

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC VISITING TEAM**

**SEEKING ACCREDITATION VISIT 2**

For Institutions Seeking Initial Accreditation

To: Dharma Realm Buddhist University

November 16-17, 2017

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The team evaluated the institution under the WSCUC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective judgment for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission. 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. Once an institution achieves either candidacy or initial accreditation, the team report and Commission Action Letter associated with the review that resulted in the granting of either candidacy or initial accreditation and the team reports and Commission Action Letters of any subsequent reviews will be made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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## SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

### Description of Institution and Visit

Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) seeks initial WSCUC accreditation after being granted candidacy effective October 31, 2013, and following its Seeking Accreditation Visit (SAV) 1 in March 2016. Citing specific areas for further development in its Commission Action Letter (CAL) of July 8, 2016, the Commission scheduled the institution's SAV 2 for November 2017.

Located in Ukiah, California, DRBU is a small private university dedicated to liberal education in a broad Buddhist tradition. In 1976, the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA) established DRBU as a California 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation. In 1984, the State of California approved DRBU's awarding degrees in Buddhist Study and Practice (BA, MA, PhD), Buddhist Education (MA), Chinese Studies (BA), and Translation of Buddhist Texts (BA, MA, PhD). In 1994, DRBU terminated the doctoral degrees to focus on being what it describes as a "teaching institution."

After conducting a self-study in 2010 to examine its objectives and develop a strategy to increase student diversity, DRBU decided to seek regional accreditation. DRBU reaffirmed its long-term educational vision in its 2010 self-study, and the university decided to create two new academic programs: a BA in Liberal Arts and an MA in Buddhist Classics. In May 2013, the California Bureau of Private Postsecondary Education approved the new programs.

In December 2013, WSCUC granted eligibility to DRBU to pursue Candidacy and Initial Accreditation based on the two new degrees. Also in 2013, DRBU began phasing out its six degree programs in order to develop and implement its two new programs. This effort was completed in 2015. Since 2013, DRBU has offered its MA in Buddhist Classics program

and BA in Liberal Arts. The university reported that four of the six students in the inaugural cohort graduated in May 2015.

Currently, DRBU has 13 students enrolled in the MA program and 21 in the BA program. The university has 7 full-time equivalent (FTE) professors and 20 FTE administrators/support staff. Since the SAV 1, DRBU has increased the number of students by 7, faculty by 1, and administrators/staff by 1.

In response to the SAV 1 in March 2016, the Commission indicated in its Commission Action Letter (CAL) of July 8, 2016, that it accepted the institution's report; granted DRBU candidacy for accreditation until June 24, 2021; and scheduled the SAV 2 for fall 2017. The Commission commended the university for the following:

1. submitting an institutional report that was well written, engaging, organized, and reflective of its commitment to the accreditation process,
2. involving the entire campus in the visit and responding openly and candidly to the team,
3. maintaining successful financial operations by using an effective financial reporting system and a budget process that monitors actual revenue and expenditures,
4. demonstrating and practicing an ethic of care that is grounded in the mission and pedagogical values of the university as well as reflected in its institutional learning outcomes and in student participation in institutional decision-making processes, and
5. developing and supporting a community that explores old and new ideas, is open to fresh perspectives, advances the university's mission, and benefits from its campus connection to the monastery of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association.

In its review of the institution's compliance with the Standards, the Commission noted the following regarding each standard:

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

DRBU has demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 1 at a level sufficient for Initial Accreditation.

The Commission identified the following issues for further development:

### **Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objective through Core Functions**

The Commission found that that the institution has demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 2 at a level sufficient for Candidacy, and that CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 require further work, as described in the following:

- **CFR 2.6, 2.7:** As DRBU grows and develops it will need to refine its program review protocol and conduct a comprehensive and highly participatory program review of both academic and co-curricular programs.
- **CFR 2.8:** DRBU has developed a unique model of Great Books education. As faculty are encouraged to engage in a broad range of scholarly and research activity, the university may want to consider providing particular support to encourage them to publish and present papers on the nature and benefit of the institution's pedagogy. In addition, faculty scholarship needs to be a significant part of faculty review that incorporates the evaluation of junior and senior faculty members and aligns faculty evaluation with the process for appointing and reappointing faculty. DRBU should document all faculty policies and processes in a centralized location such as the Faculty Governance Manual to provide the university with a clear and comprehensive model of faculty review.

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

The Commission found that that the institution has demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 3 at a level sufficient for Candidacy, and that CFR 3.7 requires further work, as described in the following:

- **CFR 3.7:** While DRBU has started to develop a process for review of the President, the process needs to be fully articulated and appropriately shared.

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

The Commission found that that the institution has demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 4 at a level sufficient for Candidacy, and that CFRs 4.3 and 4.4 require further work, as described in the following:

- **CFR 4.3, 4.4:** DRBU needs to implement and complete a program review process through which faculty, staff, and the administration gather and analyze student learning data, and through which they make changes as deemed appropriate for increasing student learning. Further, DRBU will provide evidence that the findings from these inquiries are being applied to the design and improvement of curricula, pedagogy, and assessment methodology.

In granting Candidacy, the Commission confirmed that Dharma Realm Buddhist University has met all WSCUC Standards, at least at a minimal level; and it directed the SAV 2 team to focus its attention on the areas requiring further work that were cited in the 2016 CAL.

## **The Institution's Report: Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report**

DRBU's institutional materials and its discussions with the team during the visit provided strong evidence that there was widespread participation in the university's self-study process and report preparation. In the team's judgment, the report was well organized and documented in that the university focused on the WSCUC standards and addressed the CFRs in need of further work cited in the 2016 CAL, specifically CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.7, 4.3, and 4.4. The team found the report to be informative, well written, evidence-based, and comprehensive. The team also found the format of the report helpful as in section 4 of the report, DRBU restated each of the cited CFR's as it appears in the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation and followed it with the institution's response. In all cases, DRBU provided evidence of its approach to comply substantially with the standard and CFR. The university indicated those engaged in the process, supplied pertinent evidence, and reflected on its resolve as an institution. DRBU pointed out areas of concern and initial plans for improvement that demonstrated its thoughtful efforts and commitment to comply with WSCUC standards and relevant CFR's.

### **Response to Issues Raised in the 2016 CAL**

A brief synopsis of the university's response to each CFR is given below; a detailed description of the University's response is provided under each CFR in the team report.

#### **CFR 2.6: Graduates achieve stated levels of attainment; SLOs embedded in faculty standards of assessing student work.**

The university has refined and further developed its framework for the assessment of student learning outcomes. This framework includes student learning outcomes, curricular mapping a clear assessment cycle, and assessment methods. DRBU draws upon both direct and indirect measures of assessment.

**CFR 2.7: Program review includes SLOs, retention and graduation data, external evidence and evaluators.**

In response to the CAL, the university has refined, expanded, and moved up the timetable for program review. Since the previous visit, DRBU has reviewed the MA in Buddhist Classics and two co-curricular programs. These reviews included high levels of participation from faculty, students, and staff; areas of strength as well of concern, and recommendations for improvement. The program review for the MA program also included external reviewers.

**CFR 2.8: Scholarship, creative activity, and curricular and instructional innovation for both students and faculty are valued and supported.**

The university has documented that scholarship in its broadest terms is expected of all faculty members, and the university evaluates faculty scholarship and creative activity as part of its review of faculty. The faculty selected Ernst Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* as a guiding text and referred to its various forms of scholarship, including traditional research. After considerable discussion, the university formulated its expectation of faculty scholarship.

**CFR 3.7: Clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes; priority to sustain institutional capacity and educational effectiveness.**

During the 2016-17 academic year, the university conducted a presidential review. The Board appointed a Presidential Review Committee, consistent with the University By-laws, and the committee worked in consultation with the Faculty Review Committee. The process included evaluation criteria, evidence gathering instruments, and a report template.

**CFR 4.3: Commitment to improvement based on data and evidence; systematic assessment of teaching, learning, campus environment; utilization of results.**

Using the results of the reviews of the MA degree and two co-curricular programs that were conducted during the past academic year, the university is applying a list of its findings to

curricula, pedagogy, and assessment methodologies. These changes reflect the institution's commitment to support its continuous improvement with evidence.

**CFR 4.4: Ongoing inquiry into teaching and learning to improve curricula, pedagogy, an assessment.**

Based on the outcomes assessment framework, the faculty has been improving the assessment process and using the results to implement changes. The university also added a part-time staff member who specializes in educational research methods and quantitative analysis to increase the institution's capacity for analytic research.

**SECTION II. EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH CFR'S IDENTIFIED BY COMMISSION AS REQUIRING FURTHER WORK**

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

**CFR 2.6 and CFR 2.7 Teaching and Learning**

In its 2016 CAL, the Commission made the following recommendation to DRBU with regards to CFRs 2.6 and 2.7 – “As DRBU grows and develops it will need to refine its program review protocol and conduct a comprehensive and highly participatory program review of both academic and co-curricular programs.”

**CFR 2.6: Teaching and Learning—Graduates achieve stated levels of attainment; SLOs embedded in faculty standards for assessing student work**

DRBU developed the assessment of learning or PLOs when it initiated the MA and BA degrees. Since then, DRBU has made considerable improvements in its assessment of learning process (CFR 2.6). Through its calibration sessions and faculty assessment retreats, DRBU identified the need to revise the PLO rubrics. DRBU also hired a part-time staff member for Institutional Research (IR), thereby increasing its capacity to gather and analyze qualitative and

quantitative evidence. This capacity aids the assessment and program review processes. Also, the coupling of the direct evidence from the calibration sessions with the indirect data from surveys administered to different groups on campus has made a positive difference in DRBU's decision-making processes for which the university is to be commended.

The concerns noted by DRBU relative to CFR 2.6 consisted of its difficulty in scoring with the four rubrics, challenges with evidentiary standards in student work, student needs for more expanded and deeper integration of contemplative exercises across the curriculum based on indirect data, and further development of the IR capability. DRBU responded to these concerns with initial plans for improvement. An item that was consistently mentioned in the university's initial plans for improvement was the need for reallocation of time for professors and committees. The team found DRBU made a change in which a faculty committee rather than the entire faculty read and scored the students' work in a retreat. The team found this to be a helpful change to make assessment less burdensome on the faculty. The efforts and outcomes of the faculty committee were then communicated at general faculty meetings allowing all faculty members to engage and give feedback.

In its campus meetings, the team was impressed by the detailed responses to all its questions about the learning outcomes and assessment framework. The team noted a commendable integration of qualitative and quantitative aspects, with the later enhanced by the coding provided by IR, enabling the faculty to make more informed decisions. In a highly participative manner characteristic of DRBU, the faculty continues to revise the rubrics to be more discriminating. The institution is clearly "closing the loop" by using the assessment results for program improvement. An example of this is the pre-post analysis of writing, which is leading to curricular changes as well as collaborative co-curricular events such as the recent writing workshop.

**CFR 2.7: Teaching and Learning—Program Review includes SLOs, retention and graduation data, external evidence & evaluators**

The SAV 1 report included a description of the program review process developed by DRBU at the time of the initiation of the MA program in 2013. The program review process was designed to integrate with the strategic planning process. The cycle lengths are every five years. In the team's view, the DRBU Academic Program Review Handbook is well conceived and written; and it includes the governance process over the program review, the structure of the self-study, and the criteria for selecting external reviewers. DRBU identified four phases in the process: 1) planning and preparation; 2) self-study; 3) external review and action plan; and 4) closing the loop.

The team read and evaluated the efforts of DRBU to prepare three self-studies and to conduct the external review team visit for its review of the MA program. The MA program was to be reviewed in 2018-2019; however, in response to the recommendation in the 2016 CAL the university moved the process earlier than planned. The two non-academic units were also reviewed during the same time period: namely, the Academic Resource Center and the Co-Curricular Programs and Activities.

The external reviewers came from institutions with Great Books curricula: one from the Integral Program of Saint Mary's College of California, and the other from St. John's College, Santa Fe. A couple weeks prior to the visit, the ALO forwarded the reports of the external reviewers to the team. The reviewers thanked the ALO for organizing the schedule to "help us [the reviewers] get the human context for a very well prepared self-study." The reviewers also noted in their report a "well designed curriculum has been developed, is thoughtfully executed and meets the students' expectations for their choice of graduate studies." The reviewers indicated that the materials showed perceived strengths based on the four criteria

of mission alignment, effective student learning, quality and development of teaching faculty, and sustainable practices. The reviewers spoke to the unique efforts of DRBU to bring the Buddhist perspective to Great Books education and commended DRBU for its innovation in including spiritual exercises in the MA program.

The reviewers identified 10 areas for improvement along with various recommendations within each area. The areas included: Rubrics, Writing, Spiritual Exercises, Institutional Research, Faculty Training, Faculty Decision-making and Workload, Faculty Scholarship, Enrollments, Student Housing, and Compensation. An addendum to the external program review report addressing the question, “Do St. John’s College or the Integral Program at St. Mary’s College require members of the teaching faculty to do research as part of their review and reappointment process?” Both reviewers elaborated on their institutions’ approach to the question.

With the report and addendum, DRBU is presently considering the external reviewers’ commendations and recommendations. The team probed as to how the institution would use the results of the recent reviews of the MA and the co-curricular program reviews. These reports have been widely shared and committees are now in the process of thoughtfully creating an action plan based on the self-study and external review. The action plan includes a timeline, a sense of priority, and it will be included in budget planning in the spring. Some aspects of the plan are already being implemented, such as a student symposium that will occur in February and anticipated collaborative work with other "Great Books" institutions.

**CFR 2.8: Scholarship and Creative Activity—Scholarship, Creative activity, and curricular and instructional innovation for both students and faculty valued and supported**

In the 2016 CAL, the Commission stated regarding CFR 2.8, “DRBU has developed a unique model of Great Books education. As faculty members are encouraged to engage in a

broad range of scholarly and research activity, the university may want to consider providing particular support to encourage them to publish papers and present papers on the nature and benefit of the institution's pedagogy. In addition, faculty scholarship needs to be a significant part of faculty review that incorporates the evaluation of both junior and senior faculty members and aligns faculty evaluation with the process for appointing and reappointing faculty. The university should document all faculty policies and processes in a centralized location such as the Faculty Governance Manual to provide DRBU with a clear and comprehensive model of faculty review.”

In response to CFR 2.8, DRBU’s president appointed three professors to the Faculty Review Committee (FRC) to address WSCUC’s recommendation by proposing a “Summary of Proposals of the Teaching Faculty Review Committee.” The proposal was adopted in April 2017 to guide the faculty in the new scholarship and faculty review policies effective 2017. In the proposal, DRBU decided to “adopt and act on WSCUC’s recommended scholarship activity to publish and present papers on the nature and benefit of DRUB’s programs.” The team commended the university for clearly defining its expectations for research, scholarship, and creative activity.

At every meeting with the faculty, administration, trustees, and students, the team made various inquiries regarding scholarship. The university provided the team with ample evidence and thoughtful articulation of scholarship. At separate meetings with the faculty and administration, faculty members intelligently verbalized and illustrated their engagement in scholarship by their publishing book chapters, presenting papers and posters at conferences, organizing symposia at DRBU, and collaborating with external faculty in establishing conferences. For example, a professor mentioned that faculty from DRBU and faculty from the

University of California, Berkeley created a conference on contemplative studies in September 2016 entitled “Self, Sacrifice, and Cosmos – Late Vedic Thought, Ritual, and Philosophy.”

In addition, the team discovered the extent to which DRBU’s faculty members continue to work on aligning contemplative studies as an academic strand. They explained that this alignment is directly related to DRBU’s mission and that it represents a new direction for the university. Given the growing interest in mindfulness in higher education, the team regarded this direction as a very promising development. The team was impressed and pleased to see DRBU’s commitment to scholarship at many levels of inquiry and with commendable intellectual engagement. At a visit meeting, a team member praised DRBU for being “pioneering and comfortable with difficult conversations” regarding scholarship.

During the visit, it was corroborated that the faculty have seriously discussed and reflected on the meaning of scholarship, often countering traditional assumptions and definitions of scholarship to develop a definition that speaks to the ethics and spiritual spaces that DRBU occupies. The team found that the past criticism of DRBU that scholarship was only encouraged and not expected of its faculty is no longer valid. It became abundantly clear to the team that DRBU’s president, faculty, and administrators indeed expect scholarship, but do not legislate that it be expressed in a particular form. For example, the president stated that mathematics professors are not required or restricted to publish, write, or produce scholarship only in their disciplines. Because faculty members are free to produce scholarship in other areas, the insights gained by them in co-teaching courses open up new possibilities outside their disciplines. A faculty member vehemently stated at a public meeting that if DRBU did not support scholarly activity such as publishing and presenting papers, the faculty member would not stay at DRBU. The team saw evidence that DRBU provides ample support and opportunity to produce scholarship.

The team thought it important to include DRBU's progress relative to CFR 2.9. DRBU's faculty members have also added and strengthened the Professor Plan in terms of conducting faculty review. DRBU faculty members and administrators consistently mentioned their gratitude for the SAV 1 recommendation as it has motivated them to examine faculty review and improve their process. One administrator noted that DRBU's response has raised the level of participation across the board, including junior faculty who are key to the sustainability and advancement of scholarship and creative activity at DRBU.

DRBU has included scholarship as a key element for faculty review. Scholarship and creative activity are found under criteria 2, "Serious engagement and commitment to DRBU's mission and programs." Scholarship is defined as 1) writing, presenting, and publishing articles, essays, and papers, 2) organizing and attending workshops and conferences, and 3) texts translation.

The following are DRBU's five criteria for faculty review:

1. excellence in intellect and imagination,
2. serious engagement and commitment to DRBU's mission and programs,
3. competence in leading small, seminar-style classes,
4. willingness and ability to teach in all parts of DRBU's programs, and
5. responsiveness as a civil and collegial member to the needs of DRBU's community.

The team confirmed that faculty scholarship at DRBU is a significant part of faculty review in that it "incorporates the evaluation of both junior and senior faculty members and aligns faculty evaluation with the process for appointing and reappointing faculty." The university documents all faculty policies and processes, including those pertaining to scholarship and creativity, in the Faculty Governance Manual.

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

**CFR 3.7: Organizational Structures and Decision-making Processes—Clear, consistent decision-making structures and processes; priority to sustain institutional capacity and educational effectiveness**

In its 2016 CAL, the Commission indicated that it “found that that the institution has demonstrated evidence of compliance with Standard 3 at a level sufficient for Candidacy”, and that CFR 3.7 requires further work ... in the following: ‘...While DRBU has started to develop a process for review of the President, the process needs to be fully articulated and appropriately shared. ‘

In its SAV 2 institutional report, DRBU stated: “Although much of the organizational structure and decision-making mechanism that DRBU discussed in its response to CFR 3.7 in the SAV 1 Report have not changed since the first visit, this section will report on DRBU’s efforts to improve in area under CFR 3.7 in addition to addressing the Commission’s specific recommendation on the review of the University President” (p.35).

The team was impressed by the continuing commitment of DRBU to include and engage the university community in institutional decision-making. The meetings of the team with the DRBU community affirmed that that the many attachments in the institutional report described institutional practice. These attachments

1. indicated the lines of authority and accountability from the board of trustees to the president and to the faculty,
2. documented that the academic, student affairs, finance, and administrative areas report to the president.

3. outlined a faculty governance structure that facilitates faculty participation in a broad range of decision making, and presented the schedule of general faculty and committee meetings, and
4. affirmed the various roles that the administrators, faculty, staff, and students play in shared decision making.

Similar to the SAV 1 team's conclusions regarding governance noted in its report, the SAV 2 team recognized the rare quality, transparency, and effectiveness of the various governance structures at DRBU as well as the university's high regard and unswerving commitment to shared decision-making at all levels.

#### **Evaluation of the President.**

The SAV 1 team in its report and the Commission in its 2016 CAL noted the need for a systematic and timely evaluation of its president. The university responded by organizing an extensive review of its current president, and it set in motion a system for presidential evaluation that will serve the institution well in the near and distant future. In a detailed chart in the institutional report indicating specific dates and actions, DRBU documented that in January 2016 the chair of the board initiated the process by appointing a trustee presidential review committee. In May 2016, the teaching faculty appointed a faculty presidential review committee. The chairs and representatives of both committees met in September 2016, to establish a collaborative review process in which all campus constituents could assess the president's administrative and academic performance. The faculty committee conducted the review and reported its finding to the trustee committee who drafted a report for the board. This process is clearly and succinctly outlined in Section 6.a of the Faculty Governance Manual.

The process encourages the presidential review committees to be flexible in determining criteria of evaluation, instruments for gathering evidence, and timelines for the review. In this

way, review committees can evaluate presidential performance in light the current needs of the university. The review of the current president was completed in May 2017, and it incorporated the results of a survey that was widely distributed to all university constituents. The survey solicited comments regarding the president’s commitment to the university mission, long-term vision and planning, leadership, board relations, administrative management, communication skill and ability, professional/academic knowledge and skill, community and public relations, fiscal management, and development. The team considered the survey to be an exemplary instrument as it sought a comprehensive assessment of the multiple skills needed for a president to effectively meet the immediate challenges of DRBU. As indicated in the institutional report, “the results of the review were strongly positive” (p.38) regarding the president.

DRBU established that a president would serve five-year renewable terms with a university-wide review conducted in the fourth year of each term. In addition, the board will conduct annual reviews that are less extensive than the fourth year reviews and are focused on the current state of the university.

The team commends DRBU for creating and initiating a comprehensive presidential review process that enables all its constituents to participate in assessing the performance of the president every four years and ensures that the board is providing the president with an annual evaluation.

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

In the 2016 CAL, the Commission stated, “CFR 4.3, 4.4 - DRBU needs to implement and complete a program review process through which faculty, staff, and administrators gather and analyze student learning data, and through which they make changes as deemed appropriate for increasing student learning. Further, DRBU will provide evidence that the findings from these

inquiries are being applied to the design and improvement of curricula, pedagogy, and assessment methodology.”

**CFR 4.3: Institutional Learning and Improvement—Commitment to improvement based on data and evidence; systematic assessment of teaching, learning, campus environment, utilization of results**

In its SAV 2 Institutional Report, DRBU referred to the SAV 1 Team Report in which the SAV 1 team wrote regarding CFR 4.3 and 4.4: “DRBU’s mission, the design of its governance and quality assurance systems, and the early implementation of these quality assurance systems all lay a strong foundation for a culture of participatory and evidence-based inquiry and self-reflection” (p. 42). The SAV 1 team added why this was important to establish on the onset by stating, “To advance DRBU’s mission of activating ‘an intrinsic wisdom possessed by all individuals,’ it requires an orientation toward a form of learning that is ‘dialogical, interactive, probing, and deeply self-reflective” (p. 42). This self-reflection at the institutional level has led to DRBU’s creation of the MA and BA programs, “along with the reorganization of the University so as to best support them” (p. 43).

DRBU’s quality assurance systems include program reviews and outcomes assessments. The university pointed out that these processes were designed to lead to findings and recommendations for changes that will contribute to formalizing the development and incorporation of institutional action plans as part of its review cycle.

The team found evidence in the SAV 2 report of this process and how DRBU put the assessment guide into practice. The report documented the widespread involvement of faculty, staff, and administrators in the program review process as well as the outcomes assessment process. The self-studies for the MA program review as well as those for the program reviews for Academic Resource Center and the Co-Curricular Programs and Activities involved

assessments of outcomes. The self-studies contained evidence that involved collecting, analyzing, and reporting both direct and indirect evidence. As a result, the self-studies included tables containing a column of Areas of Concern that was immediately followed in the next column by the recommendations of Initial Plan for Improvement. For its first run through on conducting self-studies on its academic and co-curricular units, DRBU demonstrated a substantial level of understanding and practice of the program review process. The team found that DRBU was consistent in what it said it would do in its Academic Program Review Handbook. The University used a different template for completing the self-study report for the co-curricular units (see Attachment CFR 2.7.8). The team commends DRBU for these efforts.

During the site visit, the team learned from several committees how the self-study process has brought items to light that have lead to areas of concern. For example, the MA program self-study listed as an area of concerns the need to revise rubrics for PLOs that directly have an impact on pedagogy. One initial plan for improvement identified the system used by the Program Review Committee to understand the variability of writing quality from course to course. The committee will examine practices of assigning written work in different courses from reviewing writing prompts, grading practices, and providing feedback to students (p. 52 of MA program self-study).

The team also learned about the effective use of quantitative and qualitative data and the supportive role of the institutional research analyst in providing committees with relevant data in a timely fashion in order to aid the decision-making process. One example the university shared with the team was the use of coding to improve the analysis of qualitative data. Another example was how the coupling of both quantitative and qualitative data facilitated learning about the students' academic and co-curricular needs. These measurements aided in establishing a

committee that will plan events featuring outside lecturers as well as symposia featuring the presentation of student and faculty written works.

**CFR 4.4: Institutional Learning and Improvement—Ongoing inquiry into teaching and learning to improve curricula, pedagogy, and assessment**

Based on use of the outcomes assessment framework, the faculty has been improving the assessment process and using the results to implement changes. More specifically, DRBU has refined two sets of PLOs, established and enhanced the writing tutor service for students, added calibration to the assessment process, and improved the process of measuring learning outcomes that resulted in improving the MA and BA rubrics. In addition, DRBU improved the outcomes assessment procedure from involving all faculty members to a handful who report findings during general faculty meetings and seek feedback. Initial action plans were put in place to improve clarity of PLOs, improve practices of student assignment prompts, integrate contemplative exercise into the MA program, and enhance DRBU's institutional research capacity to aid outcome assessment and program review processes (SAV 2 report, p. 46).

The team received a copy of the external reviewers' commendations and recommendations prior to the visit. The team found that the timing of the SAV 2 visit presented DRBU with a difficult challenge to produce evidence of improvement based on the recommendations of the external review team. During the visit, the team learned how DRBU gained insights and valuable recommendations from the report of the MA degree external review. The team also learned that several members of the faculty, staff, and administration have read and reflected on the external review team's report and recommendations. When asked what was the next step, it was clear to the team that DRBU will proceed with the closing of the loop as is codified in their Academic Program Review Handbook.

In addition, the team also learned DRBU's plans to align the external review recommendations with the strategic planning process in spring of 2018. Various members of DRBU noted that some recommendations of the external review team could be worked on immediately while others would require alignment with the strategic plan as initiatives incorporated into the university's budgetary process.

As envisioned in its Strategic Plan, DRBU noted in its SAV2 report the addition of a 27,000 square-foot renovated building in fall 2017. The university also pointed out how this building has contributed to its educational mission by tripling the available classroom space, offices, meeting rooms, library reading rooms, student lounges, and computer rooms.

### **SECTION III. FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Findings**

As documented in this report, the team confirmed that DRBU has significantly improved the specific areas cited in the 2016 CAL that required further work; and in the team's view, the university is now in substantial compliance in all standards. The team commends the university not only for systematically addressing each of the six CFR's cited by the Commission, but also for improving the whole institution, including the areas the Commission found to be in substantial compliance. Moreover, the team discovered that the university's work in the specific areas cited by the Commission has not been at the expense of other areas; in fact, its improvement reflects an institutional commitment to ongoing system-wide progress.

The team is convinced that DRBU will continue to evolve as a quality university well beyond its current efforts in seeking initial accreditation.

The university validated for the team that it is both mission and student driven in creating, expanding, and revising academic programs. The university has put in place and tested effective processes for assessing student learning and for applying the data gained by assessment

to revise programs and activities to meet the ever changing needs of its students. As substantiated during the visit, the university has developed an effective capacity to “close the loop” between assessment and academic improvement.

By challenging the traditional assumptions and definitions of scholarship to expand it well beyond the notion that disciplinary research is the only valid expression of scholarship, DRBU is imaginatively creating a many faceted scholarship that will serve its unique academic mission. By drawing on the spirit and content of Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered*, DRBU expects its faculty members to be creative in finding the type of scholarship that will best serve their university, courses, and students.

DRBU has established a highly participative community in which the opinions of all its constituents – trustees, faculty, students, administrators, staff, and alumni – play an important and appropriate role in all decision-making. The university successfully drew on its community to evaluate the president. DRBU created an exemplary survey that sought input on a full range of skills that it believes its president needs to be an effective leader. The university has modeled for higher education an exemplary approach to presidential evaluation that is intelligent, fair, comprehensive, inclusive, and aligned with the mission and core values of the institution.

The university’s focus on strategic planning will continue to be increasingly relevant in the coming years of institutional growth and change. The renovation of a large campus building is transforming the university, and there are many more spaces on campus that could be renovated as the institution evolves. That fact that the university acts only after considerable input from its community bodes well for effective collaboration and enduring support from its constituents.

The team came away from the visit with a strong sense of student centeredness that is still possible in higher education. Guided by a clear mission, dedicated to transforming the lives of its

students, and inspired by its Buddhist wisdom and spiritual traditions, DRBU is poised to sustain and advance itself as an acknowledged leader in innovative higher education.

### **Commendations**

- 1. The Visit.** The team expresses its heartfelt gratitude to President Susan Rounds, ALO Franklyn Wu, and the entire DRBU community – trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students – for their welcoming spirit and warm hospitality. The team commends DRBU for its thorough compilation and presentation of supporting documents, participation in all team meetings, and candid responses to the team’s questions.
- 2. Report.** The team commends DRBU for a well written and organized report that focused on the CFRs identified in the recommendations from the 2016 Commission Action Letter (CAL), more specifically CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.7, 4.3, and 4.4. There was widespread participation that included several committees that engaged in the process; gathered, analyzed, and provided evidence; and reflected on their findings.
- 3. Program Review.** The team commends DRBU for its efforts in conducting three self-studies: one on the MA program, and two on co-curricular units (Academic Resource Center and Co-Curricular Programs and Activities). These reviews have resulted in the identification of areas of concern with accompanying initial plans for improvement. The team commends the university for carrying out the external review visit of the MA program in a tight timeframe prior to the SAV 2 visit.
- 4. Evaluation of the President.** The team commends DRBU for creating and initiating a comprehensive presidential review process that enables all constituents to participate in assessing the performance of the president every four years and ensuring that the board is providing the president with an annual evaluation.

**5. Scholarship.** The team commends DRBU for strongly integrating scholarship and creative activity into faculty evaluations, the Professor Plan of Employment, and the Faculty Handbook, as well as for engaging students in scholarly and creative activities. The conversations on scholarship, as it relates to DRBU's mission and values, have critically examined the traditional assumptions and definitions of scholarship.

**6. Assessment.** The team commends DRBU for its thoughtful and effective implementation of its assessment framework, characterized by intense institution-wide participation and reflection on how to use the results for programmatic improvement.

**7. Governance.** The team commends the university for its exemplary shared governance processes and practices in which all members of the university community can participate meaningfully in decision making.

**8. Strategic Planning.** The team commends the university for its consistent, productive, and collaborative strategic planning, as evidenced by its opening a \$5.4 million, 27,000-square-foot renovated building in fall 2017. This impressive and well-designed facility more than doubles the number of classrooms, offices, meeting rooms, library reading rooms, student lounges, and computer rooms. Moreover, the team commends the university for plans to align recommendations resulting from program reviews with strategic planning and budgetary processes.

## **Recommendation**

**1. External Reviewers Report.** The team recommends that DRBU move forward with reviewing and implementing the recommendations cited in the MA program's external reviewers' team report, and that it complete the process articulated in the DRBU Academic Program Review Handbook (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3). The team also recommends that DRBU apply the same review processes for a program review of the BA program in 2019-20 academic year.

**Federal Compliance forms and Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators:** Since the Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 took place only a year earlier, it is not necessary to complete the federal forms at this time for the Seeking Accreditation Visit 2.