



CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

**The University of San Francisco and the
WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC):
A Short History**

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Origins: 1950-1975

The relationship between USF and its regional accrediting agency began on a positive note. On November 2 and 3, 1950, the Western College Association (WCA), the forerunner of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), paid its first official visit to the University of San Francisco. A committee of six California educators read reports prepared by administrators, met with faculty and staff, and visited a sampling of classes. The dean of faculties at USF, Raymond Feely, S.J., was the key administrator who prepared for the WCA visit. Fr. Feely became USF's first academic vice president the next year. In April 1951, the secretary-treasurer of the WCA, Charles Fitts, wrote to USF President William Dunne, S.J., noting that USF had been approved for complete accreditation. The final report by the WCA stated that USF's programs were carefully planned, that faculty were actively involved in planning and curriculum development, and that the "religious commitment of the institution did not limit freedom of learning or scholarship and that there was considerable adaptation of the content of courses to the needs and problems of students in the modern world."¹ The WCA committee underscored its view that there was no interference with academic or scholarly freedom at USF—not an insignificant concern in American higher education in the early 1950s. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, through his senate subcommittee, was engaged in a witch hunt for communists in virtually all of the nation's institutions. Colleges and universities came under McCarthy's scrutiny, and "loyalty oaths" and investigations of individuals' political backgrounds were required at many schools, though not at USF.

Throughout the 1950s, USF was formally visited by WCA accreditation teams on a regular basis, and the institution saw its accreditation reaffirmed and extended for the maximum period of five-year intervals. On July 1, 1962, the WCA became the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the new accrediting body visited USF and reaffirmed USF's accreditation in 1966. In 1971, accreditation was again reaffirmed, and in 1974, USF was approved to offer a

program in Business Administration in Tokyo, the first of USF's fully accredited overseas programs.

Challenges: 1975-1997

During the early 1970s, the University of San Francisco, like many colleges and universities across the nation, faced a decline in the number of traditional undergraduate students as the last cohort of children born immediately after World War II moved through the nation's schools. The Vietnam War continued until 1973, and in its wake, the nation faced a huge war-related debt, recession, and runaway inflation. Colleges and universities were caught in a cycle of rising prices, national recession, and declining enrollments. Faculty began to unionize throughout the nation to protect their jobs, and in September of 1975, the full-time faculty at USF, excluding the law school, voted to authorize the USF Faculty Association (USFFA) to represent their interests in collective bargaining.²

USF was especially hard-hit by external forces during the early 1970s, and began to launch new programs designed to make up for declining enrollments in its traditional undergraduate programs. In so doing, the university began to face increasing scrutiny from WASC. In May 1975, an interim team visited USF to evaluate its new doctoral program in the School of Education, and a year later, WASC urged USF not to implement the proposed doctoral program until after a commission meeting, which decided to defer action on the new doctoral program. In 1976, WASC also raised concerns about academic programs for working adults that USF was beginning to offer through its Office of Continuing Education and the Institute for Professional Development (IPD), an external educational provider and marketing organization, started by John Sperling, who later founded the Apollo Group, the parent organization of the University of Phoenix. WASC deferred reaffirmation of accreditation pending a comprehensive evaluation in the fall of 1976, and requested a complete report by USF on each institutional program offered under its contract with IPD. In November 1976, there was a WASC interim visit to USF. Although accreditation was reaffirmed in 1977, WASC requested that USF submit a written report by January 1978, detailing regulation of the IPD programs, and requested that USF prepare a limited self-study emphasizing governance, contractual relations, fiscal conditions, and general education components of its programs for working adults. In February 1978, WASC approved the purchase by USF of the Lone Mountain College and its plans to care for the defunct college's records and the accommodation of some of its students. In May 1979, WASC scheduled a fact-finding visit to USF, by which time USF had discontinued the IPD programs, but WASC continued to raise concerns about the university's financial situation and fiscal planning.³

A WASC self-study was due in June 1980, followed by a visit to USF in the fall of 1980. In 1981, after the self-study and visit, WASC issued a warning because of its serious concerns regarding USF's financial situation and fiscal planning. The WASC visiting team noted that there had been no appreciable improvement in the financial condition since the time of the last WASC visit, deficits in current operations had continued, and the cumulative deficit had reached nearly \$6 million by the end of the 1980 fiscal year. The WASC visiting team reported:

“The University recognizes that it continues to face serious financial problems based on the inadequacy of internal financial management as well as the fluctuations of income due to uncertain student enrollments and that it must adopt financial management procedures which allow for the development of an adequate long-range academic and financial plan.”⁴

The WASC visiting team also noted that one of the major problems in establishing effective financial control was an inadequate financial reporting system that “collapsed completely in 1978-79.” In addition, enrollment projections and tuition income were regularly overestimated and the lack of accurate revenue reports made it impossible to take corrective action. The WASC team reported that the vice president for business and finance had just been replaced; a new accounting system had been installed; and a new financial management board, composed of the vice president for business and finance, the vice president for academic affairs, and the university planner, was charged with the responsibility to review all budget proposals and to recommend to the president budget revisions. Despite these changes, which “show promise,” the WASC visiting team concluded:

“The University needs to develop a planning process that relates more effectively fiscal concerns and academic planning. In particular, the role of departments needs to be reviewed and a means developed to allow them to become effective participants in university planning.” Further, the “University management and Board must assign high priority to the development of a long range financial forecast and the development of strategies to deal with the financial problems of the university. At this point in time we observe little in the way of long range and strategic planning.”⁵

In 1981, WASC also had concerns about the integrity of the bachelor’s degrees offered by the new USF College of Professional Studies, an outgrowth of the Office of Continuing Education and the IPD programs. Moreover, the 1981 WASC team observed the major change in the governance structure of USF as a result of the formation of the faculty union in 1975. This major change “has been the focus of intense discussion and development in succeeding years.”⁶ The WASC team reported:

“It has been an era marked by misunderstanding and readjustment as both faculty and administration sought to establish their rights and responsibilities. Serious issues remain unresolved; at the same time, a cautious optimism has developed that this new form of governance will generate a productive faculty-administration relationship. The character of the new collective bargaining relationship established by this Agreement is unusual in American higher education in the degree to which it resembles labor-management models commonly found in industry, as distinguished from ‘collegial models’ of shared governance found in other unionized campuses. The faculty, within the Agreement’s formal provisions, effectively plays no controlling role in the University’s management.”⁷

Chief among the challenges at USF when John Lo Schiavo S.J., became president in 1977 were indeed issues related to the formation of the faculty union two years earlier, and the institution’s financial situation, including a 1975–1976 fiscal year deficit of \$1.7 million and an endowment of only \$4.6 million. The financial accounting system was in such disarray that the new president found it impossible to obtain an accurate monthly statement of expenditures and revenue. Fr. Lo Schiavo hired Elwood “Woody” Hancock as the new vice president of business and finance to establish an accurate accounting system, a goal he achieved. Fr. Lo Schiavo also sought to raise money for the institution, and with the assistance of Al Alessandri, vice president for university relations, the university launched the REACH capital fund campaign. When the campaign ended in 1982, it had brought in \$26.8 million, making it the largest and most successful fundraising

effort in the history of the institution to that time. The returns from that campaign enabled USF to add a wing to Kendrick Hall and to purchase the Lone Mountain College property. Another capital campaign, which raised an additional \$18 million in the mid-1980s, underpinned the construction of the Koret Health and Recreation Center in 1989. Fr. Lo Schiavo's presidency was also marked by significant growth in the university's endowment, from \$4.6 million in May 1976 to \$38.7 million by May 1991, and by the elimination of the long-standing cumulative debt of the university. By the time Fr. Lo Schiavo left office in 1991, USF was on a solid financial base, a far cry from the institution's situation in 1976. Overall, the fiscal situation at USF significantly improved during Fr. Lo Schiavo's administration, new academic regulations were implemented by the College of Professional Studies, and in 1984 USF issued its interim self-study to WASC.⁸

The WASC visiting team considered the USF 1984 Interim Report "satisfactorily responsive" to the concerns raised in 1981. The team noted that the administration and the faculty association had just agreed on a memorandum of understanding that amended the original collective bargaining agreement, and that "hopefully, this agreement signals the start of a new relationship based on mutual trust and respect." On the issue of finances, the WASC team reported that the financial situation of USF had improved substantially since the 1980 WASC visit, a new financial accounting package had been purchased, and a "budgeting system appropriate to the environment of volatile student enrollments has been put in place." As a result of these improvements, WASC removed its 1981 warnings, and the next comprehensive visit was scheduled for December 1988. WASC made it clear, however, that despite these improvements in the financial condition of USF, "a serious deficit in the current unrestricted funds remains." USF "has yet to do meaningful long-range financial planning" and the "need remains for coordinated academic and financial planning."⁹

The 1980s was a challenging period in administration and faculty relations at USF, punctuated by breach of contract charges, law suits, grievances, a threatened strike, and difficult negotiations on a wide range of issues, including salaries, faculty conscientious objector status, layoff policies, and contract duration. When the WASC visiting team arrived in December of 1989, they immediately became aware of the negative atmosphere engulfing faculty and administration relations. Raymond Bacchetti, provost for planning at Stanford University and head of the WASC visiting team, commented that "generally there appears to be less faculty involvement in influential decision making, in peer review and tenure proceedings. It seems that the leadership of both groups (faculty association and administrators) are stuck in the image each has created for the other. It is, at best, a vexed situation." Bacchetti also noted that in certain areas of planning, "there seems to be little cumulative expertise developed over the years."¹⁰ The WASC team report outlined two major issues:

"We were forcibly struck during the visit by the amount of institutional time that goes into coping: coping with finances, coping with processes, people coping with each other. We believe that two overarching issues account for the bulk of this situation of poor return for good effect: (1) The insufficiency of planning, and thus of the coalescing and coherence enhancing qualities it brings to institutions that do it well and with vigor. (2) The poor state of relations between the faculty union and the administration."¹¹

In light of these issues, the WASC visiting team had two major recommendations:

1. That USF "develop a planning process that integrates academic planning with financial, enrollment, fundraising, and facilities planning; and that integrates school plans with University plans. Led by the

executive administration, the process should involve representative faculty, deans, officers in essential areas, and students and others as needed.”

2. That “the Administration and the Faculty Union develop mechanisms where none exists and enhance those that do exist for the involvement of faculty in such planning, governance, and management roles as are consistent with the current contract and move the parties toward more collegial working relationships.”¹²

After the 1988 visit by the WASC visiting team, WASC deferred reaffirmation of accreditation and issued a warning in 1989, citing the poor relationship between the administration and faculty, lack of faculty governance, and the dearth of faculty involvement in planning. The WASC letter to USF on March 7, 1989, noted that at USF:

“Essential planning processes are ineffective and not in keeping with expectations of Standards 2.B, 4.F, 8.C, and 9.B... Institutional planning is partial, sporadic, and uncoordinated. Faculty do not participate on a University-wide basis. With regard to the Committee on Budget and Planning, the team reported: ‘...without faculty participation, it is doubtful whether academic views are as carefully formulated, weighed, and influential as a sound planning process requires’.”¹³

To address some of the WASC concerns, Fr. Lo Schiavo created a new office of university planning and appointed Fay Bower, former dean of the School of Nursing and former interim vice president for academic affairs, to serve as coordinator for university planning. Bower reported directly to the president and was charged with working with the vice presidents, deans, directors, and select faculty members to “pull everything together and find out where everyone stands in all four divisions”... so “that there be much more involvement with all factions on campus.”¹⁴ In April 1991, the USF Board of Trustees approved a five-year strategic plan developed by a committee chaired by Bower and that included administrators and faculty members. Moreover, after John Clark, S.J., became academic vice president in 1989 (he was elevated to provost in 1992), relations between the USF faculty association and the administration greatly improved.

In May of 1991, USF and the USF Faculty Association ratified a new collective bargaining agreement, which addressed the concerns raised by both the university and the faculty union during the 1980s, and also paved the way for a positive special visit by WASC in October of 1991. The new collective bargaining agreement outlined new promotion and tenure criteria, a peer review process, a new workload distribution formula, new research standards, and protocols for joint collaboration on all governance matters. Most significantly for WASC, the faculty association and the administration also agreed to work together to strenuously meet all accreditation guidelines.

In February 1990, Fr. Lo Schiavo announced his retirement as president, though it would not be until June 1991 that his successor, John P. Schlegel, S.J., would assume the president’s office after a lengthy nationwide search. In the interim, and under Fr. Clark’s leadership, issues from the 1980s were successfully addressed during the special visit made by WASC in October 1991, the concerns from 1989 were remedied, the warning was removed, and accreditation was reaffirmed in March 1992. The WASC team observed that “where that there had been depression and disaffection, there is now enthusiasm and optimism.”¹⁵ The WASC team report applauded the changes at USF:

“Since the 1988 Visit there has been remarkable transformation of the relationships between the Administration and the Faculty Union, occasioned by an almost total change of top level administrators, adaptation of a collective bargaining agreement expressly providing for faculty participation in governance, and significant efforts of all segments of the University including the Union and its leadership, to respond to the WASC concerns.”¹⁶

After the favorable WASC report, Fr. Clark observed that:

“Widespread efforts of faculty and staff contributed to the changes that brought about the Commission’s commendations. WASC noted the dramatic change in university climate and culture. Certainly this transformation came about through the broad USF community working together to strengthen the institution in the many ways noted by the Commission. We now enter a new era, an era characterized by a newly invigorated spirit and a new sense of our own excellence.”¹⁷

Alan Heineman, professor of English and president of the faculty association, said of the WASC team report:

“All of the faculty are pleased. It’s great to be out from under a cloud.... A lot of faculty worked extremely hard, in a positive spirit, to address the issues raised. The underlying institutional loyalty of the faculty manifested itself. We are pleased that the trustees and administration moved to improve conditions mentioned by WASC that needed special attention.”¹⁸

In its letter of March 3, 1992, WASC wrote to the new USF president, Fr. John Schlegel:

“Perhaps the most remarkable changes have occurred in the relationship between the administration and the faculty union. The University also has installed a new leadership team, which the team reports to be sensitive to the particular ethos of the University, and well regarded within the University community. It also appears that new leadership is in place in the faculty union, and that a spirit of cooperation has begun to take hold.”¹⁹

In 1992, Fr. Schlegel and Fr. Clark continued to reorganize the academic planning and budgeting process at USF. Fr. Schlegel appointed Robert Waters to serve as coordinator of university planning, following the departure of Fay Bower from that position. Like Bower, Waters reported directly to the president, and he assumed a major role in university planning, including overseeing institutional planning priorities, preparing enrollment projections, evaluating strategic goals, preparing an executive information guide, and chairing meetings of the Planning and Budget Review Committee. In a letter to the vice presidents, deans, and directors on January 28, 1994, Waters stated:

“As we enter the second year of our consolidated planning and budget process, I hope that an increased effort will be made to establish a tighter link between department and division plans and budgets. The large amount of time spent developing plans will be meaningless if they are not tied to ‘realistic’ budgets and the ‘vision’ outlined in the University’s Mission Statement, Strategic Plan and Institutional Priorities. The Executive Planning Committee will use the plans developed as the foundation for the 1995-96 framework budget and the Planning and Budget Review Committee will use them as the basis for its budget review this year and the years ahead.”²⁰

During the 1990s, the budget office was still separate from academic affairs and reported to Bill Nutting, vice president for business and finance. The budget office prepared the operating budget for USF and gave its recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Changing Focus: 1997-2014

The next WASC team visit to USF was in the fall of 1997. The report in preparation for that visit was coordinated by Susan Prion, assistant to the provost, and was structured around USF's *Vision and Plan 2005*, which focused on six areas: USF's Jesuit and Catholic identity; the learning community; pluralism; the university community; the broader community; and human, physical, and financial resources. In March 1998, the WASC commission reaffirmed USF's accreditation, with a fifth-year visit scheduled in the fall of 2002 to address concerns regarding assessment of student learning outcomes in the General Education Curriculum (GEC), the integration of the College of Professional Studies (CPS) with the GEC, and other selected issues in CPS, including access to technology and learning resources, level of staff support, number of full-time faculty, and integration of faculty and students with the main campus in its off-campus regional programs. Significantly for later USF reorganization, the WASC letter of March 9, 1998, stated:

“The Commission recommends that the University examine how institutional planning, financial planning, and assessment can be integrated together along with the development of an effective system of data collection to support the process. In reading the planning document, it is not clear how the campus finance staff participated in the process. None of the action recommendations have costs assigned to them. Given the University's statement that ‘there is very little flexibility in the University's budget, and few resources to focus on new initiatives, including many of the goals of this Plan,’ effective decisions cannot be made unless there is a way to tie together financial realities with programmatic needs.”²¹

Significant organizational changes did indeed take place during Fr. Privett's presidency, from 2000 to 2014. William Nutting, vice president for business and finance, departed during the first months of Fr. Privett's administration and was replaced by Charles Cross. A new division of planning and budget, headed by Robert Niehoff, S.J., was created within the provost division as well. This new division included the reassigned budget office, managed by Michael Harrington; institutional research, directed by Alan Ziajka; sponsored projects, under Pamela Miller; and instructional technology services, supervised by Tracy Schroeder, the university's chief information officer. The divisions of academic affairs and university life were also combined. This division, under Provost and Academic Vice President Jim Wiser, included academic services, directed by Dean BJ Johnson; the Gleeson Library/Geschke Center, under Dean Tyrone Cannon; international relations, managed by Vice President Stanley Nel; and university life, administered by Vice President Margaret Higgins. The six deans of the USF schools and colleges continued to report to the provost. The other two major divisions at USF, during Fr. Privett's presidency, continued to be business and finance, under Vice President Charles Cross, and university advancement, directed by Vice President David Macmillan.

Robert Niehoff, S.J., as the new vice president for planning and budget and liaison officer to WASC, coordinated the university's response to the WASC fifth-year visit in November 2002. WASC issued a positive report about USF, though it noted in its letter of March 3, 2003:

“While recent initiatives have yielded significant progress toward developing a systematic planning process, it is understood that much work needs to be done. Institutional benefits will continue to evolve as systematic long-range planning becomes more fully a part of the institution's culture. Such planning will need to involve goal setting and integrate academic, facilities, and financial planning into a comprehensive model for charting the University's

future. Critical to this process will be systematic evaluation of institutional progress based on evidence gained through a solid program of assessment.”²²

Moreover, the WASC letter stated that there is a “need to extend the assessment of student learning across the University, to embed it within the culture of the institution, and to integrate assessment results into program planning and improvement.” WASC confirmed that the next reaccreditation proposal was due in May 2005, a capacity and preparatory visit was scheduled for the fall of 2007, and an educational effectiveness visit was scheduled for the fall of 2009. When Fr. Niehoff assumed the presidency of John Carroll University in 2005, Gerardo Marín, associate provost for academic affairs, became the liaison officer to WASC, and he coordinated the university’s preparation for the next WASC reports and visits. After Fr. Niehoff’s departure, Salvador Aceves became the vice provost for planning and budget, followed by Ana Karaman, and then Jeff Hamrick, all of whom reported to the provost, Jennifer Turpin, who assumed that office in 2010.

Under Marín’s leadership, and with the help of many USF faculty members and administrators, USF’s reaccreditation proposal of May 2005 outlined three themes from USF’s *Vision, Mission, and Values Statement* for the forthcoming WASC comprehensive review: (1) effectiveness in supporting academic excellence as an essential component of a learning community, (2) effectiveness in building a diverse learning community, and (3) effectiveness in creating a socially responsible learning community.²³ WASC accepted this theme-based proposal and was “particularly impressed” by the involvement of the campus community in the self-review, by the university’s commitment to “building a culture of evidence,” by the fact that student learning outcomes for most major programs were available online, that program reviews were systematically conducted for academic programs, and that the results of program reviews were considered by the campus leadership. WASC did, however, give the following suggestions for improvement:

1. Clarify what structures and processes were in place leading to a culture of evidence, including how data was used for decision-making, and what improvements have been made as a result.
2. Provide additional evidence how the mission statement was linked to learning outcomes in the core curriculum, the major, and in co-curriculum areas.
3. Continue efforts to have all academic programs develop learning outcomes, select assessment strategies, and demonstrate how assessment improved student learning.
4. Develop an assessment strategy for service-learning courses.²⁴

WASC scheduled the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team visit for fall 2007 and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team visit for fall 2009. Following the fall 2007 team visit, the action letter of February 2008 commended USF for its “thoughtful self-study,” which was “well aligned with the institution’s Vision, Mission, and Values Statement; was “congruent” with the Institutional Proposal; and approached the “task of self-reflection with integrity and transparency.” Since 2002, the WASC letter continued, USF has made “great strides in the processes of consultation with respect to decisions important to the University community.” WASC further noted that “USF’s release of significant documents for public viewing is laudable and helps the University hold itself accountable to public demands and expectations, as well as

those of its internal constituents.”²⁵ The WASC Commission letter of February 2008, however, highlighted three major areas for special attention before the scheduled visit of fall 2009:

1. The number and proportion of full-time faculty at USF, especially from underrepresented groups.
2. Weaknesses in student advisement, which WASC believed depressed student retention and hampered persistence to graduation.
3. An uneven record on assessment, and USF’s over-reliance on survey and other indirect data.²⁶

WASC proceeded with the educational effectiveness report due in July 2009, and the educational effectiveness review, scheduled for October 2009. In its letter of March 3, 2010, WASC commended USF for so “effectively continuing its mission of service and focusing on the physical, spiritual, social, and educational needs of those who are disadvantaged not only in the Bay Area, but internationally as well.” The team also found “extensive evidence of awareness of the university’s distinctive mission” among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the Board of Trustees. USF’s commitment has “helped create one of the most ethnically diverse student bodies in the country, even when compared to other Jesuit colleges and universities with a similar mission.” WASC also noted that USF addressed the three prior issues from 2008 with “transparency, openness, and aggressiveness,” yet “work remains to be done.” USF had, however, effectively managed its finances, and was commended for its seriousness in addressing educational effectiveness: “In almost every program and underlying course offering, learning outcomes have been developed or revised, appropriate assessment tools have been created, and results are being taken seriously to inform improvements.”²⁷ Nevertheless, further attention and development was needed in two areas:

1. USF needed to revise, complete, and document a three-year comprehensive assessment plan for all undergraduate and graduate programs, incorporating more direct evidence at the institutional, program, and course level.
2. USF should increase its number of full-time faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups.²⁸

In its March 2010 report, WASC reaffirmed USF’s accreditation for 9 years, but requested an interim report in November 2014 addressing the two above issues. In October 2014, USF filed the required interim report with the newly renamed WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), which issued a positive letter on March 7, 2015, reaffirming USF’s accreditation, and commending USF for “the very well written report which addressed in a comprehensive and thorough way the two issues being focused upon.” WSCUC noted that USF had instituted a new assessment model, including a decentralized and web-based reporting system, with assessment coordination placed in each of the schools as part of the responsibility of the associate deans. WSCUC further noted that data had become central to major decisions, the long-term established program review process has become even more important in the school’s assessment efforts, and a new culture of assessment was being developed. According to WSCUC, USF had made progress in academic and co-curricular program reviews, concurrent accreditation of professional programs, institutional learning outcomes, core curriculum assessment, normed indirect measures, mapping of NSSE, graduating student surveys,

professional exams, capstone projects/portfolios, student evaluation of teaching, and a redefined mission of the university assessment committee. WSCUC made it clear, however, that “at the time of USF’s next review in 2018, the institutional report will need to contain an update on further implementation of the new model.”²⁹

WSCUC also commended USF on how it had “documented enormous progress” with respect to an increase in the number of full-time faculty, including growth in the number of full-time faculty who were women, African American, Hispanic, of Asian. At the time of the offsite reviews and accreditation visit in 2018, however, WSCUC indicated that USF will be required to provide an “update on continuing progress made in both areas.”³⁰

Toward 2018

Paul J. Fitzgerald, S.J., became USF’s 28th president in 2014, and Donald Heller became the institution’s provost in 2016. Gerardo Marín retired in 2015, and was replaced by Shirley McGuire as USF’s senior vice provost for academic affairs and WSCUC accreditation liaison officer. Under her leadership, and with the assistance of a steering committee and various sub-committees composed of faculty members, staff, and administrators from throughout the university community, USF will be preparing for the submission of its institutional report (self-study) in the winter of 2017-2018, the offsite review in the spring of 2018, and the WSCUC team visit in the fall of 2018. USF will need to respond to four major WSCUC standards and 41 criteria for review contained in the 2013 WSCUC *Handbook of Accreditation*. Among those criteria, under Standards 3 and 4, are the following:

3.4 The institution is financially stable and has unqualified independent financial audits and resources sufficient to ensure long-term viability. Resource planning and development include realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and diversification of revenue sources. Resource planning is integrated with all other institutional planning. Resources are aligned with educational purposes and objectives.

4.3 Leadership at all levels, including faculty, staff, and administration, is committed to improvement based on the results of inquiry, evidence, and evaluation. Assessment of teaching, learning, and the campus environment—in support of academic and co-curricular objectives—is undertaken, used for improvement, and incorporated into institutional planning processes.

4.6 The institution periodically engages its multiple constituencies, including the governing board, faculty, staff, and others, in institutional reflection and planning processes that are based on the examination of data and evidence. These processes assess the institution’s strategic position, articulate priorities, examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions, and resources, and define the future direction of the institution.

4.7. Within the context of its mission and structural and financial realities, the institution considers changes that are currently taking place and are anticipated to take place within the institution and higher education environment as part of its planning, new program development, and resource allocation.³¹

The national political context for USF’s next reaffirmation of accreditation effort is complex and challenging. In April 2016, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) outlined changes in how it expects accreditors to do their jobs and how they will be considered for federal recognition, which is required for them to serve as gatekeepers for federal student aid. Colleges must be accredited by a federally recognized accreditor in order for their students to be eligible for such aid. In particular, the DOE indicated that accrediting agencies should emphasize standards that

consider how students are performing in areas such as graduation rates, retention rates, job placements, and student loan repayments depending on the type of college and its mission. The DOE will also ask about the above outcomes when it considers whether an accreditor is fulfilling its duty to the federal government. The department may ask an accrediting agency to explain why it uses different standards than does a similar agency, or why student outcomes at the colleges it accredits are lower than the outcomes at colleges overseen by similar accreditors.³²

In March 2015, members of the federal National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) discussed a set of proposals to overhaul the accreditation process and the way the committee assesses the accreditors. The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions released a similar set of proposals. The suggested actions include breaking down the geographic boundaries of the six regional accrediting agencies; allowing an expedited review for institutions that meet certain standards; stripping away the long list of accreditation requirements that do not directly relate to educational quality but that are mandated by federal law; having more gradations in accreditation status; and establishing new, nontraditional accreditation agencies. The Senate committee's proposal raises the possibility that accreditors would no longer act as "gatekeepers" for federal student aid, an idea strongly opposed by most accrediting agencies. In June 2016, NACIQI recommended denying recognition to the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, which oversees 245 for-profit educational companies, including the now-bankrupt Corinthian College Inc. NACIQI also criticized the ABA for its lack of attention to student achievement in the law schools it accredits.³³

DOE has also organized in one website all the current accreditation standards across the nation, setting forth the state of how to "engage" students in quality learning and the potential impact on students across many different metrics. The regional accreditors, in different ways, require attention to broad learning or general education, but only the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) provides any specificity on expected student capabilities, requiring; for example, that its members address "core competencies including, but not limited to, written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and critical thinking."³⁴

In February 2015, the Higher Learning Commission, the regional accreditation agency for the North Central Association, placed John Carroll University, a Jesuit School in Cleveland, "on Notice." The Commission's Board took the action because of concerns related to program quality, program review, assessing student learning, financial management, shared governance, strategic planning, and systematic improvement. The Board took this action based on findings from a comprehensive evaluation visit. If John Carroll University does not resolve the Board's concerns that led to the imposition of the Notice, and demonstrates that it is in compliance with the criteria for accreditation and core components, other action by the commission may be taken.³⁵ Ironically, the president of John Carroll, Robert Niehoff, S.J. was USF's former liaison officer to WASC, when he was USF's vice president for planning and budget. In June 2016, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools put four small colleges (including Spring Hill College, a Jesuit School in Mobile, Alabama), and one community college, on probation due to concerns over financial management.³⁶

Accrediting agencies across the country are facing increasing political pressure to demand higher standards of those schools that they are charged with accrediting. USF is entering the reaffirmation of accreditation process with WSCUC during an especially challenging time, which is not to say the USF has not faced demanding accreditors before. Although accreditation standards have changed significantly over the 66 years since USF was first accredited by the Western College Association, there are several threads woven into the USF accreditation tapestry stretching back to 1950. They are:

1. **The importance of faculty involvement in the shared governance of the university, in planning, and in preparing for a successful accreditation visit.** In 1950, faculty involvement in curriculum development and institutional planning was cited positively by the WCA accreditation team. During the 1980s, the relative absence of faculty involvement in planning, and in a host of other institutional matters, led to two warnings by WASC, which were only lifted when faculty and administration relations improved and faculty participated in shared governance. Today's WSCUC standards and criterion for review cite the importance of faculty involvement in establishing student learning outcomes, standards of performance, assessment activities, and program review. Moreover, under WSCUC standards, faculty must be sufficient in number, professionally qualified, and sufficiently diverse to achieve the institution's mission, to establish and oversee academic policies, ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic and co-curricular activities, and exercise effective academic leadership. Finally, faculty should be committed to institutional improvement based on the results of inquiry, evidence, and evaluation, and to the assessment of the institution's strategic position, core functions, resources, and future directions.
2. **The critical role of institutional planning that integrates academic and financial considerations, budgeting, enrollment management, and development efforts into a comprehensive evidence-based model that can chart the institution's future.** In 1950, WCA stated that USF's programs were carefully planned by administrators and faculty. In 1981, however, WASC warned USF that its fiscal planning was of great concern; and in 1988, WASC warned USF again that its institutional planning was "partial, sporadic, and uncoordinated." During the WASC visits during the 1990s, and during the visits since 2000, WASC teams reported on the progress made toward developing a systematic planning process, while noting that work still needed to be done. Today's WASC standards and criteria for review call for resource planning and development that include realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and diversification of revenue sources. Moreover, resource planning should be integrated with all institutional planning, and aligned with the university's mission. In addition, the institution's organizational structures and decision-making processes should be well defined, consistent with the mission, and support effective decision making. Finally, institutional planning should be based on inquiry, evidence, and evaluation; should periodically engages multiple constituencies, including the board of trustees, faculty, and staff to help define the institution's future; and should take into consideration anticipated changes within the institution and in the higher education environment.

3. The vital role played by assessment to ensure institution quality and effectiveness.

Although not part of the original WCA guidelines in 1950, assessment became a major part of the WASC lexicon and criteria for review beginning in 1988. In that year, WASC formally revised its guidelines and called on institutions to focus on assessment as a means of assuring institutional quality and effectiveness. Accordingly, in the fall of 1988, a small group of USF administrators and faculty began to develop recommendations for assessment in preparation for the 1988 WASC accreditation visit. In its report to WASC in support of the special visit in the fall of 1991, USF included a substantial chapter on the development of assessment at USF. As noted earlier, assessment has played a major role in all of the WASC visits since 1991. Today, assessment activities appear throughout WSCUC's criteria for review, including the assessment of student learning outcomes and standards of performance, the assessment of academic and co-curricular programs, and assessment processes throughout the university that involve the collecting of data, tracking learning results over time, using comparative data from external sources, and improving structures, services, processes, curricula, pedagogy, and the campus environment. Assessment should be incorporated into the overall planning process, and involve multiple stakeholders: faculty, administrators, students, alumni, board members, and employers.

For the past 66 years, USF has ultimately been successful in its accreditation efforts in the face of challenges associated with a particular period of institutional history, external political and economic challenges, and evolving accreditation standards. The threads of our accreditation history are woven into the present and foreshadow the future.

Notes

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
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