

REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM

For Reaffirmation of Accreditation

To: The Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

March 5 – 7, 2019

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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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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Accreditation History

The mission of the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT) is:

The Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology, a member of the Graduate Theological Union, is a community of scholars committed to the pursuit of truth as revealed in the Gospel and discovered by human reason. Inspired by the Dominican practice of disciplined inquiry and learned preaching, the School draws its students into the rich tradition of classical philosophy and Catholic theology, especially as exemplified by St. Thomas Aquinas, and from this tradition engages contemporary scholarship and culture in mutual enrichment. As a Center of Studies of the Order of Preachers and an apostolate of the Western Dominican Province, the School is committed to preparing women and men for academic and apostolic vocations.

History of DSPT. DSPT began in 1851 in Monterey, California as the House of Studies or seminary of the Western Dominican Province (WDP) and as a Center of Studies of the Dominican Order. The institution had a dual mission to provide education for the friars in classical philosophy and Catholic theology, particularly in the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas, and to provide education for the laity as the apostolic outreach of the church. In 1932, in Oakland, California, it became a degree-granting institution in the State of California under the name of College of St. Albert the Great. Subsequently, in 1963, the college decided to seek accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The following year the college joined the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) and later rented property in Berkeley, California to be nearer to the other GTU institutions. In 1976 College of St. Albert the Great

changed its name to Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology. The following year DSPT decided to join the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) “so as to more fully engage contemporary scholarship and the challenges of contemporary society.” Since 1978 DSPT has also been accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). In 2004 the WDP purchased property in Berkeley, California to create its own campus. This campus, occupied in 2006, has become an integral part of the educational outreach of the WDP.

Degree Programs. From the beginning DSPT has sought to live out its mission through their on-site programs. The Dominican Order and the WDP require the institution to offer the Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree for the new members or friars of the Dominican life. To fulfill their outreach mission for the laity several degrees are available. As the website notes “(a)t DSPT, lay women and men study for the Master of Arts Theology (MATH) alongside Dominican Friars, Capuchins, Benedictines, Jesuits, as well as . . . seminarians from (other religious groups). Students also benefit from the wide range of theological faculties and resources available throughout the Graduate Theological Union, which span the full range of Christian denominations, as well as Jewish, Islamic, Orthodox, and Buddhist traditions.”

<https://www.dspt.edu/theology-programs>

Two additional degrees, for both laity and clerical candidates, are the MATH and the MA Philosophy (MAPh). These two degrees, while separate degrees, can also be taken concurrently. After completion of the concurrent MAPH and the MATH, students will have two separate MA degrees. The DSPT website notes that “The Concurrent MA takes students through the entire historical series of philosophy, systematic theology and philosophy, historical theology, moral theology, ethics, Scripture, and non-Christian religions” (<https://www.dspt.edu/concurrent->

[ma](#)). The team noted that, while the MDiv degree was available only to the clerical candidates, these candidates were also expected to enroll in the MATH and MAPH degrees. The MA Theological Studies was approved by WSCUC in 2011 and is available to students who want to bring a sense of confidence of their faith to their professional lives. Also available to students at DSPT is a non-degree Certificate of Theological Studies and the GTU common MA.

Enrollment. Enrollment at DSPT for the past 4 years has decreased from a headcount of 75 students in fall of 2015 to a headcount of 53 in fall of 2018, a drop of 30%. Of the students enrolled in fall 2018 there are 17 part-time students. While the headcount has decreased, student FTE has vacillated between 40 and 45 students in the last 4 years (Institutional Report, p. 17). The Institutional Report for fall 2018 also includes 11 total students enrolled in the MDiv program, 2 of whom are part-time students, resulting in an FTE of 9.6 in the MDiv program. Based on the requirements of the Dominican Order, the WPD provides funding to DSPT to support the education of friars. This leaves all other tuition paid for by the lay students, which in fall 2018 would be 40 students, including all part-time students. Given the stress of falling enrollments, the institution requested additional funding from the WDP. In response the WDP increased their contribution to the institution from \$180,000 to \$300,000 in fall 2015 for the following 3 years. Additional funding by the WDP in FY 18 brought the total to \$461,000; \$400,000 was guaranteed for FY 19 regardless of the enrollment. These enrollment numbers do not include enrollments in courses by students from the GTU.

WSCUC Accreditation History. The school's last substantive change review by WASC came in 2010, when approval was granted for the Master of Theological Studies degree. The most recent comprehensive review took place in 2011; that review was coordinated with an

evaluation by ATS. Following the review, the WASC Commission reaffirmed accreditation through 2018, with a Special Visit scheduled for the fall 2014. This Special Visit was followed by a Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2015, followed by a progress report submitted in fall 2016 with an Offsite Review (OSR) in fall 2017. The comprehensive review, scheduled for spring 2018, would eventually be postponed until spring 2019 due to the withdrawal of most of the support services provided by the GTU for its member schools. The current Accreditation Visit (AV) began in July 2018 with the Institutional Report submitted in July 2018, an OSR in September 2018 and the AV in March 2019.

In its letter of reaccreditation after the 2011 comprehensive review, the Commission lauded DSPT for “embracing the broader mission” to “educate lay leaders in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas” rather than focusing primarily on “training friars.” It also saluted the strong faculty and the “excellent outcomes of its graduates.” Yet the Commission also called attention to several areas for improvement, most notably strategic planning, financial planning and sustainability (CFR 4.6), board development (CFR 3.9), the assessment of student learning outcomes, and program review (CFR 4.3). These items for improvement were designated as the focal points for a 2014 site visit.

The 2014 site visit team would eventually add its own recommendations. DSPT was advised to implement better methods for predicting FTE, provide more administrative support for Admissions and Development, enhance the website’s role in recruiting students and donors, and find more networking opportunities for professional development. The spring 2015 letter to the President and the subsequent progress report in fall 2016 included a request for

information regarding results of enrollment/recruitment efforts, results for DSPT's fundraising efforts, and DSPT's financial condition.

B. Description of the Accreditation Team's Review Process

The reaffirmation of accreditation team was constituted in May 2018 and re-formed in July 2018 following the departure of one member. The team received the initial DSPT Institutional Report in July 2018 and an updated report in August 2018. An organizational conference call was held in July 2018 in preparation for the August 2018 conference call. Team member assignments were made in preparation for the Offsite Review (OSR) on September 12-13, 2018. At this meeting observations were presented and the team decided on specific Lines of Inquiry that would be used during the onsite DSPT visit. A video conference with President Peter Rogers and Father Chris Renz (the ALO) from DSPT was held and the team requested additional documents prior to the team visit and additional documents to be presented in the team room at the Accreditation Visit (AV). In response to the Lines of Inquiry the additional requested documentation was received between December 12 and December 21, 2018. This information was discussed at the team conference call on February 13, 2019 and the team drafted the preliminary team report. The team convened for the AV on Monday evening, March 4, 2018 and conducted its work on March 5-7, 2018 according to the schedule that had been developed. The following interviews of the appropriate personnel were conducted by one or more members of the team:

- President
- Academic Dean/ALO
- CFO
- Phone meeting with External Auditor

- WSCUC Steering Committee
- Open meeting with Student Friars and Lay Students
- Open meeting with Faculty
- Chairs of Philosophy Department and Theology Department
- Enrollment and Retention Team
- Recruitment and Admissions Team
- Assessment and Program Review Faculty
- Strategic Planning and Institutional Research Team
- Board of Corporate Members
- Board of Trustees (including video conference with certain members)

A list of commendations and recommendations was developed and shared with the DSPT community at the team exit interview on March 7, 2019. Work on the DSPT Accreditation Team Report was continued after the team's departure from the onsite visit and edits were made via email over the following two weeks leading to the final draft of the team report.

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

DSPT's Institutional Report was clearly and concisely written, though it did not follow the recommended format for institutional essays on each of the main components recommended by WSCUC. The original version of the report submitted in July 2018 to WSCUC and reviewed by the accreditation team also lacked sufficient references to the Criteria for Review (CFRs). As a result, it was more challenging for the accreditation team to assess how well the institution was responding to the Standards of Accreditation and addressing the major components of the review. At the request of the team, therefore, a new version of the report was prepared with more extensive references to CFRs and a "Crosswalk" chart that suggested links between narrative passages and selected criteria.

The report was most coherent and clear when addressing some of themes that had been cited in previous reviews, notably related to enrollment, finances, and strategic planning. The narrative also gave a compelling overview of the ideals and mission of the institution, and provided thoughtful reflection on recent program reviews, new tactics to promote enrollment, and some recent efforts to bring their trustees and administration together for planning. In the report, DSPT gave a clear summary of the process whereby the institution conducted its self-study, and it was apparent that the self-study process had been beneficial for the sense of community and for planning. Discussions of faculty life and policies, faculty development, academic freedom, diversity, scholarship, evaluation, hiring, promotion (CFRs 1.3, 1.4, 2.8, 3.2., 3.3., 4.4) were quite sparse in the report, and this required more investigation during the AV. As noted in later sections of this report, the accreditation team did find that the report focused on tactics and immediate steps rather than offering broader assessments of the current landscape of theological study, higher education, or the Dominican order. The concluding section of the report gave only brief indications of the future directions for the institution and left some ambiguities about where the institution would head next.

Throughout the report, the narrative did cite and analyze important data, and there were clear links between the prose analysis and the appropriate chart or appendix. Most of the supportive evidence and appendices submitted with the original report in July were relatively modest. Yet the institution was responsive when asked to provide additional information after the OSR, and during the AV the administration produced updated information on request. Since DSPT has noted its students' struggles with their theses, the team requested samples of theses of various qualities, and that was helpful in conveying their expectations and outcomes

for students. Data from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) gave the team perhaps the most valuable glimpse at DSPT's performance in light of national trends. Now that DSPT is not relying on GTU to provide many of its institutional research functions, DSPT will need to produce admissions and registration data that is more clearly disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, degree program, etc. For this review, such data was often rather generic and required further probing by the team (CFR 4.2).

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ESSAYS

A. Component 1: Response to Previous Commission Actions

Much of DSPT's current Institutional Report for the 2019 reaccreditation dwelt on the concerns and themes outlined in the previous reviews over the past seven years (CFR 1.8). The report appropriately celebrates progress in several key areas. Successful searches led to the hiring of a new president, a new CFO, and a director of development (CFRs 3.6, 3.8). DSPT has developed a better tool for predicting enrollment, relying less on generic headcounts and more on specific projections for the units the school expects each student to take in the coming year. Strides have been taken to upgrade the website, and a new Director of Admissions is beginning to augment digital outreach and marketing. Faculty members expressed appreciation for the institution's support of professional development activities.

Notably, DSPT has been at work addressing the recommendations from WSCUC during a season of personnel change and the withdrawal of support services from the GTU (e.g., information technology, student information system, financial aid processing, etc.) (CFR 3.5). To its credit, DSPT has turned the cutback in support from the GTU to its advantage. Rather

than languishing because of the withdrawal of the GTU's assistance, DSPT used the change to save over \$100,000 in its annual expenses and has migrated to a more effective student information system (SIS) called Populi, which more adequately serves a small institution.

On several of the major recommendations from WSCUC, DSPT's progress has been mixed and its institutional responses worthy of fuller development. The most significant of these items was noted in both the 2011 comprehensive review and the 2014 site visit. Some of those matters will be discussed in the sections of this report devoted to specific components: assessment and program review will be covered in components 4 and 5, and recruitment, fundraising, and the general financial condition as well as strategic planning will be appraised in component 7. The other area of major concern, governance, is considered below.

Governance. DSPT is overseen by two boards. The Board of Corporate Members (BCM) is the highest level of governance and consists of a leadership council of Dominican friars from the Western Dominican Province (WDP). The BCM has final authority over DSPT. The Board of Trustees (BoT) includes lay persons, both women and men, who lend their expertise and financial support to the school. The BoT oversees the budget, policies and management of the institution (CFRs 1.5, 3.9). Prompted largely by the self-study requirement for WSCUC, the two boards have met more often and endeavored to enhance collaboration. The task of preparing the self-study was used by the institution as an occasion to bring together its boards, faculty, and staff to appraise the current health of the institution and to ask vital questions about its future (CFR 1.8). DSPT deserves praise for engaging these multiple constituencies in the self-study process. Among its principal objectives during this process, the school has sought to articulate how DSPT serves the province as an "apostolate" and a "center of studies" for the

Dominican Order. The BoT has also begun to work in earnest with the president, staff, and faculty in the development of its strategic plan (CFR 4.6).

The AV did reveal much of the good will that has emerged from greater communication and collaboration between the two boards and the school's leadership. For the most part, the members of the BCM and the BoT who met with the accreditation team spoke enthusiastically about DSPT. Nevertheless, as the Institutional Report notes, not all trustee committees are adequately engaged with their responsibilities and some ambiguities remain regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the boards (CFRs 1.5, 3.7). Serious health issues for the previous board chair did slow some progress, and the leader of the BCM and many of its members are new to their roles. That newness was apparent in conversations with the current accreditation team, though the team was impressed by the commitment and energy of the new BoT chair and head of the province to serve the institution. The province has recently committed considerable new resources to support the school (discussed in component 7), yet the BCM's and BoT's distinctive duties and roles in raising funds and identifying potential donors could be clearer and stronger. Often in the Institutional Report and in conversations during the accreditation visit, the building of an endowment was cited as one of the institution's "Desired Ends" and essential objectives. That task will require full engagement from both boards.

Commendably, the BCM and the province have recently endorsed the school's desire to increase its outreach to lay students, but the BCM appears to have less involvement in the strategies for recruiting students for this expanded vision. DSPT has clearly set forth a vision for the institution (discussed in component 3) that blends clerical and lay students, and the faculty

and leadership of the school have quite effectively united these different students into a common learning community. Yet communication and cooperation among the two boards in planning and implementing this shared vision should be cultivated in order for DSPT to ensure sufficient enrollment, maintain a unifying mission in the midst of change, and launch the most compelling and appropriate initiatives (CFR 3.7).

Furthermore, the BoT, in collaboration with the BCM, needs to clarify and implement the protocol for the evaluation of the president. The current president has yet to undergo a formal evaluation even though he is approaching the end of his five-year term. WSCUC standards require the evaluation of the CEO (CFR 3.9), and it is unfair to the current president to ask him to declare his intentions about serving in a new term if he has not had the benefit of a full review. Reportedly, the illness of the previous BoT chair was partly responsible for the delay, though the BoT needs to have a protocol in place to ensure the regular appraisal of the president, even during times of transition in BoT leadership.

B. Component 2: Compliance: Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements; Inventory of Education Effectiveness Indicators

The team made use of the four standards as an organizing principle for its evaluation of the DSPT self-study report.

STANDARD I: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

The institution defines its purposes and established educational objectives aligned with those purposes. The institution has a clear and explicit sense of its essential values and character its distinctive elements, its place in both the higher education community and society, and its contribution to the public good. It functions with integrity, transparency, and autonomy.

The Institutional Report, materials, and team visit all included descriptions of the philosophical and theological foundations for the school and mention that graduates will be “agents of change” informed by a Catholic worldview (CFR 1.1). The Student Handbook includes some language on how academic freedom, in this environment, is practiced (https://www.dspt.edu/files/DSPT_Student_Handbook_F2018-2019.pdf, p. 23) (CFRs 1.3, 1.4, 1.5). The Student Handbook and the DSPT website provide students with specifics regarding policies/procedures for student conduct, grievances, disability accommodations, and financial issues such as refunds and financial aid (CFR 1.6).

WSCUC requires institutions to be committed to “honest and open communication with the Accreditation Commission; to undertaking the accreditation review process with seriousness and candor; and to informing the Commission promptly of any matter that could materially affect the accreditation status of the institution” (CFR 1.8). It is clear via the AV and in the self-study that DSPT had communicated openly and honestly regarding the accreditation review process. It does need to be noted that further development of the self-study and timely updating of materials would have aided the team in its review. During the AV, there were a few instances in which updated information was available but had not been provided to the team. This information would have significantly informed the review process. For example, a \$5 million donation was mentioned at the start of the AV but was included in provided documentation only as a footnote to a budget document. It appears that DSPT had been aware of this gift for a few months and had made a determination that the gift would be used for student scholarships. It would have been helpful if this information was more clearly provided to the visiting team earlier in the process.

The DSPT website and Institutional Report, taken together, provide appropriate detail on the underlying and guiding faith tradition and principles that are the basis of the institution. Further, there is some discussion in the self-study on how this translates into institutional goals which then inform program and course goals. Conversations with students indicate that they feel that the institution's philosophical and religious foundations are clearly interwoven into the educational experience and used to provide frameworks through which they can be intellectually curious. Students were able to discuss how the stated institutional goals of "Deep Learning" and "Collaborative Leadership" manifest in their educational experience at DSPT.

Additionally, it appears students at DSPT have a deep awareness and appreciation of their educational endeavor. DSPT would have benefited greatly by having them involved in a significant way in the self-study process. Students had much to share about the facets of DSPT that engage them, how the institution supports their development into scholars and holistically, and the ways that DSPT is preparing them to make use of their education after graduation. Throughout the self-study, program reviews, and during the AV, concerns about students' academic preparation and specifically their underdeveloped writing and research skills were expressed. It would have been valuable to the team for students to have been included in the institutional discussion that would allow them to weigh in on their perspective on this observation. A more substantive involvement by students has the potential for revealing possible blind spots and/or interventions that could address these concerns.

Faculty, staff, and students expressed clarity about the institution's purpose, conceptual foundations, and how the institution fulfills this purpose. A more systematic, collective, and explicit alignment of institutional, program, and course goals would aid in ensuring the

foundational purpose of the institution's educational endeavors are evident in students' experiences and in graduates' lives as they move beyond DSPT. Anecdotal evidence is valuable and important, yet institution-wide efforts in which everyone participates can be similarly valuable even in a small institution such as DSPT. It may seem simplistic, but a chart in which institutional goals, programmatic learning outcomes, and course learning outcomes would illustrate if alignment is fully formed and could be easily shared with faculty, students, and staff. At such a small institution, it may be easy to conclude that students are learning what the institution aims for them to learn, as there is so much to one-to-one and small group interaction. Yet there are assessment approaches that could be implemented that could provide more global insights on student experiences.

STANDARD II: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Function

The institution achieves its purposes and attains its educational objectives at the institutional and program level through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning and success. The institution demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively by evaluating valid and reliable evidence of learning and by supporting the success of every student.

Materials provided made explicit that DSPT's educational programs are appropriate and staffed sufficiently. The DSPT Student Handbook contains information regarding admission requirements, transfer of credits, credit hours, and the nature of graduate level study (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3). Program reviews and sample syllabi provided all state student learning outcomes (CFRs 2.3, 2.7) and the narrative portion of the self-study describes an inclusive and collaborative process among faculty to assess if learning outcomes are being achieved (CFRs 2.4, 2.5, 2.11). Through the self-study and onsite interviews, it was noted that students have an

active role in being aware of learning outcomes and their involvement not just in learning, but also in understanding the learning outcomes at every level and to seek out the necessary guidance and advisement to progress in their program of study. Given the concerns mentioned in the self-study and program reviews regarding entering students' academic preparation, data regarding graduation/retention, and specific mention of students' challenges in crafting and completing theses, greater student integration in considering the structure and approach of their education (as opposed to the "content" of the academic program) may be untapped sources of insight into addressing these myriad concerns. Student learning outcomes are indeed essential for faculty to guide their teaching; they are also essential for students to guide and shape their approach to their education.

Assessment as illustrated by the program reviews is clear, yet the self-study and program reviews note that student learning assessment (beyond exam/thesis completion) takes a more informal, anecdotal approach, in part because of the few students within the program.. This makes sense, yet the self-study notes, in multiple programs, an ongoing frustration with students' performance. For example, the MATH program review notes students' poor performance on an exam that was created in hopes of providing students a means beyond writing theses to demonstrate achievement of outcomes.

It would be beneficial if student learning outcomes (SLOs) were more explicitly shared with students by more faculty (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6). Simultaneously, it must be noted that students report appreciating the clarity of learning outcomes and goals not only in courses but also in their work with theses advisors. Student spoke in very positive terms regarding

understanding what is expected of them academically. Multiple times students described that they felt DSPT was focused on their success and concerned about ensuring their support.

Little information was provided addressing expectations for research, scholarship, and creative activities for faculty in the provided documentation. The DSPT website does include information about faculty areas of research (CFRs 2.8, 2.9). Students spoke of the enthusiasm and expertise of faculty that taught and advised them on theses, but in the AV faculty expressed a desire to have more opportunity to focus on research. Faculty did note that DSPT provides support for and recognition of faculty doing research.

Multiple documents provided show detailed demographic information of students, retention, and time to graduation (CFR 2.10). The self-study makes mention of several co-curricular activities such as lectures and colloquia, yet both the Institutional Report and the AV revealed that these activities could be more fully integrated into a holistic approach to learning, particularly when considered along with DSPT's substantial concerns about students' performance (CFRs 2.11, 2.13). Students expressed appreciation for the workshops held on doing research; they provided much needed instruction on the more mechanical skills of crafting a thesis and using secondary sources. Co-curricular activities are often high-impact practices that can be of equal importance to classroom experiences.

Concerns about students' successful crafting of a scope/topic for theses and timely completion of quality theses are discussed in the Institutional Report. As previously noted, there are several activities related to supporting students in this significant aspect of their educational experience. Faculty described a variety of specific efforts to address these areas of student struggle. Samples theses were requested after the OSR, yet it is not clear if the

provided theses illustrate the issues observed by faculty (CFRs 2.2, 2.2b, 2.5). Faculty may find a more systematic approach to addressing this concern helpful in ensuring that all students access the help needed to write theses.

STANDARD III: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through investments in human, physical, fiscal, technological, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high-quality environment for learning.

Given the materials provided, particularly in the program reviews, there is indeed evidence of faculty's commitment to DSPT's mission, and the students they work with (CFR 3.10). There are sufficient faculty members of appropriate qualifications (CFR 3.1) yet specific documentation regarding multiple aspects of faculty work do not appear included in materials nor were identified during the AV (CFRs 3.2, 3.3). The DSPT website has a "Core Doctoral Faculty Handbook" that provides such details but it's unclear exactly who among the faculty this refers to.

An area of interest for the team was students' access to library resources and instruction on how to use these resources (CFR 3.5). This was due in part to the concerns that students were struggling to appropriately access and use information sources for crafting thesis topics. The accreditation review made clear that students had access to UC Berkeley libraries and GTU libraries, and students elaborated that they were pleased with their access. Multiple students remarked that the library staff went above and beyond in assisting them in accessing

materials and that faculty were also adept in helping students. Students remarked that they found workshops and sessions focused on research skills particularly impactful on their thesis work. Faculty noted that students had to seek help for research. Given the enthusiastic response from students, consideration of a required and/or curricular-integrated component that focuses on developing students' skills in navigating the information landscape required for successful completion of their thesis could move DSPT towards ensuring success in this regard. In addition, this may be a helpful way of addressing observed areas of academic weakness.

STANDARD IV: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

The institution engages in sustained, evidence-based, and participatory self-reflection about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. The institution considers the changing environment of higher education in envisioning its future. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities to plan, and to improve quality and effectiveness.

Faculty described the various individuals, groups, and offices that review new curriculum and programs. For new elective courses, faculty describe having the freedom to propose and offer these new courses. Entirely new degree programs go through a formal process of review that starts at DSPT and concludes with a review by the Head of the Order in Rome (CFR 4.1).

In addition, program review is led by department heads and clearly involve faculty (CFR 4.3). The faculty are committed to teaching and learning and shared in detail the care and attention they give to their syllabi, teaching practices, and student progress and interest in shaping courses. They are reflective practitioners in this regard and well-positioned to work

together as a group to consider new student-centered pedagogies in order to fulfill learning goals and implement assessment approaches that are meaningful to them.

DSPT's "Desired Ends Map," which was mentioned many times as a valuable guide for the institution, shows an inclusive, institutional effort to reflect, plan, articulate priorities, and consider the school in the greater context of higher education and its faith tradition. It is clear that there is an appetite and willingness for collective effort and it could be applied to focused effort on considering approaches to teaching and learning to address concerns regarding student performance (CFR 4.6 and CFR 4.7).

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

The Institutional Report did not follow the recommended components of a WSCUC self-study, so its discussion of the "meaning, quality, and integrity" of DSPT's degrees is often more implicit than explicit. At the request of the accreditation team and WSCUC, the school did produce a "Crosswalk" chart that does provide guidance for readers looking for where the themes are addressed in the report. For the most part, the articulation of the "meaning, quality, and integrity" of DSPT's programs is focused on the broad institutional goals and principles, rather than on the distinctive features of each degree track.

Overarching Values from the Dominican Order. In many respects, this focus on broad goals and principles conveys one of DSPT's strengths—a strong allegiance to the overarching values of the Dominican Order. As a "principal center of studies of the Western Dominican Province," DSPT draws heavily on the Dominican Order's *Ratio Formationis* and *Ratio Studiorum*. These are core documents that shape the life and study of the Dominican brothers

(CFRs 1.1, 2.2). The first of these ratios (or “Plans”), the *Ratio Formationis*, “gives the principles for all Dominican formation,” spiritual life, service, and vocational duties. The second, the *Ratio Studiorium*, determines the specific program for organizing the intellectual life of the province, with the necessary guidelines for promoting the life of study of the brothers.” As the *Ratio Studiorium* states, “the tradition of the Order stresses the need of the Preachers ‘to cultivate the inclination of human beings toward the truth’ . . . The Order has as its patrimony a rich intellectual tradition that understands study as contemplative, synthetic, grounded in the real, and reliant upon reason informed by faith.” Within the Order, friars strive for “a profound unity between our study and the other elements of our life. Our study as Dominicans cannot be separated from the fraternal life that we share, from the prayer we offer in our liturgical celebrations or in the silence of our hearts, from the mission of preaching and care of those who have been entrusted to us by the Church” (*Ratio Studiorium Particularis*, Rome 2017, pp. 1-3).

For individuals pursuing the call to be Dominican brothers, the time of study begins with a “common one-year novitiate,” where brothers are introduced to Dominican life and live together at a local priory not far from the DSPT campus. Subsequent years, known as the Studentate, blend mentoring and guidance by the Church and study at DSPT. According to the RFS, the DSPT “program provides a thorough grounding in the Dominican intellectual tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas in the context of the contemporary ecumenical theological setting of the Graduate Theological Union. The rich heritage of holiness and theological genius bequeathed to the Order by Thomas Aquinas serves as the intellectual basis for engaging contemporary philosophical and theological issues.” During this time of study, Dominican brothers take

courses preparing them for their Master of Divinity studies, and many of the brothers complete a MATH degree before launching into their MDiv. These years of development and study include a “residency year” outside of the community when students engage in “full-time supervised ministry” and when the province has the opportunity “to observe the student friar and evaluate his vocation in a different environment” (CFR 1.1).

DSPT’s Dual Purpose. While DSPT is committed to developing friars for ministry in the Church, the institution claims a “dual purpose.” In addition to preparing friars, it provides “apostolic outreach” by educating the laity. It hopes to instill in both clerical and lay students a common set of virtues (known as “foundation habits”). Those are summarized in four major institutional learning goals: integrative thinking, intellectual humility, self-direction, and the ability to collaborate. In recent years, DSPT has made a more concerted effort to enroll more of the laity in its courses, and it continues to contemplate new programs and degrees aimed at lay students. This decision, to more deliberately serve the laity, has been recently affirmed by the Western Dominican Province. The accreditation team was impressed by the institution’s ability to blend clerical students and lay students into a common academic community and educational ethos (CFR 2.2b). Working within the Dominican Order’s overarching framework for study and service, DSPT has cultivated an academic and spiritual community that is characterized by intellectual curiosity, open inquiry, notable rigor, and deep concern and care for one another. It is noteworthy that DSPT is far more likely than any of the other institutions in the GTU to enroll students from other institutions in its classes than to send its own students elsewhere. It has clearly been one of the preferred options for students in the GTU who cross-register.

One of the reasons for this wide interest in DSPT courses is its rigorous endeavor to blend philosophy and theology—a hallmark of the scholastic and Thomastic heritage. That goal helps nurture a rich interdisciplinary spirit at the institution (CFR 1.2). DSPT is unique among its peer institutions in that it offers concurrent degrees in theology and philosophy, through which students can combine research in the two disciplines into one thesis. Notably, the integration of philosophy and theology is apparent not just at the program level, but also at the course level. The school does not simply give students an array of philosophy and theology courses from which they can choose; rather, professors are continually bringing readings from both disciplines into dialogue with one another within each course. Faculty were clearly engaged with this interdisciplinary task as one of the dimensions that gives the school its special character, even though the responsibility of integrating two disciplines required more work than normal for the scholars. The integration promotes conversations that sustain themselves outside of the class, as students are continually prompted and challenged to see connections between different lines and methods of inquiry.

By bringing the Dominican brothers and lay students into a common intellectual community, DSPT has also achieved a healthy balance of vocational discernment and education for its own sake. While the brothers have a clear vocational path, their journeys are enriched by conversations with those lay students who have chosen DSPT's courses primarily for intellectual and spiritual growth. Some of the lay students commented that they chose to attend DSPT because they wanted something more rigorous and challenging than the conventional "Bible studies" offered by churches, and the institution strongly encourages the pursuit of ideas and understanding as a valuable end in itself. The best of the students' theses demonstrated robust

and carefully argued exploration of scholarly questions and dilemmas. All of the students interviewed during the AV spoke with great appreciation for the rigor of their academic experience and the mentoring and care of their professors.

Areas for Improvement and Clarification. While impressed by the quality, coherence, and hospitable academic community at DSPT, the accreditation team did note some need to articulate and clarify the “meaning, quality, and integrity” of the DSPT degrees (CFR 1.1). In the report, and in other institutional documents, there are different ways of defining the “four” overarching principles of study. For instance, there are “four pillars” of Dominican life (prayer, study, community, and apostolic ministry), four institutional goals (integrative thinking, intellectual humility, self-direction, and the ability to collaborate), four areas of “Priestly Formation” (intellectual, human, spiritual and pastoral), and four “primary areas of formation for clerical candidates” (religious heritage, cultural context, personal and spiritual formation, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership). Such nuances in language may be easily understood by those within the Dominican order and culture, though they warrant some clarification and synthesizing for external audiences looking for a clear articulation of DSPT’s core values (CFRs 1.1, 1.2). DSPT has also yet to fully and clearly articulate the alignment of its curriculum with the recently revised Ratios, so that remains both a significant responsibility but also a rich opportunity to clarify its role as a “center of studies” for the province even as it articulates how Dominican values can shape the full academic community.

Among the more vibrant and captivating aspects of the Dominican vision is its emphasis on “holistic” education. DSPT expresses its interest in the “formation of persons” and not “just the education of minds.” As the report indicates, that vision calls for a vibrant co-curricular

experience (CFR 2.2). In multiple sessions with DSPT faculty and staff, the accreditation team noted that this co-curricular experience was understood primarily in terms of the hospitable, supportive social environment created at the institution. Conversations over meals, after class, and following lectures help nurture a community of trust, exploration, and inquiry. Shared worship experiences bring unity and promote common values and virtues. The campus of DSPT includes a large space for art exhibits, and a College of Fellows brings together professionals from the area to serve as mentors for students. But there are numerous other co-curricular opportunities (some of them already common experiences for DSPT students) that might be more fully integrated into the DSPT vision for an education that forms persons and not just minds. Those include activities commonly described as service learning, experiential learning, cross cultural study, and community engagement. Within higher education, there is a rich literature about such enterprises, including studies on effective ways of integrating these activities into one's pedagogy and the design of one's programs. The accreditation team encourages DSPT to give concerted attention to how these co-curricular endeavors might be developed and defined within the school's plans for the "formation of persons."

Such reflection on the intentionality and assessment of the co-curricular programs might even be helpful to DSPT as it appraises a couple of its current challenges—developing degree programs to attract lay students and addressing students' struggles with their theses (CFRs 2.10, 2.13). Consistent with the school's scholastic tradition, the curriculum stresses the development of a major thesis, often devoted to theological subtleties. A review of several theses indicated that the best students were capable of producing astute, well-argued manuscripts with substantial research. But given that many students, friars as well as laity,

struggle with the thesis and are not envisioning careers in scholarship, many of them might profit from capstone projects and tasks aligned with “holistic” learning and a wider range of vocational directions.

Although the overarching values of the Dominican Order and the strong community have provided some admirable unity and coherence for DSPT, the school’s ability to recruit lay students more aggressively may benefit significantly from a sharper articulation of the distinctions between its degree offerings. The narrative of the Institutional Report did not clearly describe the meaning and characteristics of its specific degree programs, so much of that had to be inferred from the analysis of recent program reviews. These reviews recount several practical and structural considerations that have grown out of recent assessments and deliberations over the curriculum, such as limiting admission to the MDiv degree to clerical candidates and adding an exam option (as compared to a thesis requirement) to the MATH. A more robust description of the distinctive characteristics and opportunities of each degree could enhance recruitment efforts among lay students. At a time when more and more students are asking how liberal arts programs lead to professional opportunities, DSPT might consider drawing a stronger picture for its current and potential lay students about how its specific degree programs enable graduates to cross multiple vocational thresholds (CFR 2.13).

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

There is a clear culture centered on learning and caring for each individual's learning and progress. Students and faculty spoke in detail about how this is practiced and how this is essential to their experiences as part of the DSPT community.

The Institutional Report indicates that DSPT has a strong foundation within the theology and philosophy of the Dominican Order. DSPT uses this foundation to achieve institutional goals described as "Deep Learning" and "Collaborative Leadership." This is described in the Institutional Report, yet additional documents included did not explicitly mention these goals in substantive ways. However, students were able to clearly share how they experience these goals in their education.

Faculty are clearly focused on students. Given the nature of DSPT, this focus includes an emphasis on students' development as whole persons. As such, in the Institutional Report and in conversations with faculty, the accreditation team found clear evidence of careful reflection on how to assist students in academic and non-academic ways. When considering solely the academic curriculum (programs and courses), faculty described how institutional learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, and course learning outcomes worked together to inform syllabi and course creation. Tools such as rubrics and consideration of other institutions' assessment practices were also noted by some faculty. While thoughtful reflection and individual efforts are useful towards meaningful assessment, encouraging a collective, shared approach to assessment may identify insights about student learning that are otherwise not visible. For example, there is a clear concern about students' writing and related academic skills. A collective approach to learning outcomes and assessments related to writing could

identify any common issues and aid in identifying effective interventions and supports (CFR 4.4).

In meetings and in documents, DSPT faculty and staff were able to describe in detail their concerns about achieving educational objectives and a desire to address them (CFR 4.3). In addition, there was evidence that this concern has resulted in response and action. For example, program reviews detailed a number of areas needing response in terms of students' academic achievement. In many cases, quality assurance and institutional learning occurred in an anecdotal and ad hoc fashion. Indeed, there is nothing inherently wrong with these approaches and cultural attitude, and they can indeed be considered appropriate given the size of the institution; however, it would benefit DSPT to identify more systemic, shared, and collective approaches. Even with few students, there are ways to engage in such efforts in a meaningful fashion and provide information that might otherwise be inaccessible. The accreditation team encourages DSPT to consider steps in this direction (CFR 4.4).

Through materials and interviews, DSPT faculty and administration expressed concerns about students' success at crafting and completing theses. These concerns were so significant they led to the creation of an exam option for MATH program. It is clear faculty spent much time considering offering this option and making clear this is not a 'lesser' means for completing the program. However, students' performances on the exams were not as strong as expected. Taken together, these concerns and actions illustrate clearly that DSPT faculty are not certain that students graduate having demonstrated appropriate mastery of their chosen program of study. This provides an exciting opportunity for DSPT faculty to take a deep dive into investigating why this may be. As previously mentioned, the students themselves may be a

source of ideas as to why this might be, particularly in a culture that clearly is focused on holistic student learning and development. Even if students are not involved, the concerns of faculty merit further investigation (CFRs 2.2, 2.2b, 2.5).

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

Student success is not specifically defined by DSPT in either the literature or the Institutional Report. However, in conversations with faculty and staff on the campus, it was easy to see that the faculty and staff have very appropriate yet distinct and individual understandings of the term “student success.” To those in administration, student success is defined and measured primarily by retention and graduation rates. Unfortunately, due to the unique opportunities of these programs, graduation rates and time to degree are fluid, and no goals or benchmarks are in place.

Faculty seem to define student success in different ways, depending on program and faculty experience. For example, Philosophy faculty tend to look at a student’s ability to use reason to define theological issues, or to track a graduate’s professional career or the rates of being admitted into doctoral programs. Theology professors may look to see a pastoral attitude of those students planning to join the clergy. Consistent means to measure student success is a requirement for accreditation and DSPT is encouraged to develop methods of measurement (CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 2.13).

A number of faculty and staff referred to the four student learning outcomes, (integrative thinking, intellectual humility, self-direction, ability to collaborate) as opportunities to define the measures of student success. This may be an area to begin the discussion to meet

the following recommendation: DSPT should synthesize its many diverse and compelling ways of describing its aspirations for students into a coherent vision for student success, with some means for measuring its effectiveness in promoting this success (CFRs 1.2, 2.7, 2.13, 4.1).

As student success is not clearly defined, it cannot be fully promoted (CFRs 2.3, 2.10-2.14). It seems clear that faculty and staff are clearly committed to the students and to their education. Due to the small sample size of the student population, disaggregating data by demographics is difficult. The students are either clerical (male, Catholic), or lay persons (male or female, Catholic or not). Typically the clergy, who have had a previous year of initiation into the Dominican Order, are in the MDiv program and seeking ordination into the priesthood. These students live together, share a common prayer and mealtime routine, and have a high rate of retention and graduation, albeit taking up to 7 or 8 years to graduate. MDiv graduates must complete coursework in the MAPH and MATH programs before beginning the MDiv program. The few students who leave this program are not necessarily leaving the academic institution, but rather have determined not to pursue ordination and a life in the priesthood.

Lay students are typically in the MA programs for Theology or Philosophy, which are by design two-year programs, or the concurrent MA program estimated to take 3-4 years to complete. As DSPT seeks to increase its diversity in gender, lay/clergy, and religions, disaggregating retention and graduation rates may provide opportunity for DSPT to evaluate and improve these rates amongst the different groups. This may also help in recruiting new students into these programs. The accreditation team recommends that DSPT needs to take more systematic approach to Institutional Research; it must develop methods for

disaggregating and publishing its student data to comply with WSCUC requirements (CFRs 1.2, 4.2).

The recently completed program reviews provide more detail into the ideas of student success than the DSPT Institutional Report. However, little attention seems to have been provided on assessment of students' learning or success in these reviews (CFRs 2.7, 4.1).

In the review of the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI) (see Appendix A, p. 49), DSPT indicates that for each program the findings are used for planning co-curricular activities. Outside of the social aspects and events indicated above, and the life of the church itself, there does not appear to be an active co-curricular program. While faculty and staff seem to embrace the concepts of a holistic education, and educating a community of scholars, there is room to evaluate and review the co-curricular education program. The team recommends that DSPT should more fully develop and define the co-curricular programs that contribute to students' holistic development (CFRs 1.4, 2.8, 2.11, 3.1, 4.3).

The MDiv program appears to have the highest retention and graduation rates. However, it is difficult to compare this program to the MA programs as the MDiv program is specifically designed for those seeking ordination into the priesthood. One lesson that was learned from this program is that MDiv students have a greater emphasis on community life than the lay students have. For this reason, more attention is being given to the social and community aspects for the lay students, such as Tuesday lunches, movie nights, guest speakers, and other opportunities designed to bring all students together outside of the classroom (CFRs 2.6, 2.10, 2.13).

F. Component 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review, Assessment, Use of Data and Evidence

Diversity. DSPT has included its Diversity Policy in both the Student Handbook and the Faculty Handbook (CFR 2.1). The Student Handbook interprets diversity not by numbers of certain groups but as a “focus on disciplined inquiry and effective leadership . . . a diverse educational environment which invites both faculty and students to examine all points of view so as to uncover the truth (https://www.dspt.edu/files/DSPT_Student_Handbook_F2018-2019.pdf, p. 13). The Faculty Handbook, provided in the Appendices of the Institutional Report, echoes the language provided in the Student Handbook. The Diversity Policy, as stated in the Faculty Handbook, is tied closely to the GTU Handbook for the Faculty.

DSPT has endeavored to include diversity in the student population. It would certainly be difficult for DSPT to strive for gender diversity for the MDiv program, given their mission to provide education for the clerical students of the WDP. The Institution Summary Report shows that of the students enrolled approximately 20% are women. Of these, the largest majority are white, non-Hispanic. The effort to increase scholarship opportunities for the lay students could provide an impetus to further diversify the student body. DSPT must develop a common set of measures of institutional effectiveness and for disaggregating and publishing its student data to comply with WSCUC requirements. DSPT should tie differences in outcomes achievement such as retention rates, graduation rates, and learning outcomes to differences in gender, ethnicity and race (CFRs 1.2, 4.2).

Assessment Infrastructure. DSPT advocates the value of learning outcomes, particularly in the description of the four pillars of Dominican formation, intellectual formation, spiritual formation, community formation and apostolic formation for the ministry of teaching and preaching. These four pillars are further explained through their institutional goals, pedagogical goal of deep learning, and vocational goal of collaborative leadership. Deep learning is further defined as integrative thinking, intellectual humility, and self-direction. The vocational goal is described as the ability to collaborate (CFR 2.3). These four pillars and the institutional goals are articulated by the faculty and are the guiding force in their curriculum. The programs have communicated these goals in their curriculum and these goals drive the courses.

It is not clear to what extent assessment tools and techniques have been devised to measure the students' learning of these goals in each course. While some faculty clearly see the need and benefit of student learning outcomes in their courses, other faculty see little need for assessment of learning outcomes. DSPT would do well to avail themselves of assessment tools which have been created by other like institutions. Seminars and workshops are also available to create a robust assessment infrastructure (CFR 2.4).

Program Review. Program reviews were included in the Institutional Report for the MAPH and the MATH. Although the program review for the MDiv program was not included in documents provided to the accreditation team, this program was reviewed in 2016-2017 (CFR 2.7). The report by an external reviewer of the MDiv Program was provided to the team. The conclusions drawn by the external reviewer mirror those of the current visiting team. Concerns

center around assessment, use of assessment tools, measureable learning outcomes, and identifying changes made to the program of study as a result of the assessments (CFR 2.6).

Quality-Assurance Processes. DSPT has set in place a model for syllabi. It was not clear to the accreditation team how or where the syllabi were reviewed for inclusion of core components. It appears that a manual or document for program reviews would also serve the institution (CFR 4.1). It was also not clear to the team to what extent DSPT uses consistent practices to define how new courses and program are developed and approved and how to end courses and programs which no longer serve the institution and its constituency (CFRs 2.7, 2.10).

Data is provided for DSPT by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) through three documents: "Peer Profile Report," "Entering Student Questionnaire, 2017-2018: Profile of Participants," and "Graduate Students Questionnaire 2018." These documents are comprehensive and provide valuable data. It is unclear to what extent these profiles are used in both short-term and long-term planning and budgeting at DSPT. The report also provides information about peer institutions, which is very helpful in determining the position of DSPT in relation to other institutions. While this information may be used at the administrative level, it was not clear to what extent the faculty were aware of this information. This data would be valuable as it would be incorporated into the program planning of the institution (CFR 4.1).

Comments were made by administration and several board members concerning the value of distance education; however, no distance learning or technology-mediated instruction currently takes place at DSPT.

Institutional Research. Now that the GTU has withdrawn many of its support services, DSPT will assume more responsibility to gather and publish data about its students and programs. Currently the Institutional Research (IR) function resides in the position of the Academic Dean/ALO. While it is understood that DSPT does not have the resources or staff to fully fund many positions, with new hires in Admissions and Communications the school has staff members who are much more data-driven than their predecessors. To date there is no centralized Institutional Research office, and the results of various assessments and studies are not always synthesized into more coherent reports that can be readily consulted for decision-making. The institution collects data about retention and graduation rates, but it should be certain that these data are always disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and degree programs. The accreditation team recommends that DSPT should become more systematic in the collection and publishing of its data, and it can consult with WSCUC about the appropriate ways and categories for disaggregating the data for public display (CFRs 1.2, 4.2). As noted in the “Desired Ends Map,” creative ideas are proposed. It is not clear whether these ideas come out of analyzed institutional research or whether they come from “desires” or interesting avenues to pursue (CFR 4.2).

Culture of Evidence and Improvement. In the past DSPT has relied on anecdotal evidence for improvement of both academic and non-academic programs. For a small institution, these stories of student and program success seemed to be sufficient. However, DSPT has been encouraged, through their reviews, both by WSCUC and ATS, to gather evidence, analyze this evidence, and make changes based on evidence. The faculty are working on a “research rubric” which focuses on skills the students will acquire during their time at DSPT (Institutional Report,

p. 38). Results from assessment of student learning are also bringing about changes to the curriculum. Realization that writing in the thesis was not up to the standard desired by the faculty brought about the examination option in addition to the thesis option. The faculty continue to evaluate the success of this “exam option” and are looking at ways to improve this option. For some of the faculty, reliance on evidence of teaching and learning comes easily; for others it is a shift from anecdotal evidence to designing ways to measure what students are learning (CFR 4.3).

Teaching and Learning. In an effort to improve the curriculum, DSPT is engaging with faculty from Zaytuna College of Berkeley to explore the feasibility of developing a cross-cultural learning program of common topics from their shared philosophical heritages. This would be done through a grant from the Wabash Center which endeavors to bring together the Muslim and Catholic dialectic traditions (Wabash Grant, p. 1). As stated in the grant proposal, “In the short term, the study project would bring together for the first time members from both faculties to share expertise and interest, building the foundation for future collaborations” (Wabash Grant, p. 1). Such collaborations will go a long way to improve the teaching expertise of the faculty and the learning environment for the students (CFR 4.4).

Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness. Assessment of student learning as well as assessment of Institutional Effectiveness at DSPT is in the nascent stage. Certainly the evaluation of their clerical students has been ongoing once they are placed in a parish and involving the employers of the lay students has been done to some degree. DSPT has not developed a comprehensive program of involving stakeholders in the assessment of the work of the institution (CFR 4.5).

Since the 2014 Special Visit, DSPT has been working at developing a comprehensive enrollment management plan. A new Recruitment Director was added to the staff, along with a student worker to input data and assist with inquiries. Along with these efforts, new recruitment materials have been developed and the website has been improved. The faculty has been involved in the recruitment work, particularly in showcasing the College of Fellows (a program of mentors from various professions). DSPT recognizes that it is “behind the curve” in comparison to peer institutions, particularly in the area of using social media for recruitment. They are aware of this problem and are working hard to catch up. DSPT recognizes the need for enlisting the help of experts in developing this plan.

The Desired Ends Map also prioritizes increased endowment. DSPT is enlisting the help of the two boards to develop a plan for scholarship endowment. Increased scholarships would assist lay students in meeting the financial obligations of living and studying in a very expensive area of the country. Linking the board members to the work of the institution will assist in evaluating the success of DSPT.

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

The long-term welfare of DSPT will depend upon important choices about institutional priorities, recruitment, and fiscal stability, so strategic planning and finances are central to the discussion of DSPT's sustainability.

Strategic Planning: Enhanced Planning Efforts. Several paragraphs in the Institutional Report describe the enhanced strategic planning efforts. Such endeavors took wings from a

Leadership Roundtable in March 2018, which involved faculty, staff, and members of the governing boards. Discussions at the Roundtable eventually led to the creation of a “Desired Ends Map.” DSPT expressed confidence that the Map provided sufficient guidance on work needed in the immediate and near future. Much of the language of the strategic plan, though, remains aspirational. The Map did not include estimates of needed resources. Expressing DSPT’s aspirations is certainly valuable in shaping a vision and conveying its message, but far more strategic work remains to craft objectives and measurements for pursuing the primary goals of the plan. As it builds on these emerging efforts in strategic planning, DSPT should link budgeting and planning, set metrics and milestones for evaluating progress, and determine how new programs will be chosen and evaluated (CFR 4.6).

While the Institutional Report does speak to many of the recommendations and concerns noted by previous reviews, there is significant strategic work ahead of the school, especially related to fundraising, recruitment, program development, and governance. In that respect, the conclusion of the report is notable for presenting an optimistic outlook on the future even as it lacks clarity about specific plans (CFR 4.6). During the AV, administrators and trustees did speculate about a range of possibilities for new or “alternative” programs, from a pontifical degree program to new certificate programs and even distance learning. The conclusion to the Institutional Report states that there is something exciting and energizing about asking “what is the new thing we will do.” Yet, since that question is the conclusion of a self-study, rather than part of its guiding framework, it is apparent that there is significant strategic planning, study, and prioritization that still await the college. Moving from “Desired

Ends” and speculative goals to concrete plans with appropriate investment and refinement should be among the leadership’s foremost responsibilities in the immediate future.

A Final Note on Strategic Planning. Throughout the AV, the accreditation team asked how some of the current controversies within and surrounding the Catholic Church have altered the landscape in which DSPT and the Western Dominican Province endeavor to recruit students (friars and lay students) and promote their vision for service and learning (CFR 4.7). On many occasions, the questions were evaded, and more than a few persons alluded to the long legacy of the Dominicans as assurance that the Order would endure through the current troubles. Several reflected how they, as individuals in their own work, might respond in positive and beneficial ways. Allusions to personal responsibility and the best of one’s tradition are laudable, though the team had some concerns that DSPT’s perspective could too readily be myopic and not fully responsive to the full scope of macro and micro challenges in the Church. Several of the faculty, though, spoke quite compellingly and even elegantly about specific aspects of the Dominican tradition—its ecumenical spirit, its lack of clericalism, and its high standards for accountability to one another—as positive messages that could be more boldly introduced into the public discourse about the DSPT future. Tapping into such a rhetorical understanding of the Dominican heritage could play a notable role in recruitment and in expressing DSPT’s unique calling at this moment in ecclesiastical history.

Financial Sustainability: Recent Challenges. The most pressing challenge facing DSPT in the last decade has been its financial sustainability. Recent declines in enrollment, along with a small endowment and modest fundraising efforts, have left the institution in a vulnerable position (CFR 3.4). There were some years (FY13 to FY15) when operating expenses outpaced

revenues. The school saw its student FTE fall from 71 in FY06 to 40 in FY16. A new Admissions director has introduced a broad range of new tactics, including greater emphasis on getting prospective students to campus for visit days. While those endeavors are sophisticated and promising, the overall enrollment has only bounced back modestly, reaching 46 for the current year. Reversing this steady enrollment decline and rebuilding the FTE remain among the school's major challenges in the coming decade.

Support from the Province. In the midst of these fiscal and recruitment challenges, though, the Western Dominican Province has substantially increased its support for the institution. First, in 2016 the province enlarged its annual contribution to the DSPT operational budget from \$180,000 to \$300,000, and then augmented it further in 2018 to \$400,000. Even more dramatically, the province designated \$5 million from an estate gift in the summer of 2018 to the institution's endowment, and the new endowment funds will be designated to support scholarships for lay students. Both endeavors place the institution in far more stable fiscal condition than when the college went through its last site visit in 2014. The enhanced funds clearly express the province's understanding that it must sustain DSPT as its "principal center of studies." Furthermore, the funding signals the wholehearted affirmation of the province for DSPT's quality and programs, and the province, through the Board of Corporate Members, recently took formal action to endorse DSPT's expanded vision to educate more lay students (CFR 3.9).

Budget Prudence and Fundraising. Along with this bolstered support from the province, DSPT has consistently pruned and adapted its operational budgets to live within its means. Faculty and staff openings have occasionally been left vacant to help cover shortfalls in tuition

revenue and/or the annual fund. The current CFO receives extensive praise from the school's auditor for the clarity and integrity of his reporting, and the BoT and the BCM lauded the leadership for communicating transparently about finances, opportunities, and challenges (CFRs 1.7, 3.4). Additionally, the school's fundraising endeavors have been augmented in the past decade. Since 2014 the annual fund and total gifts raised between \$400,000 and \$500,000 each year, more than a four-fold increase over 2003. In 2017 the school received its largest endowment gift ever (\$375,000), though that has now been superseded by the \$5 million gift in 2018.

Throughout the report DSPT emphasized the development of its endowment as vital for its future, and there is commendable progress in sharing information about donors between the two governing boards. But discussion of major gift cultivation and deferred giving, both typically vital to the growth of an endowment, remains relatively light in DSPT's planning (CFR 3.4).

Recruitment. The recent gifts have been a considerable boon to the school during this time of enrollment decline, though the long-term health of the institution will require increasing and stabilizing the enrollment. At present, the recruitment of students is starkly divided between the province and the leadership of the school. According to the Institutional Report, "recruitment for seminarians is done exclusively by dioceses and religious orders," and the province as a director of "vocation" who assumes principal responsibility for seeking out candidates for the priesthood. Therefore, according to the Institution's Report, the "DSPT Recruitment plan focuses exclusively on lay women and men." The split in duties enables many hands to share the load, but it also can mean that no single person or group fully owns the

responsibility for achieving the goals in FTE. In this respect, the BCM and BoT need to work quite intentionally with the president and the school's leadership on a comprehensive recruitment strategy (CFRs 3.9, 4.3).

There are several dimensions of the recruitment task that are worthy of attention. First, the discussion of recruitment and marketing strategies in the report remains primarily tactical rather than strategic. The staff has made a conscientious effort to enhance viewbooks and visit days, improve the websites and produce videos and electronic newsletters, though the institution recognizes that it "is behind the curve on executing a social and digital media campaign." On the strategic level, DSPT has devoted substantial energy to defining its core values and purposes through its "Why DSPT, Why Now" document. What is less evident is the institution's analysis of the current landscape of theological education and higher education in general (CFR 4.7). DSPT does acknowledge that "national trends in theological education" present them a "severe handicap" in recruitment, yet the Institutional Report and AV revealed only modest reflection on the state of the Dominican order, the pool of students interested in the priesthood, and the potential market for new degrees aimed at the laity.

Second, DSPT needs to enhance its commitment to financial aid for lay students (support for the clerical students is provided by the province). Admittedly, the Institutional Report was submitted before the receipt of the \$5 million-dollar gift. This major gift will make two full-tuition scholarships available to lay students, so more will be needed to bolster the FTE to the levels that DSPT hopes to achieve. This is particularly true since DSPT has made the deliberate goal of entrusting its financial future largely to the recruitment of lay students. DSPT admits that it has hit a "recruitment wall" due to the difficulty of competing for top students

against the better-endowed seminaries and universities. It hopes to define a “new demographic” of students, including more working adults. Finding financial resources to assist these students will take considerable effort by the leadership and the two governing boards.

H. Component 9: Conclusion: Reflections and Plans for Improvement

The OSR during fall 2018 had drawn attention to some concerns about DSPT’s future, most apparent in the school’s financial condition, enrollment struggles, and the still emerging process for setting goals and strategies. Therefore, the accreditation team was very pleased to find DSPT to be such a vibrant intellectual community and to be in better financial health than when it submitted its Institutional Report. The support of the WDP was especially clear, in both word and deed. Students at DSPT clearly benefit from a low student-faculty ratio since the province supports so many of the friars on the faculty (CFRs 2.1, 3.1). Professors convey a deep appreciation for one another and for their students. They are committed to refining their pedagogies and keeping the curriculum lively and relevant. They also have considerable freedom to craft their courses and pursue their ideas within the general frameworks provided by the Dominican Order (CFR 1.3). The community’s embrace of DSPT’s mission and Dominican heritage is notable and often inspirational. Students’ satisfaction with their DSPT experience seems to be consistently high. One lay student even described her time at DSPT as “a dream.”

Even with the recent \$5 million gift to support student scholarships, some crucial challenges remain. The steady decline of students appears to have been held in check in the last two years, but the school has not seen its enrollment return to previous levels.

Fundraising for the annual budget has improved over a decade ago but needs to be enhanced

for the institution to thrive (CFR 3.4). At present, housing costs for graduate students in the Berkeley vicinity provide a considerable impediment to matriculation, and the school needs substantially more financial aid to overcome its “recruitment wall” and to compete against better-endowed seminaries and universities. DSPT knows that it needs to reach a “new demographic” of students, and must work to identify them and discern the best strategies for marketing their programs to these prospective students. The faculty have a respectful attitude toward assessment and program review, even with some worthy caution about embracing the most reductive assessment techniques, but more work needs to be done to identify the qualitative methods that fit best with their liberal arts ethos (CFR 2.7). The governing boards will need to appraise their roles and the best ways of supporting the president and leadership in cultivating and implementing DSPT’s strategic plans (CFR 4.6).

Many of the tasks facing DSPT are similar to the challenges confronting virtually all small colleges and universities, as the landscape of higher education continues to be shaped and schools find their missions and financial models under increased duress (CFR 4.7). Yet DSPT has many attributes and qualities, from a sponsoring province to a unifying mission and dedicated and discerning faculty, that equip it to face these challenges and enable them to do meaningful work in the midst of them. DSPT can thrive, but it will need to move forward with candor and courage.

SECTION III – COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMENDATIONS

The accreditation team commends DSPT for:

1. earning the wholehearted affirmation of the Western Dominican Province and its Board of Corporate Members for its quality and programs. That affirmation is evident in a recent \$5 million dollar gift to the school's endowment, an increase in the annual contribution to the school's operational budget, and its enthusiastic support for its new expanded vision to educate more lay students.
2. cultivating an academic and spiritual community that is characterized by intellectual curiosity, open inquiry, notable rigor, and deep concern and care for one another—all within the Dominican Order's overarching framework for study and service.
3. maintaining a rich interdisciplinary spirit as one of its educational distinctives, consistently integrating theology and philosophy at the program level and the course level.
4. blending clerical students and lay students into a common academic community and educational ethos. Reflecting the values of the Salamanca process, DSPT has achieved a healthy balance of vocational discernment and education for its own sake.
5. navigating the withdrawal of shared support services formerly provided by the Graduate Theological Union, even as it has continued to welcome students from other theological institutions into its classes as an enrichment and diversification of its educational environment.
6. demonstrating considerable willingness to learn from their assessment endeavors and to make changes in course design and pedagogy even though the process of program review and the assessment of student learning is still nascent,

7. managing its resources prudently and communicating about its finances, its opportunities, and its challenges with transparency.
8. engaging its faculty, staff, and students, along with the Board of Trustees and Board of Corporate Members, in the self-study process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The accreditation team recommends that DSPT:

1. bolster its strategic planning process. It should build on its “Desired Ends Map” to link budgeting and planning, to set metrics and milestones for evaluating progress, and to determine how new programs will be chosen and evaluated (CFRs 1.2, 2.7, 2.14, 4.1).
2. synthesize its many diverse and compelling ways of describing its aspirations for students into a coherent vision for student success, with some means, when appropriate, for measuring its effectiveness in promoting this success (CFRs 1.2, 2.7, 2.13, 4.1).
3. develop more fully and define the co-curricular programs that contribute to students’ holistic development (CFRs 1.4, 2.8, 2.11, 3.1, 4.3).
4. ensure that the various roles and responsibilities of the two boards (Board of Trustees and Board of Corporate Members) are clear and that board members are fully engaged with strategic planning, institutional oversight, and fundraising. The Board of Trustees should also refine its protocol for evaluating the president and ensure that it is completed regularly (CFR 3.9).

5. take a more systematic approach to Institutional Research; DSPT must develop methods for disaggregating and publishing its student data to comply with WSCUC requirements (CFRs 1.2, 4.2).

6. become more systematic in the methods for program review and assessment and less anecdotal. The faculty are encouraged to study a range of best practices for qualitative assessment that reflect the ideals and the character of the liberal arts (CFRs 2.7, 3.3, 4.1).

APPENDICES:

A. Inventory of Educational Effectives Indicators (IEEI)

FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FORMS

OVERVIEW

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

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

Teams complete these four forms and add them as appendices to the team report. They are included here in order for the institution to provide the necessary information for the team. 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 the federal requirements referenced below, WSCUC 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 WSCUC 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.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (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? See DSPT Student Handbook , p. 26.
	Comments: At DSPT, the definition of a semester credit hour is based upon the definition formulated by the Department of Education (§600.2). For each credit hour

	<p>(semester unit) there is to be one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction, plus a <i>minimum</i> of two hours of outside student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks, or the equivalent amount of work done over a different period of time (as for example in a Summer Session or Intersession course).</p>
<p>Process(es)/ periodic review of credit hour</p>	<p>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)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO See "DSPT Syllabus Criteria"</p> <hr/> <p>If so, does the institution adhere to this procedure?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <hr/> <p>Comments: DPST policy requires all syllabi to be submitted to the office of the Academic Dean three weeks before the beginning of the semester. Courses are also approved for credit by other institutions of the GTU, and must adhere to all standards of the GTU.</p>
<p>Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet</p>	<p>Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO See "Course Syllabi and Course Information"</p> <hr/> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i></p>	<p>How many syllabi were reviewed? N/A</p> <hr/> <p>Type of courses reviewed: online hybrid</p> <hr/> <p>What degree level(s)? AA/AS BA/BS MA Doctoral</p> <hr/> <p>What discipline(s)?</p> <hr/> <p>Are students doing the amount of work per the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? YES NO</p> <hr/> <p>Comments:</p>

Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated) <i>Please review at least 1 - 2 from each degree level.</i>	How many syllabi were reviewed? N/A
	What kinds of courses?
	What degree level(s)? AA/AS BA/BS MA Doctoral
	What discipline(s)?
	Are students doing the amount of work per the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded? YES NO
	Comments:
Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)	How many programs were reviewed? 2
	What kinds of programs were reviewed? Face to face on campus programs.
	What degree level(s)? AA/AS BA/BS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MA Doctoral
	What discipline(s)? MA in Theology, MA in Philosophy
	Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of an acceptable length? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES NO MA programs are designed as two-year, 48 credit programs including thesis or exit examination.

2 - MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT REVIEW FORM

Under federal regulation §602.16(a)(1)(vii), WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s recruiting and admissions practices.

Material Reviewed	Questions and Comments: (Enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections of this table as appropriate.)
**Federal Requirements	Does the institution follow federal requirements on recruiting students? X YES NO
	Comments:

	<p>Comments: Technically, yes, although very few complaints are formal and follow this process.</p>
Records	<p>Does the institution maintain records of student complaints?</p> <p>XYES NO If so, where? At this time there were no complaints to be filed, but the administration indicates they will track and maintain any and all formal complaints.</p>
	<p>Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time?</p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO If so, please describe briefly:</p>
	<p>Comments: By our determination they have not had to deal with this issue.</p>

Under federal regulation*§602-16(1)(1)(ix) WSCUC is required to demonstrate that it monitors the institution’s student complaints policies, procedures, and records. (See also WSCUC Senior College and University Commission’s Complaints and Third Party Comment Policy.)

4 – TRANSFER CREDIT REVIEW FORM

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

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Enter findings and recommendations in the Comments sections of this table as appropriate.)
Transfer Credit Policy(s)	<p>Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for reviewing and receiving transfer credit?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES NO See Student Handbook, p. 38.</p>

<p>If so, is the policy publicly available?</p> <p>X YES NO</p> <p>If so, where?</p> <p>Student Handbook on website</p>
<p>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? X YES NO</p>
<p>Comments:</p> <p>In addition, there is a reciprocal agreement of courses taken from within the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley.</p>

*§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 WSCUC Senior College and University Commission's Transfer of Credit Policy.