AAU draws students from 108 different countries as well as all 50 states and District of Columbia within the United States. AAU reports that 69% of its student have enrolled in some online courses and 43% are enrolled in online-only classes. Full-time students account for 56% of the student body. Only 7% of the undergraduate students are first-time, full-time freshmen while 45% are transfer students. Graduate students account for 32% of the student body.

### Accreditation History

Although AAU was granted candidacy by the WASC Commission in 1982, it was denied initial accreditation in 1989. AAU persisted and was granted initial accreditation in 2007 for a period of seven years. A scheduled interim report was accepted in the Spring of 2010. Accreditation was reaffirmed in June 2014 with a Formal Notice of Concern requiring a Special Visit in fall 2016 to address the following issues:

- Leadership and Organizational Structure and Effectiveness
- Faculty Role
- Student Success (including persistence challenges, student support, retention, and graduation rates
- Student life
- Strategic planning and financial condition.

The Commission acted to receive the special visit team report and continue the Formal Notice of Concern through spring 2018 and scheduled a Special Visit in spring 2018 to assess progress.

The 2018 Special Visit explored the following issues:

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.

Commendations that resulted from the Special Visit were:

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 that resulted from the Special Visit were that AAU continue their positive momentum in the areas of:

1. Collaborative and institute-wide efforts with data-informed and evidenced-based decision making.
2. 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
3. Promoting transparency and collaboration within the university around decision-making processes

Following the 2018 Special Visit, the Commission acted to receive the Special Visit team report, remove the Formal Notice of Concern, continue with the reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review in Fall 2020 and the Accreditation Visit in Spring 2021, and schedule a Progress Report to be submitted by March 1, 2019 to address a) Decision-making processes b) Shared governance c) Strategic planning.

In addition to WSCUC accreditation, programs at AAU are also accredited by the following:

- National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) since 1985, with reaccreditation for an additional 10 years in 2014 (through 2023).
- National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) for the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) and Master of Architecture (MArch) degree.
- Council on Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) for the BFA and MFA degrees in interior architecture and design.
- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) accredits the single subject art teaching credential program.

### Significant Changes at the Institution

- The COVID-19 pandemic forced immediate accommodations at AAU including moving to remote learning across all classes through Zoom video conferencing. The faculty and staff have been working remotely since March 2020. AAU assembled a COVID-19 taskforce to oversee contingency planning from admissions to student housing. AAU placed 158 employees on temporary unpaid furloughs. Approximately 1,600 employees, were able to work remotely since March 2020 and will continue to do so until January 2021. In addition, AAU permanently reduced headcount by 22 full-time positions.
- AAU is planning to transition to a new Learning Management System in the summer of 2022. AAU selected Brightspace, a product of Desire2Learn (D2L). AAU made the decision to change at the urging of faculty to be able to make some changes or modifications quickly to online course content. In the current LMS, such changes require a lengthy process involving trained production teams.
- AAU is upgrading Oracle's Student Financial Planning System to manage its Financial Aid.
- AAU has lost three executive professionals through retirement. AAU reports that succession planning efforts, led by vice president of human resources, ensured a smooth transition in these personnel changes.

### *Description of Team's Review Process.*

Prior to the off-site review (OSR), the team conducted a video conference on August 4, 2020 to review areas of responsibility for the team. The off-site review was conducted on September 30 – October 1, 2020. The team read the self-study and reviewed the appendices and developed Commendations, Lines of Inquiry, and requests for additional documents. AAU was responsive to the team's requests. The team met virtually with several administrators including, President Stephens, to deliver the following commendations and lines of inquiry.

#### **Commendations:**

1. Taking initial steps toward infusing diversity and inclusion across the curriculum.
2. Developing and implementing a robust program review and assessment process that involves multiple constituents within the university with clear alignment of ILOs and PLOs in academic and co-curricular areas.
3. Allocating resources to improve technology to support distance learning, instruction, assessment, and institutional research.
4. Developing and implementing a structured retention plan which resulted in a 9% increase of retained students enrolled in the pilot cohort.
5. Achieving financial responsibility composite scores above the US Department of Education requirements, and a student default rate well below the average for for-profit institutions.

#### **Lines of Inquiry**

The team had identified 12 lines of inquiry for the accreditation review. Under each heading, the team identified topics that were discussed during the Offsite Review.

The following are the twelve Lines of Inquiry:

#### **Enrollment Management**

1. We would like to better understand the institution's attention to enrollment management, including addressing declining enrollment, student retention, and graduation.

2. Considering AAU's inclusive admissions policy, we would like to know more about the definition of this enrollment status, how AAU assesses college and/or online readiness, and the support systems put in place to assure the success of its diverse student body.

### **Staffing**

3. We would like to know more about the impact of the recent reductions in staff due to furloughs, retirements, and layoffs on the institution's ability to achieve its mission and operations.

### **Curriculum and Assessment**

4. We would like to better understand how AAU ensures that the WSCUC core competencies are achieved across the curriculum including the majors.
5. We would like to learn more about what outcomes distinguish undergraduate from graduate degrees at AAU and the defining MQID elements of the University's graduate degrees.
6. We would like to know more about AAU's progress in implementing and assessing diversity and inclusion across the curriculum.
7. We would like to know more about how AAU is acting upon and communicating assessment data results ("closing the loop").

### **Technology and Instruction**

8. We would like to know more about the university's progress in the adoption of the new LMS and its plans for filling the gaps of the missing functionalities and tools.
9. We would like to know more about AAU's policies and practices for distance education and ensuring academic integrity and rigor in the online programs.

### **Budgeting and Financial Sustainability**

10. We would like to better understand what assumptions inform the development of the 3-year budget, and how it aligns with AAU's strategic plan.
11. We would like to better understand AAU's plan for addressing internal and external threats to financial sustainability.

## **Governance**

12. We would like to know more about the role of part-time faculty in AAU's governance structure.

### *Institution's Reaccreditation Report and Update: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence*

AAU reports that it prepared for the reaffirmation of accreditation by having the ALO attend a pre-conference workshop at the WSCUC ARC in April 2018 on *Undergoing Self-Study and Writing Institutional Reports* at the WSCUC ARC in April 2018. The ALO shared this information on the reaffirmation of accreditation process to the core constituent groups in fall 2018. A survey was sent to the key members of AAU in spring 2019, and responses were used to populate the WSCUC Standards and Federal Requirements worksheet which was later transferred to the redesigned WSCUC worksheet. Writing of the institutional report was led by Cathy Corcoran, ALO.

The team found that the report was well organized and clearly written around the Standards. The report was reflective of the components that captured AAU-identified important issues for each of the four Standards addressed. Areas of strength and improvement demonstrated AAU's progress on data driven and collaborative assessment of core competencies and learning outcomes, student services effectiveness and outreach to increase persistence, and responsiveness to the COVID-19 pandemic. AAU demonstrated a wide-spread effort to grasp and respond to the direction of the Commission's previous recommendations.

AAU provided attachments that were relevant and detailed. During the visit the team requested additional materials to have the most current and accurate information possible. Additional material requests included up-to-date and accurate financial statements and detailed strategic planning documents.

The Self-Study Report accurately describes the state of the university. Faculty were included in the discussion of issues. The data and evidence support claims made by AAU. AAU's self-review led to a greater understanding of its effectiveness, practices, and student learning.

## SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

### *Component 1: Response to previous Commission actions*

Since AAU received WSCUC reaffirmation of accreditation in 2014 for a term of seven years, AAU has had two special visits, undergone midcycle review and submitted a progress report. As part of the review process, the ALO compiled a report on AAU's accreditation history since 2014 and progress to date on all WSCUC actions and recommendations.

### *Component 2: Compliance: Review under WSCUC Standards and compliance with federal requirements; Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators*

#### **Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives**

The team agrees that the Academy's mission and statement of purpose are appropriate for an institution of higher education and clearly define its essential values and character and ways in which it contributes to the public good. AAU has well developed statements of purpose that characterize values and character. (CFR 1.1). The mission clearly describes the Academy's purposes which fall within recognized academic areas and/or disciplines. Founded in 1929 as an advertising art school with the goal of providing a practical education for artists, by artists, AAU's mission and aspirations remain true to the Academy's heritage. The mission and core values are clear and easily communicated to the institutional community and its constituents.

At AAU, each academic department links its mission statement, educational goals and course objectives to the overall Academy mission. Educational objectives at each level—institution, program and course – are published on the website, in the catalog and/or in all syllabi. Educational objectives are widely recognized throughout the Academy, consistent with stated purposes. AAU regularly generates, evaluates, and makes public data about student achievement, including measures of retention and graduation and evidence of student learning (CFR 1.2).

Many of AAU's programs are accredited (NASAD, CIDA, NAAB and CTC are examples). In addition, the Academy is approved to operate by the BPPE, which means that the university is following

state standards as set forth in the California Educational Code and Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations and may offer all programs approved. Since coming under BPPE oversight in 2016, AAU has produced an annual report as well as a school performance fact sheet for each program offered, following BPPE guidelines. The Academy elected to early implement the U.S. Department of Education's regulations for distance education. In addition to complying with federal requirements to offer online programs to students located in jurisdictions outside of California, the university works with agencies across the country to ensure compliance at the state level.

#### Integrity and Transparency (CFRs 1.3 – 1.8)

The team applauds the Academy for having a well-developed academic freedom policy (CFR 1.3) which is published in the catalog and in the faculty manual. It also commends the Academy for having an open and honest line of communication with WSCUC (CFR 1.8). The Academy has participated consistently and in a timely fashion, through both special visits and all reporting, and has adhered to WSCUC policies and procedures.

In regard to diversity, equity and inclusion, in the spring of 2020, Director of Data Privacy and State Authorization, Anne Connors engaged with faculty and staff members to examine how the Academy demonstrates commitment to the WSCUC Equity and Inclusion Policy within the framework of WSCUC's good practices for valuing diversity and fostering inclusion. These practices include (1) institutional mission and purpose; (2) nurturing diversity within the student body, faculty, administrative staff, and governing board; (3) including an appreciation of diversity as an outcome of instruction; (4) having student success supported by environments that foster their intellectual and personal development; and (5) making equity and inclusion integral to plans for institutional improvement. The ASC voted unanimously to establish a subcommittee to focus on diversity and inclusion across the curriculum. (CFR 1.4)

The relationship between corporate and university Boards was not discussed in detail in the IR (CFR 1.5) and it was difficult to gain clarity of the relationship during the site visit. The team did

discover, however, that the institution's CFO did provide de minimis obligations to the Stephens Institute (parent company for the university) due to the nature of real estate transactions to which both parties are involved.

The institution adheres to the accurate representation of academic goals and programs through the website, AAU's catalog, and syllabi. Grievance procedures are included in publications such as the catalog and faculty manual. As part of the WSCUC standards review process, the grievance committee implemented a formal evaluation of its processes. (CFR's 1.6 & 1.7) Credits earned by students are reviewed by faculty and as a result, the Office of the Registrar (OTR) ensures that transcripts are accurate and that transfer students receive fair and equitable treatment in the transcript review process.

## **Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions**

### Teaching and Learning

AAU's mission of preparing graduates for careers as artists and designers permeates the teaching and learning process. Consistent with this view of the institution's educational mission, assessment appears intrinsic to the work of AAU and its faculty, who operate within "a culture of critique" common to practice-based disciplines.

A strength of AAU's undergraduate program is the combined attention to professional or industry-relevant learning outcomes and nine liberal arts outcomes (CFR2.3). Syllabi provided to the evaluation team incorporate course-, program- and institution-level outcomes, with some courses containing additional information about alignment with external performance criteria such as those of the National Architectural Accrediting Board. The same disclosure of multi-level outcomes can be found in graduate syllabi.

For some programs, it appears that learning outcomes are similar at the undergraduate and graduate levels, though the expected achievement of these outcomes may differ (CFR2.1). During the virtual site visit, several interviewees referred to the heightened level of "sophistication" expected of the latter's capstone portfolios. Further, supplementary information provided to the team during one meeting demonstrates AAU's efforts to differentiate the aims of undergraduate and graduate programs.

Specifically, when proposing degrees, AAU complies with guidelines established by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design to define undergraduate and graduate attainment (CFR2.2a,2.2b).

A comprehensive system of outcomes assessment and program review has been established by AAU. Faculty make use of assessment results and endeavor to “close the loop” by engaging in actions implicated by the data (CFR2.4). Department action teams are convened to address curricular and related topics; notably, AAU appears to have established a mechanism to encourage and compensate part-time faculty participation in this process. Given the large percentage of part-time faculty employed, this inclusive approach is to be commended.

Both formative and summative assessments are carried out for programs and their constitutive learning outcomes, with the apparent aim of 80% achievement by cohorts of the milestone for any one outcome. Assessment data are also aligned with the relevant WSCUC Core Competencies for undergraduate programs, with summative achievement reported to the community (CFR2.2a). Examples of the use of assessment data include increased opportunities for non-native English speakers to practice professional communication skills, the establishment of an English for Art Purposes instructor to assist ESL students, and revision of the interior architecture BFA coursework to include coverage of applicable design codes. In addition to formal assessment protocols, feedback to students is a feature of AAU pedagogy, especially in studio-based courses (CFR2.5). Especially noteworthy is the innovative way AAU’s LMS enables online faculty and students to participate in communal review and critique of posted assignments, with instructor’s additional feedback also privately communicated to students through a separate comment function. At the individual student level, portfolios are reviewed mid-career and prior to graduation, thus ensuring attainment of program outcomes (CFR2.6).

Sample syllabi indicate that different grading minima are imposed on undergraduate and graduate coursework, and on liberal arts and major coursework; in addition, certain programs designate liberal arts courses that require a higher passing grade. It appears that the same cumulative Grade Point Averages are required of undergraduate and graduate students at the time of degree completion (CFR2.2).

AAU implements program reviews on a five- or six-year cycle, employs a standardized though flexible template for the self-study, and has maintained a data warehouse since 2017 that is available to all academic departments. Sample program reviews document the historical development of degrees at the university and the results of previous self-studies, enrollment, and graduation trends (including student demographics), and attainment of learning outcomes (CFR2.7). In addition, alumni highlights, results of student satisfaction surveys, and an analysis of faculty composition and longevity are presented. Student course evaluations are included in the program reviews. Although the protocol requires inclusion of external evaluators in the review process, the team was unable to find examples in the sample reports. Nonetheless, there is evidence that commentary provided by working professionals who attend student portfolio showcases is included in program planning.

Finally, both full- and part-time faculty appear engaged in curriculum planning and assessment activities (CFR2.4). In general, faculty members hail from a range of creative and industry backgrounds, which is appropriate given the university's mission. Less clear is the adequacy of the faculty composition, specifically the ratio of full-to-part-time faculty. While the process for how decisions are made to approve full-time positions is explained in the faculty manual, the team found that neither the faculty nor their supervisors could explain this process during the site visit. (CFR2.1).

#### Scholarship and Creative Activity

AAU faculty members are engaged in the artistic, technological, creative, and related professional industries. Evidence is provided of faculty participation at arts and film festivals as exhibitors and judges, along with faculty publishing efforts and business ventures (CFR2.8). Innovative teaching is encouraged and supported; the ASC distributed guidelines to faculty as their teaching moved increasingly online in 2020. It is less clear what support and training is offered for traditional campus-based instruction. Further,

neither the self-study, nor the site visit provided any clarity as to how scholarship and creative activity are valued by AAU, and whether such professional engagement is considered when the university makes personnel decisions (CFR2.9).

#### Student Learning and Success

The Director of Assessment provides grade distribution, enrollment, persistence, and other data to the academic leadership; department chairs are supported in visualizing and interpreting such data through a Tableau site license (CFR2.10). Multi-year trends can be seen, along with midterm progress, thus enabling program directors and faculty to adjust course delivery and content in a timely fashion.

Sample program review reports identify actions that have been taken as a result of the available data; follow-up actions vary from the “micro” to the “macro” level (respectively, modification of a course assignment, and enhanced retention services for online students). Given an increase in online and part-time enrollment, AAU’s various data displays aim to disaggregate the trajectory through the university of onsite and online students, as well as that of first-time and transfer students (CFR2.10). However, some program review documents are difficult to read as they incorporate data from all degrees offered by a program, which may include associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, and certificates.

Services and co-curricular activities made available to students include advisors who are trained on the curriculum and program requirements, career and employment assistance, NCAA Division II athletics, and opportunities to interact with industry professionals. The publication, *Academy Life*, demonstrates the varied ways in which student clubs and organizations, housing, field trips and industry partnerships parallel the academic and professional objectives of the institution (CFR2.11). In addition, co-curricular activities are subject to the same comprehensive program reviews as are academic degrees; these adhere to a comparable report template and multi-year schedule (CFR2.13). AAU is to be commended for offering enhanced tutoring services for non-native speakers of English and those who are completing their degrees wholly or partially online, an increasing sector of the institution’s population.

Primary media for information dissemination include the web, admissions brochures and other specialized publications (CFR2.12). In particular, the AAU website contains information about enrollment

and graduation rates, educational costs by program, and other data mandated by the State of California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education. Additionally, the states from which AAU may enroll online students are disclosed, as is information on whether programs lead to certification or licensure in particular states.

Information in the academic catalog and on the website describes the process and criteria for transferring credits from another institution to AAU. Limits are placed on the number of transferrable credits based on degree level and program, and whether the coursework is liberal arts or in the major (CFR2.14). A handful of students who participated in the virtual meeting expressed concern that not all credits taken as part of an associate's degree had transferred; while the visiting team recognizes that many factors enter into transfer credit decisions, it is noteworthy that these complainants did not feel they had received adequate communication about their particular transfer situation prior to enrollment.

### **Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability**

#### Faculty and Staff

To serve its student body of approximately 10,000, AAU employs nearly 1,600 employees, most of whom are hired on a part-time basis. Sixty-nine percent identify as White, 10% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 2% Black or African American. For context, the ethnic makeup of San Francisco is White 40%, Asian 34%, Hispanic 8%, and Black or African American 5% (U.S. Census Bureau). While gender diversity at the university seems to be acceptable (female board chair, president, and CFO), the university self-attest that “there is room for improvement” among the lower ranks of employees. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a reduction in force of 180 employees: 158 were furloughed and 22 were permanent reductions of full-time positions. Remaining employees continue to work remotely with a plan to resume onsite instruction as soon as is practicable in 2021. On March 1, 2021 the university announced that it would be laying off an additional 78 employees as a cost containment measure.

It is the practice of the university to recruit and hire working professionals to teach students. This practice is such that students learn from industry practitioners, enriching their experience in the process. The university has fully developed faculty and employee handbooks that are distributed to each employee

on hire and updates are distributed in a timely manner. The Faculty Manual details employment guidelines for part-time and full-time faculty, including compensation guidance, teaching standards/rubric, and faculty governance structure. During the visit, the team interviewed new and existing employees who attest to the policy being administered on a consistent basis. (CFRs 1.4, 3.1, 3.2)

Faculty and staff professional development is critical to the success of the university. Employees are encouraged to attend conferences to keep up on trends and current topics within their respective areas. The faculty evaluation and coaching (FEC) department exists to provide support to new and existing faculty through mentoring and evaluation. While the team observed evidence of online resources for faculty development, there was no clear indication that the budget process contemplated staff development in any tangible way. For example, the team was not made aware of a per-faculty or per-staff allocation for professional development in the budget. The team also learned in its meeting with part-time faculty that professional development at any level would be a welcomed resource. The academic and executive directors acknowledged the concern and will prioritize it for the FEC future meetings. (CFRs 3.2, 3.3)

#### Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources

For the fiscal years ended Dec 31, 2017-19, AAU consistently attained financial responsibility composite scores above the minimum threshold set by the US Department of Education. For the fiscal year ended Dec 31, 2020, AAU was projected to realize income from operations of \$1.7M (0.71% margin). Preliminary unaudited financials for 12/31/2020 reveal a decline in revenue of 10%, driven by Covid-related declines in enrollment and dormitory occupancy levels compared to prior year. Current liabilities increased 132%, and current ratio declined to 26%. The university explained that at statement date, the current debt facility was being negotiated which triggered the reclassification from long-term to short-term debt. A replacement long-term debt facility should be in place by May 31, 2021.

According to pro-forma profit and loss statements provided by AAU prior to the team visit, net income from operations were projected to be positive with average margins of \$1.7M for the three years ending Dec 31, 2020-22. During the visit, an updated schedule was provided to the team. Despite the FY20 negative variance to plan, the university projects steady growth in revenue from FY21 – FY23. Income

from operations is projected to stabilize on average \$5.5M each forecast year. [See component 7 for more thorough discussion on financial sustainability.]

The key revenue driver at AAU is tuition and fees. From 2013 to 2020, AAU realized a 39.6% decline in enrollment from 16,001 to 9,661. This decline is driven by a lackluster international student market hampered by visa and travel restrictions imposed by the US government. AAU receives approximately 90% of its revenue from tuition and fees. Dormitory revenue account for the remainder of revenue. While the revenue composition places a high risk on tuition and fees, it is not an outlier for privately held postsecondary institutions in the US. Further, AAU has the flexibility to access lease payments (primarily sourced to off balance sheet entities owned by the Stephens family) to shore up EBITDA if enrollment and revenue falls. Also, a classic car collection and an often-used revolving credit facility provide near-term liquidity, if necessary. (CFR 3.4)

#### The Budgeting Process

The budgeting process is a bottoms-up top-down process. This means that senior management develops high-level budget targets for the entire organization but allows individual departments/budget managers to create a budget that gets sent upwards for approval. The executive vice president for finance provides each department director with a budget template that includes current and prior year financial results for the respective departments. Directors and managers submit their budgets to a team comprised of the executive vice president of finance, chief academic officer, vice president of academic administration, directors/managers, and administrative assistants. After a thorough review, the executive vice president of finance makes final adjustments and submits the budget to the president for approval. If approved, the budgets are then distributed to the respective budget managers. Budget control takes place monthly via a budget-to-actual report that is distributed to managers. The document “Budgetary Process at Academy of Art University” does not suggest any participation of trustees (finance committee) in the budget process. However, the team confirmed that trustees, especially the finance committee, is involved and is the body that ultimately approves the budget. Also, the budget process does not identify the strategic plan as the source for informing strategic resource allocation. As the team explored the process during the visit, it was

evident that the strategic plan was achieved through resource allocation in the budget process, though not intricately so. Best practice recommends that strategic resource allocation through the budget process correlates positively to strategic mission attainment. (CFR 3.4)

#### Facility and Technology

To serve the curriculum needs of students, AAU maintains physical and virtual facilities (student labs and workspaces) for its students. Facilities are updated frequently and maintained to standards within the respective artistic industries. With the shift to remote work for faculty and online learning for students during FY20, the Faculty and Online Academic Subcommittees partnered to ensure quality delivery of content via internet-based video-conferencing solutions like Zoom. The Technology Subcommittee made numerous recommendations to the executive cabinet on best practices in online pedagogy that will be implemented in 2021. While there are numerous online resources for faculty and staff, the resources are either not readily accessible or staff is unaware that they are available. To maximize return on investment on available resources, the university should consider launching a program aimed at enhancing awareness amongst faculty and staff. (CFR 3.5)

#### Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes

The university has an 11-member board of directors that meets three times per year to receive reports and assist the president in setting strategic directions for the university. Board committees include the Audit Committee, the Academic Committee, Directorship, and the Finance Committee. President

Elisa Stephens is the granddaughter of the university's founder and has served as full-time CEO since 1992. President Stephens received a B.A. in political science from Vassar College and a J.D. from the University of San Francisco. She leads a nine-member cabinet that represents the various administrative tenets of the organization. Martha Weeck, BA, an experienced financial leader, has served as Executive

Vice President and the full-time CFO of the university since 2003. Martha has de minimis obligations to the Stephens Institute (legal entity of the university) due to the nature of real estate transactions to which both parties are involved. Sue Rowley is the Chief Academic Officer and holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Eastern Kentucky University. She has been with the university since

1995. (CFR 3.6)

University leaders are supported by various committees to improve efficiency and create a broad-based decision-making process. The Academic Steering Committee (ASC) leads several subcommittees and is the main channel for faculty access to the university administration. Sub-committees of the ASC cover functional areas like curriculum, online pedagogy, faculty surveys, diversity/inclusion and technology. (CFR 3.5)

#### Employee Evaluations

A key role of the university Board of Directors is the evaluation of the president. This takes place annually. The president's performance expectations are assessed, and succession planning updates are reviewed. The VP of Human Resources manages the two-part process that includes goal setting and meetings with the president. (CFRS 1.3, 3.9). While the president receives annual evaluations, the evaluations of other key university leadership, faculty, and staff are less structured and occur infrequently. Some cabinet members self-attested that they have not been evaluated in many years or at all. Best practice suggests that all employees' (faculty, staff, part-time, full-time, administration) performance be evaluated on a regular and systematic basis. Regular employee evaluation helps remind faculty and staff of expectations of the university. Additionally, they provide leaders with information to use when making employment decisions, such as promotions, pay raises, and layoffs. On a more practical and critical note, the lack of a culture of employee evaluation puts the organization at risk for adverse outcomes in labor litigations. (CFRs 2.9, 3.10)

#### **Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement**

AAU engages in continuous, evidence-based, and collaborative self-reflection about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives (CFR 4.1). The university has made advances in their institutional effectiveness and assessment practices and reliance on data for decision making. Data collection is used to continually improve quality and curriculum (CFR 4.1, 4.4). The assessment of institutional level outcomes, while nascent, demonstrated a commitment to quality improvement and a shift towards incorporating these outcomes throughout the curriculum.

Assessment of program learning outcomes was prevalent across programs. Portfolio reviews are used to provide formative and summative assessment within the majors. Faculty are involved in these reviews and provide feedback to students and to the leadership in Department Action Team (DAT) meetings. This feedback is used to improve curriculum and to support student learning. Data from these assessments is incorporated into the program review process (CFR 2.2).

The team was very impressed with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE). The OIE works closely with all departments to provide critical data for decision making. They guide faculty in the development of assessment tools and heavily support retention efforts. The OIE has been critical in the assessment of core competencies and they have effectively improved the assessment processes across the university (CFR 4.2).

AAU relies heavily on part-time faculty and while there was some evidence of their participation in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, team interviews indicated that many of these faculty, while experts in their field, have very little understanding of best practices in teaching and learning (CFR 4.4). The university has taken some measures to support these faculty, but due to the pandemic these initiatives have been dramatically reduced. AAU should take steps to enhance part-time faculty development more consistently and on an individual level to ensure participation (CFR 4.4).

Quality assurance processes were evident throughout the university. AAU initiated an Institutional Assessment Task Force made up of individuals across departments and programs and staff who work with students from entry to exit. This group works collaboratively to ensure achievement of the university's institutional learning outcomes in both academic and co-curricular activities (CFR 4.3, 4.4). To that end they completed a comprehensive ILO impact inventory to assess how each ILO is impacted in the different areas of the university. This team should be commended for their efforts to look at the students' entire experience across all areas of the university.

One initiative that surfaced from the Institutional Assessment Task Force is the Launchpad orientation "experience" for new students. This experience was specifically designed to help students acclimate to the online learning environment. This orientation teaches students to solve creative problems

and is an opportunity to introduce ILOs such as critical thinking early in the students' academic journey. Some other highlights of this group include building of a library of industry portfolio examples and adding a self-assessment to the portfolio review. The university is encouraged to continue to support this Task Force in their endeavors.

AAU engages stakeholders in institutional reflection in Department Action Team (DAT) meetings, committee meetings and assessment practices (CFR 4.6). The institution is commended for their supportive and qualified board of directors. Institutional planning processes were evident in a variety of committees; however, the university lacks a cohesive strategic planning structure to articulate priorities and examine the alignment of its mission and future direction (CFR 4.6). The current strategic plan expires in 2021, but there was limited evidence of moving forward with a collaborative and inclusive future planning process. A more unified approach to strategic planning is recommended in order to guide the institution through the next planning cycle. The university must collaboratively consider the many changes within the current environment in future planning and budgeting (CRF 4.7). The team's finding, which is subject to Commission review, is that the institution has provided sufficient evidence to determine compliance with the Standard.

#### *Federal requirements; Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators*

The team has reviewed AAU's federal requirements and Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators and has determined that the University is in compliance with all requirements. Please see attached worksheets in the appendices.

#### *Component 3: Degree Programs: Meaning, quality and integrity of the degrees*

AAU offers art and design programs at the certificate, associate, bachelors and masters levels. Undergraduate programs include Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Architecture and Associate of Arts. Graduate programs include Master of Arts, Master of Architecture and Master of Fine Arts. The university also offers a variety of certificate programs and continuing art education courses. The curriculum effectively maps course learning outcomes to program specific learning outcomes to institutional outcomes (CFR 2.3). Achievement and success are supported through the use of foundation

courses, visual rubrics and a variety of student success resources.

Undergraduate curricula are supported by a liberal arts program designed to align general education subject matter with the undergraduate art and design disciplines offered at the university. In the second half of the undergraduate curriculum, students enhance their skills focusing on the specialized skills of their majors with a focus on industry specific skills and knowledge. Programs culminate with a portfolio suitable for seeking employment.

Degree integrity is demonstrated through the university's coherent curriculum design which focuses on building students' skills to the required degree level (CFR 2.2). This design was evident in curriculum maps demonstrating the scaffolding of the curriculum as well as the points of both formative and summative assessment. A review of the liberal arts curriculum map identified measurable and achievable general education learning outcomes mapped across the curriculum in the bachelor's degree programs (CFR 2.2a).

While the institution provided much evidence of the meaning of an undergraduate degree at AAU, data on graduate programs was lacking. This is especially concerning given the practice of combining graduate and undergraduate level courses (CFR 2.2b). The university would do better in defining the meaning, quality and integrity of graduate programs by carefully reviewing course learning outcomes to ensure they are at the appropriate level and furthering the assessment of the achievement of program level outcomes (CFR 2.2). Furthermore, AAU should refine how the meaning of graduate level degrees differ from that of undergraduate level degrees (CFR 2.1).

The quality of degrees offered at AAU is supported through the program review process which includes faculty assessment of program learning outcomes aligned with both course and institutional level outcomes (CFR 2.2, 2.4). Quality is also ensured through programmatic accreditations such as the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). Meeting the requirements of these accreditors provides external confirmation of the meaning, quality and integrity of the degree programs (CFR 2.7). The college should be commended for

their careful alignment of Liberal Arts program outcomes with institutional level outcomes and NASAD criteria within their art and design curriculum. This alignment helps to provide clarity on the meaning, quality and integrity of an AAU art and design degree (CFR 2.2).

All AAU curricula is practicum based with a focus on providing an education “for artists, by artists.” Given the AAU mission to prepare aspiring professionals in the fields of design, communications and the arts, employment rates would be a good measure of the meaning, quality and integrity of the degree (CRF 1.2). While some employment data is collected for the BPPE, it is not widely shared across the university. A comprehensive list of employers who have hired graduates was available, but without the data indicating the actual rates of employment, this can be misleading. The university may consider adding employment rates and internships as performance indicators in program reviews.

The university has developed institutional learning outcomes which provide a roadmap to share values and measures of success in meeting its mission. These outcomes, developed through collaboration of faculty, academic directors and the board of directors describe skills that all graduates should be able to demonstrate. AAU should be commended for instituting an Institutional Assessment Task Force (IAT) to explore the meaning and achievement of their ILOs across the university (CFR 2.3). This task force is charged with examining how ILOs are achieved considering both the student academic and co-curricular experience (CFR 2.11). Overall, the university provided ample evidence of what it means to hold a degree from AAU. They have implemented robust assessment processes and student services to ensure the quality and integrity of the degree programs and have demonstrated a commitment to student success.

*Component 4: Educational Quality: Student learning, core competencies, and standards of performance at graduation*

The university has made great advances in their assessment practices and reliance on data for decision making. Data collection is used to continually improve quality and academic effectiveness (CFR 4.1, 4.4). The university should be commended for improving its methods to include assignment level rubrics mapped to general education and core competency outcomes (CFR 2.2a, 4.1). Improvements to the process resulted in increased sample size, more engaged faculty and reduction in costs.

Core competencies are assessed within the liberal arts curriculum using course level rubrics normed by faculty (CFR 2.4, 4.4). AAC&U VALUE rubrics form the foundation for assessing core competencies. The university has worked hard to identify appropriate assessment points for all five core competencies and have begun the process of benchmarking their expectations using their rubrics against the VALUE rubrics. The university has made many improvements to the assessment process.

The critical thinking outcome is required to be aligned with a program level outcome within the disciplines. AAU would do well to continue to build the core competencies and other general education outcomes within the program specific art and design curriculum beyond the first two years (CFR 2.2a). This is especially important for transfer students who may not have the benefit of achieving all general education outcomes taught within the AAU liberal arts curriculum.

The college effectively delineated evidence demonstrating competencies and key learning outcomes are being met. All five core competencies were assessed in 2019. Assessment of student work by faculty demonstrated university achievement goals were met in all competencies except for Information Literacy (CFR 2.2a). In the case of Information Literacy, assignment design was indicated as the reason for not meeting expectations. The institution demonstrated an exceptional assessment process for these outcomes. Given the high level of achievement of core competency outcomes, no examples of using assessment results to improve teaching/learning methods were provided. Therefore, improvements described related to the process of assessment rather than achievement of outcomes. The university is encouraged to develop processes which describe the actions it would take if gaps in achievement were identified (CRF 2.2, 4.4). One example of closing the loop provided for quantitative literacy was the adoption of a math lab which helped support the achievement of this outcome. The institution may consider disaggregating the achievement data of ILOs to evaluate if there is a difference in achievement in online versus onsite students (CFR 2.10, 4).

Faculty and administrators have access to Tableau data dashboards which include pass rates, grade distribution, enrollment data, student demographic data, class attendance, IPEDS retention and graduation data, faculty survey results and student satisfaction survey results. This data informs decision making for

the individual majors and university leadership (CFR 4.2, 4.3, 4.6).

AAU attributes the educational quality to their working professional faculty. The report described coaching and training of these faculty. However, in interviews with faculty, it seems these kinds of opportunities are not currently readily available. In many meetings, the fact that adjunct faculty often have no teaching experience was brought up. Given the lack of teaching experience of their faculty, the university should reinstate the faculty coaching and training previously offered. Especially important, is providing faculty with support and training in strategies to enhance teaching effectiveness both online and onsite (CFR 2.10, 3.3).

*Component 5: Student Success: Student learning, retention, and graduation*

The institutional report demonstrates significant activity across AAU to track data on student success, disseminate those data to key stakeholders and decision-makers, and monitor responses and initiatives that may result from review of the data (CFR4.1). The work is generated by AAU's Office of Institutional Research (OIR) with robust collaboration with Academic Affairs, Student Services, and other functional areas (CFR4.2).

OIR tracks the retention and graduation of undergraduate and graduate students, and where appropriate disaggregates the data to shed light on multi-year trends and potential areas of institutional vulnerability based on full-time, part-time, Pell eligible, and online/campus status (CFR2.10). A number of indicators are used to monitor student success, including term-over-term retention rates, degree awards (graduation rates), and profiles of course grades. Equally important, student perspective is used to inform analyses of institutional success, and several initiatives are reported to have been undertaken based on survey results (CFR2.5).

When success is defined in terms of the rate of degree awards, AAU finds that full-time and transfer students are its most successful groups (respectively, 44% and 30% at six years). Conversely, AAU acknowledges challenges in the award rate for part-timers (7%) and Pell grant recipients (14%). Award rates significantly improve in the latter category for those who enter with prior college credits and work full-time toward their degrees (41%). Full-time graduate students evidence the highest award rate (72%) of

the various population segments.

Data collection and institutional decision-making are also shaped by emerging trends. The enrollment shift to hybrid and fully online students has led to heightened tracking and attention (CFR2.13). According to data presented in 2018 (Appendix 5.02), fully online students represent 43% of the total AAU student population; in addition, 72% of campus-based students enroll in at least one online course. Course duration (7.5 versus 15 weeks) appears to impact student performance, with students receiving higher grades in shorter courses. On the other hand, online students (the majority of which pursue their studies on a part-time basis) graduate at a rate of only 14%, significantly lower than their campus counterparts. Finally, the data indicate the “same” students enrolled in campus and online versions of courses perform less successfully with the online modality.

The site team recognizes the significant work involved in AAU’s tracking and disaggregating of student enrollment and graduation data. At the same time, the team did not find information about the planning for increasing online students. (CFR4.6, CFR4.7). Also unclear are the reasons for the disparate success rates, such as whether academic preparedness differs between traditional campus and the newly emerging online students. AAU is urged to consider the institutional profile that the increasing numbers of online and part-time students yields, clarify its intended enrollment mix, and plan programming and services accordingly to improve student success in learning and degree completion.

The lack of a clear enrollment plan notwithstanding, AAU does respond to enrollment trends as these emerge. The launchpad initiative, an onboarding process for campus students enrolled in online courses, was one attempt to respond to the disparity between campus and online performance (CFR4.3).

Course-specific data were used to enhance support to faculty and students in courses where student success was questionable. The fashion program modified the late-work policy for first-term online students, initiated a recording of tutoring sessions so these can be reviewed by students at their own pace, and established a virtual student lounge for peer chat and mentoring.

Importantly, the contribution of the launchpad and related activities has been monitored by AAU (CFR4.4). New online students who participated in the launchpad and/or a tutorial about the LMS were

retained through the first term at a higher rate than those who did not participate; they also achieved a higher grade point average. At the time of its self-study submission, AAU had not determined whether to require enrollment in launchpad. Nonetheless, the launchpad was expanded to include program-specific versions, thus introducing students both to the LMS and to the nuances of the particular field of study.

AAU also aims to assess student success through surveys and similar perspective-gathering initiatives. The survey does not yield a high response rate (14%), and AAU is therefore encouraged to consider ways of improving student participation (CFR2.5). Of the data generated, institutional strengths appear at the level of instruction and advising. AAU's internal report for spring 2019 (Appendix 5.06) acknowledges several areas for improvement, including a need for enhanced career preparation, lack of peer community among online learners, and uncertainty about where to locate support services. An increased focus on career preparation and better tracking of employment will provide a valuable student success indicator, especially given the mission to prepare "aspiring professionals in the fields of design, communication and the arts by delivering excellent undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificate and portfolio programs".

In response to COVID-19 community lockdowns and the university's transition to online instruction with virtual sessions, AAU surveyed students in spring 2020 about their experience (Appendix 5.12) (CFR4.7). Here, too, AAU attempted to disaggregate the data (e.g., "new to online" versus "already taking classes online," domestic versus international students), though it was not clear how these categories mapped onto other categories that are used when presenting data (e.g., online versus blended students).

AAU appears to respond decisively to problematic data. For example, in summer 2019 the institution attached support personnel to two online courses with the lowest passing rates. These individuals monitor student engagement, reach out to those who are absent or otherwise appear to be challenged, and coordinate with the instructor-of-record as needed. Preliminary data pointed to the success of the initiative, as the number of courses was expanded for later terms.

Similarly, AAU addressed many of the issues raised by students who completed the COVID-19 survey that was administered. In response to the pandemic, AAU moved campus classes to virtual (Zoom)

instruction. Given the survey results, AAU determined to increase support for international students. A safe mechanism for students to access technology and other equipment for their projects was also instituted.

Finally, AAU endeavors to meet student needs, having developed several initiatives to respond to enrollment management patterns and attitudes expressed by both retained and non-retained students in surveys. In addition to the launchpad, AAU inaugurated a grants program to encourage continuous enrollment, and the Academic Resource Center heightened support services and program-based learning communities for online students. In brief, AAU is to be commended for: a robust data enterprise steered by the Office of Institutional Research; decision-making, including new academic and student affairs programs, to respond to needs implicated by data analyses; and the beginnings of a culture of “closing the loop” by studying the efficacy of new initiatives.

AAU should consider a definition of student success that transcends enrollment management; the quality of student work, the professional relationships forged with faculty and industry partners as these are deepened by instruction, and student engagement in building their education are unexplored aspects of student success. Finally, although AAU appears to respond decisively to emerging data, it is less clear that the university comprehensively ties enrollment targets and academic and student services. AAU should articulate the desired institutional profile of campus, blended and online students, and then plan support structures needed collectively and by each enrollment segment.

*Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program review, assessment, use of data and evidence*

It is clear to the Team that AAU is dedicated to continuous improvement with processes and systems in place to guide changes in curriculum and support programming, including program review. The academic self-studies provided by AAU to the team were thorough, data informed and detailed. AAU implements program reviews on a five- or six-year cycle, employs a standardized though flexible template for the self-study, and maintains a data warehouse since 2017 that is available to all academic departments. Sample program reviews document the historical development of degrees at the university and the results of previous self-studies, enrollment and graduation trends (including student demographics), and attainment of learning outcomes (CFR 2.7). In addition, alumni highlights, results of student satisfaction surveys, and

an analysis of faculty composition and longevity are presented. Student course evaluations are included in the program reviews. Although the protocol requires inclusion of external evaluators in the review process, the team was unable to find examples of such in the sample reports. There is evidence that commentary provided by working professionals who attend student portfolio showcases is included in program planning.

AAU's program reviews focus on direct evidence of student learning (assessment results) and indirect indicators of program effectiveness (grading trends and satisfaction surveys), as well as key data on enrollment, retention and graduation, and finances and staffing (CFR 2.3). This information enables a department to conduct a self-study for program review and create an action plan based on an evidence-based understanding of current strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. Faculty leadership is provided with a program review template and guidance from the vice president of institutional effectiveness and the director of assessment. The faculty are supported by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) and the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) in data analysis and report compilation.

AAU engages in a robust co-curricular program review process. Co-curricular department staff receive important support from the OIR as part of the co-curricular program review process, in the form of data analysis, survey design and administration and reporting. For many support departments, program review presented the important task of assessing programming for effectiveness. Identifying ways to assess the services and programs frequently involved creating targeted data sources to support assessment work. As of July 2020, all support departments have completed or had program reviews in process.

The university launched a campus-wide initiative in 2017 to increase data-driven decision making. To improve the AAU ability to better archive, organize and present academic program data, AAU invested in Tableau licenses for all academic departments (CFR 3.5). Project implementation involved moving all program review data into Tableau, creating a calendar for publishing updates and identifying and coaching faculty leadership. Data available in Tableau for faculty decision making include Assessment Results, Grade Distributions, Enrollment Trends, Student Demographics, Retention and Graduation Rates, Faculty Survey results, and student satisfaction results.

## Assessment of Institutional Learning Outcomes (CFRs 2.3, 2.6, 2.7, 2.11)

Students in AAU's undergraduate and graduate programs are individually assessed through a midpoint and final review process (formative and summative reviews). Midpoint and final reviews are standard processes across the university, supported by the OIE and graduate student services and facilitated in the LMS. Academic department leadership determines the learning outcomes and identifies student work to be assessed. Midpoint (MPR) and final reviews allow both students and faculty to reflect on student learning over time and assess student achievement through portfolios developed specifically to demonstrate achievement of the program learning outcomes. The midpoint and final reviews serve two key purposes: (1) Provide outcome-specific feedback to students on their progress to date; and (2) determine if the curriculum is effectively supporting student achievement of the PLOs. Each student's submission is assessed by department faculty and rated on achievement by learning outcome. The process also includes individualized faculty feedback for each student in the form of a written narrative.

The Academy proposed the formation of a team to conduct an assessment of the Institutional Learning Outcomes through an Institutional Assessment Task Force (IAT). The IAT was created to explore the meaning and achievement of ILOs across the university. The IAT is tasked with completing an in-depth examination of two ILOs per year to develop findings and recommendations to share with university committees for implementation. The members completed an outcomes assessment chart to identify where student outcomes in academic and co-curricular departments aligned with the ILOs. At the site visit, the team interviewed the IAT and discovered that the work of this committee is still developing but is evolving into a more formalized way of assessing co-curricular activities throughout the institution.

### *Component 7: Sustainability: Financial viability, preparing for the changing higher education environment.*

In recent memory, the most imposing challenge to colleges and universities on a global scale is the novel Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. It has challenged each institution's teaching conventions and took aim at their institutions' financial viability. As the pandemic mushroomed into a global phenomenon and doors were closed on world economies, most institutions of higher education shuttered their physical campuses for the academic year and shifted to online modalities, to varying degrees of success. As the availability

and efficacy of vaccines signal an end to the pandemic, a lingering question is, how will the pandemic and potential recession in the US and globally affect enrollment?

Despite having endowment assets (classic cars) and a rental income revenue stream, the cornerstone of sustainability at AAU is a vibrant growing enrollment. With the global pandemic came enrollment decline as travel restrictions maimed international recruitment efforts. International students represent 44% of total enrollment. The university instituted several measures to stem the financial consequences of enrollment decline. Class schedules were streamlined, class schedules were modified, room usage and dormitory spaces were consolidated, plus other cost cutting measures such as reduction- in-force and furloughs. The 2021-23 financial projections incorporate persistence of many of the cost containment measures implemented to address operations during the Covid-19 era. Unlike many other educational institutions, the university was already pursuing online pedagogy well before the 2020 pandemic. Many classes were already online while others were taught in a hybrid format. (CFRs 4.6, 4.7)

To address the matter of declining enrollment in the near term, the university has identified strategies and initiatives that could stem the decline and drive admissions: investment in digital recruitment, greater emphasis on international students, high school student enrollment. On a longer-term basis, the university will pursue partnerships with other institutions locally and internationally, expand offerings to include non-degree stackable models, and develop an extensive infrastructure for online education and educational support. The commitment to online modality will be supported by the implementation of Brightspace Learning Management System.

The 2020 academic year was a difficult year financially for the university as evidenced by preliminary financial statements. The reality of the 2020 financial operating results exposed the fragility of the university's business model and prompted inquiry into its financial sustainability. However, the university may have been spared a more dire consequence because of its forward positioning on online education. The switch to online modality proved to be much smoother than for other less prepared institutions. As such, the university is projecting modest increases in enrollment and revenue beginning 2022.

## Strategic Plan

The university has a strategic plan that will be renewed in 2021. According to the Report of the WSCUC Team Special Visit of September 29, 2016, the university developed a “strategic plan focused on four main areas: Institutional Effectiveness, Students and Faculty, Organization and Facilities, and Finance and Regulatory Compliance” (p. 16). Prior to the team visit, a version of the strategic plan was presented that lacked some basic elements. As the visit ensued, the team was unrelenting with specific requests relating to the strategic plan. Only after meeting with the Strategic Planning Committee was the team able to uncover salient items related to the plan. For example, the team was not privy to recent minutes of the committee meetings, updated action items, evidence of alignment with the budget process, or plans to perpetuate the plan by producing its next iteration.

As the team sought answers to the inquiries regarding the strategic plan at the university, there was a general sense that the process has not yet taken root in the culture of the organization. For the university to achieve continued progress as a regionally accredited university, it must implement a strategic planning process that drives decisions and includes all university publics. (CFRs 1.5, 1.8, 3.7, 4.6, 4.7)

## Succession Planning

A key driver of institutional sustainability is succession planning. Succession planning is the systematic process of recognizing and creating future leaders for the university who can replace individuals when they leave the organization due to retirement, resignation, termination, transfer, promotion, or death. As with performance evaluation, succession planning at the university appears unstructured and without design. Some potential successors were notified of their space in a succession plan while others were not notified. Without notification, the cultivation of potential successors might be thwarted or may not occur. For key employees, including the president, the university’s failure to develop a plan could create leadership gaps as they depart the university employment. A more specific plan should be developed, formalized, and appropriately socialized.

*Component 8: Optional essay on institutional specific themes*

NA

### *Component 9: Reflection and plans for improvement*

The visiting team conducted its virtual Off-Site Review on September 30-October 1, 2020 and the Accreditation Visit on April 7-9, 2021. Given social distancing protocols and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the team was unable to observe the Academy of Art University's physical plant and technology infrastructure. It is anticipated that a member of the WSCUC administration or visiting team will engage in an actual face-to-face visit as part of the Commission's final determination on accreditation status.

AAU has embraced the value of peer accreditation. In addition to its regional accreditation from the WASC Senior College and University Commission, which was achieved in 2007, AAU has successfully pursued recognition from relevant professional associations. These accreditors include the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, National Architectural Accrediting Board, Council on Interior Design Accreditation, and California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

At the time of the most recent reaffirmation (2014), the Commission commended AAU for the centrality of the mission to the institution's operations, the focus on student learning, and the innovative manner in which arts and design subjects are delivered via distance education. At the same time, it was recommended that AAU reconsider its flat organizational structure and centralized decision-making, the role of faculty in contributing to planning and direction-setting, and student success as measured by graduation rates. A total of five items formed the basis for a Notice of Concern, which was the focus of a special visit in 2016.

Although the Notice of Concern was continued in 2016, the Commission commended AAU at that time for progress made in the reduction of the number of direct reports to the president (and the constitution of a more robust management team), initial efforts to engage faculty participation in institutional decision-making, and the creation of a five-year strategic plan. Topics for further monitoring included ongoing development of the decision-making hierarchy, the model of shared governance, and the contribution of institutional research to addressing student success and updating the strategic plan. AAU demonstrated significant commitment and attention to the several areas of concern during the succeeding two years, and

the Commission removed the Notice in 2018. This recent history serves as background for the 2020-21 visiting team's lines of inquiry. It is also forthrightly described by AAU itself in the Institutional Report.

The virtual site visit enabled the team to meet senior executives and trustees, mid-level managers and members of the administrative staff, faculty (both full-time and adjunct) with either leadership or primarily teaching appointments, and students and alumni. It was a pleasure meeting these various stakeholders and learning of their deep commitment to the vision of education "for artists, by artists." Review of the Institutional Report and Appendices enabled the visiting team to learn about the many accomplishments of faculty and students in the various arts, communications, and design fields. It is clear that the institution's founding vision is being sustained and, indeed, innovated upon via new programs, technologies, media, and instructional platforms (CFR 1.1).

The visit occurred at a particularly challenging moment in world history and against a background of disruption in higher education's models for enrollment management and instruction. COVID-19, the closing of international borders, and social distancing requirements meant that AAU had to move quickly in 2020 to maximal deployment of its online platform and adopt virtual (web-based) solutions to hold the equivalent of synchronous classroom sessions. AAU appears to have assiduously considered its students' needs during this time; it purchased additional computers for student borrowing, arranged for cameras and other equipment to be safely available for checkout, and limited access to on-campus studios. Although fewer students than usual took advantage of on-campus dormitories, AAU did commit to safe housing and dining options throughout the pandemic year. In their interview sessions, students commented favorably on the additional hardware and software provided to them. For their part, faculty positively described the training made available as campus and online sections of courses were combined and virtual sessions were held.

Continuing attention to the aftermath of the pandemic notwithstanding, AAU articulates a number of additional ongoing priorities. Consistent with observations offered above by the visiting team, AAU is aware of the need to improve the time taken by students to earn a degree, along with their retention and graduation rates. Several initiatives have been undertaken to address student success, especially for those

either fully or partially completing programs through online coursework and those for whom English is a non-native language. The team considers the attention to data and the development of such additional services to be commendable (CFR 2.10, 2.13).

At the same time, the overall contribution of online degrees to institutional stability, specifically, whether part-time online education is intended to become a dominant piece of the portfolio of program offerings, seems underdeveloped across the various documents made available. AAU is beginning to pursue several new academic opportunities (such as non-degree offerings and additional online programs,) to address its enrollment and revenue shortfall.

The visiting team is not certain how AAU intends to prioritize these initiatives and plan for the needs of each program and student cohort (CFR 3.5). In addition, the desire to modify online course delivery by including virtual class sessions was expressed by several parties, though it was not clear how this would be marketed to or required of fully asynchronous students post-pandemic (CFR 4.7).

Given the enrollment imperative, AAU would benefit not only from regular review of its success data, but reflection on and planning for its diverse student characteristics (e.g., online versus campus, full-time versus part-time, first-time versus transfer enrollee). AAU is encouraged to develop enrollment management and student services plans that map to each other and to the potential new markets being considered (CFR 4.6).

Further development of a faculty culture and role in governance is on the institutional list of initiatives and was a topic the visiting team was especially interested in learning about given the findings of previous accreditation visits. Many (but not all) part-time faculty are aware of the Academic Steering Committee (ASC) and noted that hourly compensation is offered for their participation with this body's sub-committees. However, the overall sense was that these faculty do not see themselves having a significant voice in institutional decision-making and planning, or know how the sub-committees comprise an overall governance system.

The team's meeting with the ASC and program directors revealed a strong commitment on their part to solving issues regarding academic policies, procedures and related matters. Largely consisting of

faculty with administrative appointments, the ASC was initially populated by presidential selection, though it is currently self-perpetuating and selects new members on its own. However, the visiting team was not able to determine criteria for selection, the committee's size, and its formal relationship (if any) to the president's executive group or academic vice president's leadership team. While no one model of faculty governance is expected, developments up to the present leave the role of faculty in institution-wide strategy still at an inchoate stage. Although there are numerous ASC sub-committees, it would be useful for AAU to articulate how the agenda for each is established, how membership is determined, and how decisions, advice and recommendations reach up to both the ASC and higher levels of the institution (CFR 3.7, 3.10).

Finally, considerable resources have been allocated to the transition from a homegrown Learning Management System to D2L's Brightspace LMS, a third institutional priority. The decision to invest in this technology would appear to signal institutional awareness of the growing importance of online education for AAU (CFR 3.5). Further, the initial interest in a change was instigated by the faculty, who felt hamstrung by the rigid protocols for revising courses in the legacy platform. This represented a strong moment in the faculty's reckoning with its ability to influence executive decisions, which was expressed by several ASC members, and might provide a model for further formalization of the role of faculty in institutional decision-making.

The visiting team was impressed both with the "look and feel" of courses hosted on the current LMS and the detailed planning to migrate and update courses in Brightspace. Those functions not immediately available in Brightspace but essential to AAU pedagogy, such as the ability of faculty to offer both public and confidential commentary on student work, are being developed with D2L or third-party vendors. The roll-out of Brightspace is a year away, the product of staffing cuts in 2020. Still, faculty along with the implementation team seem hopeful that Brightspace will unleash new opportunities for creative, interactive, and meaningful online learning experiences.

In brief, the Academy of Art University is pursuing several initiatives, and appears to have begun including faculty perspective in the design of some of these initiatives. Prioritization and budgeting should inform the next phase of the development of these initiatives. Equally important, AAU is encouraged to

examine ways of institutionalizing faculty input, especially from the large number of adjunct instructors who do not hold administrative appointments.

#### SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was clear to the team that the Academy of Art University conducted an informative and productive internal review AND want to recognize and affirm the hard work that the institution put into the report and in responding to the team's requests for additional documents. As a result of this review, the team has come to understand AAU's mission and its leadership, faculty, staff and students.

Commendations. The team commends the Academy of Art University for:

1. A stable, engaged, and highly qualified board that is invested in the mission and vision of the University.
2. A robust and engaged student support services across the student life cycle.
3. Significant progress on data driven and collaborative assessment of core competencies, learning outcomes, and co-curricular activities.
4. The selection and beginning implementation of a new LMS in response to the emerging academic community's voice.
5. Overall responsiveness to the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes adjusting expenses, leveraging technology to assist online instruction, and supporting students and faculty.

Recommendations. The team recommends that the Academy of Art University:

1. Enhance its systems of communication to ensure the flow of information across and between the various levels of the university. (CFR 1.7)
2. Implement a strategic planning process to include a fully developed marketing and enrollment plan, an academic master plan, an infrastructure to build alignment to the budget process, and opportunities for involvement of the wider university community. (CFR 4.6)
3. Reinvigorate faculty development and training on effective teaching and learning strategies

in both onsite and online modalities to meet the needs of both full-time and part-time faculty.

(CFRs 3.2 & 3.3)

4. Implement a model of shared governance to include both full-time and part-time faculty with clearly articulated by-laws and roles and responsibilities. (CFRs 3.7 & 3.10)
5. Develop a formal process for employee performance evaluation including full-time and part-time faculty and senior leadership. (CFRs 2.9 & 4.3)



## FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FORMS

### OVERVIEW

There are four forms that WASCUC uses to address institutional compliance with some of the federal regulations affecting institutions and accrediting agencies:

- 1 – Credit Hour and Program Length Review Form
- 2 – Marketing and Recruitment Review Form
- 3 – Student Complaints Form
- 4 – Transfer Credit Policy Form

During the visit, teams complete these four forms and add them as an appendix to the Team Report. Teams are not required to include a narrative about any of these matters in the team report but may include recommendations, as appropriate, in the Findings, Commendations, and Recommendations section of the team report.

### 1 - CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulations, WASCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution's credit hour policy and processes as well as the lengths of its programs.

#### Credit Hour - §602.24(f)

The accrediting agency, as part of its review of an institution for renewal of accreditation, must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit hours.

(1) The accrediting agency meets this requirement if-

(i) It reviews the institution's-

(A) Policies and procedures for determining the credit hours, as defined in 34 CFR 600.2, that the institution awards for courses and programs; and

(B) The application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and coursework; and

(ii) Makes a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education.

(2) In reviewing and evaluating an institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hour assignments, an accrediting agency may use sampling or other methods in the evaluation.

**Credit hour** is defined by the Department of Education as follows:

A credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than—

(1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

(2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

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

#### Program Length - §602.16(a)(1)(viii)

Program length may be seen as one of several measures of quality and as a proxy measure for scope of the objectives of degrees or credentials offered. Traditionally offered degree programs are generally approximately 120 semester credit hours for a bachelor's degree, and 30 semester credit hours for a master's degree; there is greater variation at the doctoral level depending on the type of program. For programs offered in non-traditional formats, for which program length is not a relevant and/or reliable quality measure, reviewers should ensure that available information clearly defines desired program outcomes and graduation requirements, that institutions are ensuring that program outcomes are achieved, and that there is a reasonable correlation between the scope of these outcomes and requirements and those typically found in traditionally offered degrees or programs tied to program length.

# 1 - CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW FORM

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections as appropriate.)
Policy on credit hour	Is this policy easily accessible? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, where is the policy located? Catalog Addendum page 42 <a href="http://www.academyart.edu/student-and-academic-policies">www.academyart.edu/student-and-academic-policies</a>
	Comments:
Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour	Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: Credit hour review is conducted as part of Academic Program Review and as part of the new course approval process.
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: Course hours are listed on the Learning Management System (LMS) which can be viewed by all enrolled students and faculty.
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? 3
	What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)? both
	What degree level(s)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
	What discipline(s)? Advertising, Fashion, Industrial Design
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: Meeting hours are not set for online classes but amount of work seems appropriate. A Director's credit hours certification checkbox with explanatory text is included on the online course build request form. <a href="https://my.academyart.edu/aau-forms/online-education/online-education-build-request-form">https://my.academyart.edu/aau-forms/online-education/online-education-build-request-form</a>
Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated) <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? 3
	What kinds of courses? Internships, Directed Study
	What degree level(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
	What discipline(s)?
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments: some syllabi list units, not hours; others list required hours. Internship courses lack CLOs.
Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)	How many programs were reviewed? 3
	What kinds of programs were reviewed?
	What degree level(s)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AA/AS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MA <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
	What discipline(s)? Animation, Fine Art, Music

	Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:

Review Completed By: Caroll Ryan

Date: 4/9/2021

## 2 - MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions and Comments: Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this table as appropriate.
**Federal regulations	Does the institution follow federal regulations on recruiting students? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
Degree completion and cost	Does the institution provide information about the typical length of time to degree? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Does the institution provide information about the overall cost of the degree? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:
Careers and employment	Does the institution provide information about the kinds of jobs for which its graduates are qualified, as applicable? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Does the institution provide information about the employment of its graduates, as applicable? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:

\*§602.16(a)(1)(vii)

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

Review Completed By: Ted Scholz

Date: 06/02/21

### 3 - STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)
Policy on student complaints	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints? xx <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, is the policy or procedure easily accessible? Is so, where? The section on “Student Appeals and Grievances” of the Catalog Addendum 1 for 2021-2022 (pp. 98-99) provides information to students for lodging a concern or complaint. It is available at: <a href="https://my.academyart.edu/content/dam/assets/pdf/catalog_supplement_and_academic_policies.pdf">https://my.academyart.edu/content/dam/assets/pdf/catalog_supplement_and_academic_policies.pdf</a>
	Comments:
Process(es)/ procedure	Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? xx <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, please describe briefly: The aforementioned section on “Student Appeals and Grievances” of the Catalog Addendum 1 for 2021-2022 outlines a three-step process for students to lodge complaints, initially with a responsible party and then on up to the Grievance Committee.
	If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure? <input type="checkbox"/> YES xx <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Records	Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? xx <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO The Office of the Chief Academic Officer maintains a file of student complaints and their dispensation.
	Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? xx <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly: Upon request, AAU provided the visiting team with a document, “Grievance Data Referenced in Appendix 1.10.pdf.” AAU demonstrated that it is able to record grievances for calendar year 2019, categorize them into types of grievances, and indicate their final disposition.
	Comments:

\*§602-16(1)(1)(ix)

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

#### 4 – TRANSFER CREDIT POLICY REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)
Transfer Credit Policy(s)	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for receiving transfer credit? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If so, is the policy publicly available?   X   YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If so, where? <a href="http://www.academyart.edu/student-and-academic-policies">http://www.academyart.edu/student-and-academic-policies</a>
	Does the policy(s) include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Comments:  The AAU policy on transfer credit is publicly stated on the university website and includes detailed information about the transfer of credit policies including criteria for transfer of credit earned at other institutions. Detailed transfer guides are available for community colleges across the state.

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

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

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

Review Completed By: Nicole Leshner  
 Date: 4/13/21

### Distance Education Review-Team Report Appendix

Institution: Academy of Art University  
Type of Visit: Reaffirmation of Accreditation  
Name of reviewer/s: Caroll Ryan and Nicole Leshner  
Date/s of review: April 7-9, 2021

A completed copy of this form should be appended to the team report for all comprehensive visits to institutions that offer distance education programs<sup>1</sup> and for other visits as applicable. Teams can use the institutional report to begin their investigation, then, use the visit to confirm claims and further surface possible concerns. Teams are not required to include a narrative about this in the team report but may include recommendations, as appropriate, in the Findings and Recommendations section of the team report. (If the institution offers only online courses, the team may use this form for reference but need not submit it as the team report is expected to cover distance education in depth in the body of the report.)

1. Programs and courses reviewed (please list)

Undergraduate: FSH100 Drawing for Fashion Design  
Graduate: FSA 603021 3D Design 2

2. Background Information (number of programs offered by distance education; degree levels; FTE enrollment in distance education courses/programs; history of offering distance education; percentage growth in distance education offerings and enrollment; platform, formats, and/or delivery method)

AAU has been offering distance education courses since 2006. AAU offers a total of 102 programs offered through distance education at the Associate, Baccalaureate, Master, and non-degree levels as specified below.

Associate:	24
Bachelor:	32
Master:	45
Non-degree:	1

Courses are delivered both synchronously and asynchronously. Students may choose which delivery method. 45% of students are enrolled online.

All programs are currently being offered online (synchronously and asynchronously) due to Covid-19 pandemic. The Academy plans to continue the use of widespread online courses going forward. AAU is currently using a proprietary platform that they built over the years. They are transitioning to Brightspace and plan to have it fully implemented in the summer of 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> See Distance Education Review Guide to determine whether programs are subject to this process. In general only programs that are more than 50% online require review and reporting.

3. Nature of the review (material examined and persons/committees interviewed)

Demonstration of LMS and two online courses (undergraduate and graduate).  
Interviews with the LMS Transition Team, Academic Directors, Executive Directors, Chief Academic Officer, Faculty (full-time and part-time), and Students.

**Observations and Findings**

Lines of Inquiry (refer to relevant CFRs to assure comprehensive consideration)	Observations and Findings	Follow-up Required (identify the issues)
<p><i>Fit with Mission.</i> How does the institution conceive of distance learning relative to its mission, operations, and administrative structure? How are distance education offerings planned, funded, and operationalized?</p>	<p>The majority of on-site courses and programs are also offered through DE. Although 45% of students are exclusively using DE, more than 70% of students have taken some of their courses online. While the strategic plan includes some initiatives around improving the online learning experience, future plans for growing this modality were not detailed. AAU has invested many resources toward DE and has learned much from their experience teaching remotely during the pandemic. The widespread adoption of online learning can certainly fit into AAU's mission; however, consideration should be given to where distance education fits into their strategic plan and vision.</p>	
<p><i>Connection to the Institution.</i> How are distance education students integrated into the life and culture of the institution?</p>	<p>The LMS facilitates the integration into life and culture of AAU for its students through its LMS that facilitates face-to-face interaction in discussion forums between faculty to students and student to student. AAU has created exceptional processes to engage their onsite students by building connections early in their academic programs. They will need to evaluate how to replicate these connections for their DE students.</p>	
<p><i>Quality of the DE Infrastructure.</i> Are the learning platform and academic infrastructure of the site conducive to learning and interaction between faculty and students and among students? Is the technology adequately supported? Are there back-ups?</p>	<p>The proprietary LMS currently utilized for DE is conducive to learning and interaction between faculty and students and among students through the use of video, discussion forums, and message boards. The LMS is supported adequately and is backed up regularly. While this LMS has served them well, it had limitations</p>	

	<p>especially in the area of curriculum changes. AAU will be transitioning to Brightspace in summer of 2022. The integration has begun. The Brightspace LMS will provide a robust infrastructure allowing for multiple levels of engagement, up to date curriculum and assessment opportunities.</p>	
<p><i>Student Support Services:</i> What is the institution's capacity for providing advising, counseling, library, computing services, academic support and other services appropriate to distance modality? What do data show about the effectiveness of the services?</p>	<p>AAU has an extensive student support network and provides advising, counseling, library, academic support and tutoring appropriate to the DE modality. Data suggest that these services have a high student satisfaction rate and may be contributing to a rising persistence rate of 4% of DE students. As DE continues to grow, AAU has set goals to update their library website to promote better usability and has requested additional budgetary resources to better support DE students. AAU will need to further their efforts toward building their online library offerings and other services to support these students. Satisfaction surveys indicated students do not feel connected to other students.</p>	
<p><i>Faculty.</i> Who teaches the courses, e.g., full-time, part-time, adjunct? Do they teach only online courses? In what ways does the institution ensure that distance learning faculty are oriented, supported, and integrated appropriately into the academic life of the institution? How are faculty involved in curriculum development and assessment of student learning? How are faculty trained and supported to teach in this modality?</p>	<p>Both full-time and part-time faculty teach online courses. However, the university relies heavily on part-time faculty who are working in the field. Faculty are oriented and on-boarded. While the university provides many online resources to support faculty, it was evident from faculty interviews, faculty would benefit from more personalized training on teaching and learning. This is especially important for DE faculty who may have no experience in teaching at all much less in a DE environment. Faculty are involved in curriculum development and assessment of student learning. Faculty are considered the SMEs and provide content to the course. A technology team builds out the course in the LMS.</p>	
<p><i>Curriculum and Delivery.</i> Who designs the distance education programs and courses? How are they approved and evaluated? Are the programs and courses comparable in content, outcomes and quality to on-ground offerings? (Submit credit hour report.)</p>	<p>AAU has a well-developed process for program and courses development that starts with the faculty or subject matter experts providing outlines and content. There are several layers of</p>	

	<p>approval beginning with program chairs, Curriculum Sub-committee, and Academic Steering Committee. The course development process is quite impressive and includes production, creative development, online support services and online programming. Caltura is used for video solutions so content will be made available in the library. Course development generally take 4-6 months. The program and courses are comparable to other similar universities and are identical to the courses offered on-ground at AAU other than the delivery modality.</p>	
<p><i>Retention and Graduation.</i> What data on retention and graduation are collected on students taking online courses and programs? What do these data show? What disparities are evident? Are rates comparable to on-ground programs and to other institutions' online offerings? If any concerns exist, how are these being addressed?</p>	<p>Of the over 36,000 fully online students enrolled between fall 2003 and summer 2012, only 14% have earned a degree. Data reviewed, indicated students in fully online courses are not performing as well as students in on-ground classes. Furthermore, data presented showed that students in fully DE programs can take up to 15 years to complete. Retention for online students is much lower than that of on-ground students. To address this concern, AAU has developed <i>Launchpad</i>, an online initiative designed to increase retention in online students. This program has already contributed to an increase in persistence in participating online students. AAU will need to continue to focus on improving retention and completion rates for DE students.</p>	<p>AAU has an elaborate student services department that reaches out to at risk students or to all students in at risk programs.</p>
<p><i>Student Learning.</i> How does the institution assess student learning for online programs and courses? Is this process comparable to that used in on-ground courses? What are the results of student learning assessment? How do these compare with learning results of on-ground students, if applicable, or with other online offerings?</p>	<p>AAU has a well-developed student learning assessment process at the course, program and institutional level. Assessment practices are the same for DE and on-ground courses; however, the data was not always disaggregated. For instance, there was evidence of comparable achievement of learning outcomes at the program level between online and on-ground students. However, the assessment data at the institutional level did not disaggregate the online and on-ground results. The new LMS will allow for the collection of large amounts of assessment data for both DE and on-ground courses and will</p>	

	provide for a consistent approach to assessment across all programs and modalities.	
<i>Contracts with Vendors.</i> Are there any arrangements with outside vendors concerning the infrastructure, delivery, development, or instruction of courses? If so, do these comport with the policy on <i>Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations</i> ?	Not applicable	
<i>Quality Assurance Processes:</i> How are the institution's quality assurance processes designed or modified to cover distance education? What evidence is provided that distance education programs and courses are educationally effective?	The institution has robust quality assurance practices across departments and curriculum. Assessment reports were available from many areas of the institution. These processes should be modified to assess the quality of purely DE programs and services. There was some evidence showing educational effectiveness of online curriculum in the Fashion program; however more evidence should be collected to support quality in DE offerings across all programs.	