

Sofia University Institutional Report to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission

September 23, 2021

Sofia University

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President's Message

The preparation of this self-study for Sofia University's reaffirmation of WSCUC Accreditation has been a very useful, albeit challenging exercise, allowing the university community to reflect and reassert our vision, mission, and values. It has also enabled us to undertake an extensive engagement and renewal process involving the Board of Trustees, administration, staff, faculty, and students, seeking their contributions and input. It has prompted us to undertake a strategic review and update of our 2019 Strategic Plan as an engaging and collaborative exercise. It has allowed us to build a common consensus as to who we are and what we espouse, through the reaffirmation of Sofia's unique focus on Transpersonal Psychology and Humanistic Philosophy.

The Self-Study has provided an opportunity for us to respond to previous WASC concerns and demonstrate not only our wish to be fully compliant and show the actions we have taken to address these concerns, but also to use this process as the foundation for future planning. Unfortunately, we cannot report that all issues and concerns have been addressed and resolved, but we can report that we have become aware of where we are lacking and what actions are needed going forward. This process has provided us with an opportunity to move forward confidently with a WSCUC-inspired roadmap to guide our future direction. Issues raised in the Letters of Concern over the past six years were not adequately addressed in the past. There has been a great deal of turbulence and uncertainty in leadership, Board direction, and the nature of Sofia's ownership and academic direction that resulted in a certain level of disinvestment and frustration on the part of staff, faculty, and students. I am happy to report that this has now been replaced with a sense of optimism and reassurance that is being sensed by faculty, staff, and

students. We now see faculty and staff who left Sofia returning, as they sense a new regenerative, energized environment. There is excitement regarding the transparency of communication and information in regular “Campus Conversations,” and through our strategic plan refresh and reaffirmation of direction and underlying philosophy. In our self-study, we have addressed the previous commission recommendations with respect to:

- The Board of Trustees’ composition and functioning.
- The uncertainty created by successive leadership changes, and the certainty and stability of current leadership.
- The status of the 2019 Strategic Plan and our commitment to it as the foundation for determining our direction and as the basis of our academic and operational decisions.
- Assessment of student learning and how we use institutional research to collect data.
- An assessment of our enrollment management and projections for the future.
- Certainty of Finances, demonstration of our ability to becoming sustainable.

As the self-study demonstrates, these concerns have been or are in the process of being addressed. We see this as a continuous learning and operative process. We enjoy the strong commitment of our owner, not only her providing an operational Line of Credit reflecting her commitment to Sofia’s Strategic Planning in the face of two significant operating deficits in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. She has also increased her investment in Sofia converting nearly \$1.4M Lines of Credit with the US Department of Education into shareholder equity, thereby elevating Sofia’s Composite Score from minus to above plus 1.5. The owner has consolidated her ownership with and her determination to establish Beitou Holdings (Canada) Ltd. as sole owner. She has reinforced her commitment to Sofia’s transpersonal focus and expressed her strong

personal and academic endorsement of Maslow's Need Hierarchy as an overriding philosophy to guide Sofia's academic programming and operations. As well, the owner has supported access to her extensive college and university networks in China, Canada, and the UK.

Unlike some institutions, Sofia has succeeded and flourished during the COVID-19 pandemic by choosing to expand its academic strategic partners in China and provide access to our online programs. We have been able to offer innovative online work in the way of integrated learning internships to our Chinese students with Silicon Valley Tech companies. The university's experience with online education proved especially welcome as part of its COVID-19 social distancing measures. For the last two weeks of the winter 2020 quarter to the present, Sofia migrated all campus-based courses to virtual, synchronous meetings. The same was the case for the residential seminars and intensives: these weeklong programs for the MA in Counseling Psychology and for the MA and PhD in Transpersonal Psychology were conducted virtually.

We welcome your review and look forward to engaging with you on how we can improve. The feedback you provide and the suggestions that result from this review will be the basis for Sofia's strategic and operational renewal. We are committed to being fully compliant, and potentially, even exemplary in terms of academic and operational practices and programs.

Yours Sincerely,



Allan Cahoon PhD
President and CEO

Key Term Acronyms

BAP	Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Degree Completion
BSBA	Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Degree Completion
CAC	Curriculum and Assessment Committee
CFR	Criteria for Review
CITL	Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning
CLOs	Course Learning Outcomes
CPT	Curricular Practical Trainings
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FTEs	Full Time Equivalents
ILOs	Institutional Learning Outcomes
IR	Office of Institutional Research
LMS	Learning Management System
MACP	Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology
MATP	Master of Arts in Transpersonal Psychology
MATPO	Master of Arts in Transpersonal Psychology Overseas
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MBAO	Master of Business Administration Overseas (Chinese Language)
MSCS	Master of Science in Computer Science
PhD TP	Doctorate in Transpersonal Psychology
PLOs	Program Learning Outcomes
PsyD	Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
REC	The Research Ethics Committee
SA	Signature Assignment
SARA	State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements
SEM	Student Enrollment Management
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
SIS	Student Information System
SMEs	Subject Matter Experts
TIP	Transpersonal Integration Paper
VWL	Virtual Writing Lab

Component 1: Institutional Context

Sofia's History

Sofia University is a private, for-profit academic institution located in Palo Alto, California, offering both graduate and undergraduate degrees in transpersonal psychology, psychology, counseling, business administration, and computer science. Inspired by the theories of Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, William James, and Roberto Assagioli; Robert Frager and James Fadiman founded the California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in 1975 in response to the academic, psychological, and cultural zeitgeist of the late 1970s. In 1986, its name was changed to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. First granted candidacy by Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) in 1992, the Institute achieved initial accreditation in 1998. A Special Visit followed in 2000 as did two reviews: Capacity and Preparatory (2004) and Educational Effectiveness (2006). WASC accreditation was reaffirmed in 2007 for six years.

In 2012, the name was changed to Sofia University and, in 2014, was purchased by Liz Li (assuming the role of president) and a group of investors. A WSCUC comprehensive review followed in 2013–2014. At that time, the institution reported having 539 students with 60% on site and 40% off site, studying in a variety of graduate programs in psychology through residential, online, and blended modalities. In 2015, the institution attained for-profit status with an expanded mission that included undergraduate programs and a total of 526 students. During this period, the university community focused on developing programs, partnerships, and purpose, viewed by many as external to the traditional field of Transpersonal Psychology. The shifting focus created significant challenges as Sofia endured fiscal crises, identity confusion, staff and faculty resignations, campus unrest, enrollment decline, and unfavorable media coverage.

New ownership [Beitou Holdings (Canada) Ltd.] and leadership again followed in spring 2018. Beitou, led by president and chief executive officer (CEO) Ms. Miao Yang, and chief financial officer (CFO) Michael Zhu, maintain investments in education, property, and hotels in Canada, US, and the UK. A new campus was purchased in Costa Mesa, California, with branch campus approval in 2019. Simultaneously, some stability occurred with the hiring of President Barry Ryan and a new provost. Unfortunately, President Ryan departed in winter 2020 and, a decrease in enrollments resulted in further financial hardship that required Beitou to invest additional equity. Today, Beitou remains Sofia's majority shareholder with 67% of shares.

After President Ryan's departure, Dr. Allan Cahoon was appointed as president in spring 2020. Dr. Cahoon previously served as president and vice-chancellor of Royal Roads University (Canada), and vice president, research and international, at the University of Regina, where he was also appointed acting president. Since joining Sofia's administration, Dr. Cahoon (a) initiated a search for a permanent CFO (a first for Sofia), (b) affirmed the university's commitment to the Strategic Plan and developed a Strategic Plan Update, (c) organized the development of the FY2020–21 and FY2021–22 budgets and an accompanying three-year business plan, and (d) he led the search for a new provost, Dr. Carol Humphreys, who assumed the role on July 1, 2021. Dr. Cahoon's commitment to honoring Sofia's history, while also embracing mission-aligned growth opportunities, has brought much-needed stability to the university and a sense of hope and renewal to its dedicated community members.

Sofia Today: Mission, Purpose, Values, and Vision

Despite past challenges, Sofia University has remained committed to its founding principles of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, as both are concerned with seeking humanity's highest potential for the whole person (i.e., body, mind, soul, and spirit). As a

university, Sofia aspires, “to be a globally conscious leader in transformative education that will empower students with intellectual growth, ethics, and the development of emotional intelligence.” Guided by its mission, Sofia is a “passionate, dynamic learning community that fosters multiple ways of knowing. We are dedicated to academic excellence with a shared commitment to authenticity, inclusivity, cultural humility, ecological stewardship, and service to others. Our curricula focus in six areas of inquiry: the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and creative aspects of life.” The core values of Sofia, which are integrated across programs and within courses are:

- Service
- Stewardship
- Transformation
- Academic Excellence
- Cultural Humility
- Innovation
- Inspiration
- Emotional Awareness
- Commitment

Aligned with these values, Sofia is committed to serving the global community, building local community and civic engagement, and creating economic contributions and opportunities. In addition to providing a transformative education that has a positive impact in our students’ lives and communities, Sofia’s faculty and staff have contributed to the public good by providing tutoring for local children, diversity symposiums and panels, library author visits, and service partnerships with local businesses. Students and alumni at Sofia, who are mostly working professionals, are encouraged to become engaged in social advocacy efforts to combat racism, discrimination, and xenophobia in their local communities. As an example of this call for action, Sofia organized the well-attended Asian Experience Virtual panel in May 2021 that focused on issues of social justice and the Asian American Pacific Islander experience.

In their commitment to serving Sofia, the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students commit to learning about and serving its mission, vision, and core values. We find

purpose, as a community, in providing a diverse student body, both domestic and international, accompanied by the opportunity for a transpersonal, transformative learning experience—a new way of knowing and being, both personally and professionally (CFR 1.1).

Academic Programs and Students

Sofia offers nine-degree programs: two bachelor's completion degrees (BA in Psychology, BS in Business Administration); five master's degrees (MA in Counseling Psychology, MA in Transpersonal Psychology, MBA, MBAO-Chinese language, MS in Computer Science); and two doctorates (PhD in Transpersonal Psychology, PsyD in Clinical Psychology). Focused on flexibility and accessibility, various delivery modalities including distance, on-site, and hybrid are used.

The two undergraduate completion programs are currently marketed for distance education and enroll students in 100% online coursework. The Chinese-language version of the Master of Business Administration (MBAO) is also offered 100% online. The Master of Business Administration (MBA) and MS in Computer Science are campus-based programs, combining both face-to-face and online courses each quarter, which allows for international students located in the United States to enroll while providing some scheduling flexibility through a limited number of asynchronous courses. Three programs: the MA in Counseling Psychology and both the MA and PhD in Transpersonal Psychology—comply with the WSCUC definition of distance education and are designated “online + low-residency” by the university: students earn the bulk of their academic units through online coursework and attend face-to-face residencies once or twice a year. A fourth program, the PsyD, is offered as a 100% campus-based program. The PsyD, although not in teach out, is currently not accepting new applicants, as it is being reviewed for sustainability considering its lack of APA accreditation.

Academic Oversight

Since her hire in July 2021, Provost Humphreys has focused on improving WSCUC compliance, academic excellence, shared governance, and the alignment of policies and processes ([Attachment 1.01](#)). In addition to working on the reaffirmation of accreditation and innovative programs, the Office of Academic Affairs has further integrated the Global College's academic offerings into the university. Dr. Humphreys has initiated a Syllabi Project (standardize syllabi) and Workflow Project to create an internal calendar across departments. She meets monthly with the Provost's Council, Chairs, and Faculty Senate leadership to collaborate on academic issues ([Attachment 1.02](#)), providing opportunities for transparency and shared governance (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, 2.13). Dr. Humphreys is also prioritizing the building of bridges within and across departments by including multiple voices and reducing departmental silos.

Students and Student Success

With an average age of 38, many of Sofia's students arrive at the university with family and work obligations. Most have already achieved initial success in completing an earlier degree. Their diversity is not only reflected in age, but in race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality. The spring 2021 quarter had a total enrollment of 1,330; the MBAO China program had an enrollment of 1,127 and domestic enrollment was 203 ([Attachment 1.03](#)). These students, whether in China or the United States, are seeking growth through academic excellence.

Sofia's commitment to improving student learning and success has been reinvigorated through a review of current services in the student services area, the hire of a .5 Student Services Associate, renewed attention to graduation and retention rates, new student Canvas Trainings, creation of a Virtual Writing Lab, and newly developed student learning outcomes supported by enhanced use of data. Sofia has developed an ongoing cycle of program reviews, just completed a

full set of program reviews, and established a new Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, all in pursuit of better serving our diverse student body.

COVID-19 Response

As a small institution, Sofia has the nimbleness and creativity to respond to external circumstances. Even during the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns as mandated by the State of California shelter-in-place orders, Sofia successfully met its operational and instructional obligations. Administration, faculty, and staff worked remotely based on CDC requirements. The university experienced a slight increase in enrollments above projection for the spring 2021 quarter and anticipates steady-to-increased enrollments. While many institutions in the same situation chose to migrate campus courses entirely online, Sofia's commitment to transpersonal values led it to schedule video-conference sessions. Faculty assigned to teach campus-based courses were provided virtual classrooms. The weeklong seminars that kick-off the spring quarter for the Counseling and Transpersonal Psychology programs were conducted virtually, with faculty blending didactic lessons, creative explorations, and contemplative sessions in eight-hour days. Additionally, MACP adopted guidelines issued by the State of California Board of Behavioral Sciences that permit participation in telehealth counseling and videoconference supervision, thus allowing students/trainees in practicum and internship to meet the required hours. In fall 2021, four MBA and MSCS (Master of Science in Computer Science) classes will be offered face to face on both campuses to meet SEVIS requirements for international students and will follow all CDC protocols for student safety.

Response to Previous WSCUC Actions

In the past two years, Sofia has taken significant steps to better align with WSCUC's Core Commitments, Standards, and Criteria for Review. Sofia has committed to institutional integrity,

sustainability, and accountability through the development of new sound business practices, including a transparent and broadly consultative budgeting process, a three-year business plan, and the hiring of a full-time VP Administration/CFO. Sofia has also continued to learn from and respond to a variety of WSCUC concerns and recommendations.

Commission Letter 2015 to President Liz Li

In July 2015, a WSCUC reaffirmation of Sofia's accreditation occurred ([Attachment 1.04](#)).

At that time, the Commission noted: (a) the contribution to the university's stabilization that might result from its change from non-profit to for-profit; (b) the infusion of private capital by Sofia University, SPC; and (c) supported expanding academics beyond transpersonal psychology to include business and technology studies. The Commission commended leadership for assuming educational responsibilities, securing financial resources, and articulating a vision.

Though the Commission reaffirmed accreditation for seven years, it did issue a Notice of Concern and mandated a review of mission, student success, and strategic planning. It also scheduled an Offsite Review in fall 2021, an Accreditation Visit in spring 2022, a Mid-Cycle Review in 2018, and a Special Visit in fall 2016 to review progress. Sofia responded accordingly, and the Notice of Concern was removed in July 2019 after submission of a Self-Study Report January 2019 ([Attachment 1.05](#)) and a Special Visit (April 1–4, 2019).

Commission Letter 2017 to President Liz Li

In the March 2017 letter ([Attachment 1.06](#)), the Commission received the Special Visit Team Report, continued the Notice of Concern, and scheduled future reviews and visits through spring 2022. Commendations included: (a) notice of Sofia's collaboration; (b) hiring of key positions; (c) development of Faculty Senate, student's Liaison Group, and shared governance; (d) collaboration in development of the institution's strategic plan (CFRs 1.1, 4.5, 4.6); (e)

reorganization into a four-school structure; (f) continuation of the Institutional Planning and Communication Group; and (g) an improved culture of collaboration and trust (CFRs 3.10, 4.6).

However, the Commission identified areas for further development: (a) improved balance between academic excellence and operating and fiscal needs; (b) assurance that management considerations do not overshadow the academic mission (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, 2.13, 3.7); (c) administration's awareness of higher education best practices and application of those to the development of a strategic plan, including priorities that inform enrollment, operational, and fiscal plans, using data, evidence, and analysis (CFRs 2.10, 3.1, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6); and (d) an evidenced based, academically focused strategic plan with input from faculty, staff, administration, the Board of Trustees, and students. With the hire of President Ryan in 2018, Sofia immediately responded with work on a new strategic plan with stakeholder engagement. A completed version in spring 2019 ([Attachment 1.07](#)) addressed WSCUC's concerns and included a restated vision and mission. The collaborative process fostered communication with the community, building trust. It was an example of transparent exchanges from the leadership of the institution as well as among programs, departments, faculty, and staff (CFRs 4.5, 4.6).

Commission Letter 2019 to President Barry Ryan

The Commission's response in July 2019 ([Attachment 1.08](#)) included: (a) receipt of the special visit team report and their rebalancing of the mission to prioritize academics over profits, providing student support services and hire critical staff, employing a collaborative model of strategic planning to guide the future of Sofia; (b) removal of the Formal Notice of Concern; (c) continued action on the previously scheduled Offsite Review in fall 2021 and Accreditation Visit in spring 2022; and (e) the scheduling of an interim report due May 1, 2020, to address the status of the permanent CFO, enrollment management, progress toward financial sustainability,

implementation of the strategic plan, and updates on the Institutional Research (IR) function, especially focused on assessment of student learning.

The May 2019 Interim Report acknowledged Sofia's financial challenges, and that a budgeting, planning, operational and academic infrastructure had emerged that would assist in meeting identified challenges. Renewed emphasis had been placed on the use of data and support from IR; processes were underway for the development of a new data-based learning assessment protocol; a search was underway for a full time CFO; and work had improved on communications related to the Strategic Plan. The process of reviewing data and drafting the Interim Report included transparency and provided community members with awareness of the progress that had been made in previous years, and more importantly, with the confidence to continue their contributions to the university's maturation and sustainability.

The Commission commended Sofia for expeditiously resolving compliance issues with the US Department of Education and California Bureau for Private Post-secondary Education (BPPE), maintaining a commitment to the mission and vision, the Strategic Planning Committee's process, and recruiting qualified board members and using best board practices.

The Commission also required a response to the following issues: (a) Continue to develop the strategic plan to include explicit academic planning with milestones and outcomes; (b) cultivate data sources to identify specific measurable outcomes that support Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and demonstrate results to the community (CFRs 4.1, 4.4, 4.6); (c) provide evidence of academic excellence through assessment of student learning outcomes and program review, making the process consistent across the institution and codifying the process (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7); and (d) build and expand the role and capacity of IR in data-informed decision

making, thereby fostering an institutional culture where data is gathered and routinely analyzed for continuous improvement (CFRs 3.1, 3.7, 4.2). Since then, Sofia has developed the Strategic Plan Update ([Attachment 1.09](#)), continued to work closely with IR to develop data sources and data driven decision-making, increased transparency at community-wide meetings, improved assessment processes as will be viewed in the upcoming components.

Change of Ownership

In October 2018, Sofia submitted a request to WSCUC for approval of a Change in Ownership to Beitou Holdings. Sofia complied with requests for various documents related to the change and participated in a Special Visit in July 2019 (Special Visit Team Report May 2019, [Attachment 1.10](#)). The Commission deferred a decision on the matter at both its November 2019 and February 2020 meetings pending receipt of supplemental information. After the latter meeting, WSCUC issued a Commission Action Letter ([Attachment 1.11](#)) that included a notification of a warning for an alleged failure to timely disclose or seek advance approval of the transfer of Sofia University, SPC stock to Education First, LLC.

Sofia provided information to WSCUC about this transaction almost immediately after it occurred; it submitted a Request for Review of the WSCUC Warning based on procedural errors and a failure to support the decision with substantial evidence. The Structural Change Committee met on June 22, 2020, with institutional representatives and reviewed materials submitted by Sofia that clarified the set of transactions and addressed the impact of this set of transactions on institutional control, governance, and finances. The Commission received the Structural Change Committee recommendation and approved the proposed Change of Ownership WSCUC Letter Change of Ownership to Beitou ([Attachment 1.12](#)) in June 2020. The WSCUC letter also removed the warning and supported a Special Visit in fall 2020 to address board governance, leadership

transition, enrollment, and their impact on academics as requested in a February 26, 2020, Commission Action Letter.

Special Visit December 2020

Given the change of ownership, the Special Visit conducted December 3–4, 2020, included items relevant to both the Special Visit and to the Structural Change Post-Implementation Visit. The scope of the Special Visit to Sofia University on December 3–4, 2020, was summarized in a July 2020 letter ([Attachment 1.13](#)), noting that Sofia had made progress on Interim Report recommendations, issues listed in the request for the Special Visit, and Structural Change Post-Implementation areas of inquiry. The following eight foci were enumerated and organized and presented to the WSCUC team in a submission from Sofia on October 2020 ([Attachment 1.14](#)).

Part 1: Post Implementation / Structural Change: (a) Enrollment for fall 2020 with enrollment trends for two years; (b) improved status of Board of Trustees’ development and board operations, such as committee structure, regular meetings, minutes with decisions, self-assessment of board effectiveness and other best practices, and incorporation by the board and senior management of WSCUC communication and integrity policies; (c) financial update, including audit reviews provided with the Interim Report.

Part 2: Special Visit Interim Report: (d) Update on strategic plan implementation; (e) description of leadership transitions since the 2019 Special Visit; (f) status of IR and assessment of student learning; (g) analysis of academic offerings; and (h) status of state authorizations.

The Special Visit Final Report

After the Special Visit on December 3–4, 2020 ([Attachment 1.15](#)), the WSCUC team commended Sofia University for qualified and engaged new of Trustee members, their adoption of robust by-laws, policies, and procedures, and improved data-driven decision making. The team

also acknowledged the qualifications of the president and senior staff, given their abilities to improve university capacity, sustainability, and quality. Sofia's faculty members were equally acknowledged as being highly qualified, engaged, and involved in the assessment of student learning and continuous improvement. Finally, the team recognized the work that had been done to develop an innovative graduate program, in partnership with a preeminent Chinese university, with demonstrable and sustainable enrollment that could help Sofia grow and thrive.

Additionally, the team identified the following four recommendations to focus Sofia's ongoing and future efforts: (a) Align various strategic-planning initiatives and assure integration with its academic master planning, marketing and enrollment projects, and budgetary processes, which will require: review and refinement, clear ownership of the plan as a whole and in its parts, fully articulated and measurable goals, and demonstrable metrics that inform organizational decision making (CFR 3.7, 4.6); (b) ensure that curriculum and program development involves robust faculty oversight in the creation of learning outcomes that are appropriate to the discipline, degree level, and to the university's mission and institutional learning outcomes (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3; 2.4, 3.10, 4.5); (c) continue to develop robust student learning assessment and program review processes that connect course learning outcomes (CLOs), program learning outcomes (PLOs), and institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) in an observable and measurable way and that ensures faculty incorporates the appropriate learning outcomes into curriculum to use for assessment and improvement of student learning (CFRs 2.4, 2.7, 4.3, 4.4); and (d) develop an appropriate feedback mechanism that ensures assessment information is both received by and acted upon by appropriate academic leadership to foster continual improvement in educational outcomes (CFRs 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5).

Sofia University Response to the Special Team Report

Sofia has utilized the above recommendations to focus ongoing and future efforts addressed in upcoming chapters of this document. Specifically, the creation of a new Strategic Plan Update ([Attachment 1.09](#)), with fully articulated and measurable goals and demonstrable metrics, was a top priority. Consultation and feedback from across the institution was integral to the formation of the Update, which is a testament to the progress achieved to date relative to the original Strategic Plan from 2019. This progress includes a fully established and data-informed cycle of program reviews ([Attachment 1.16](#)) a well-designed process for learning outcomes assessment with newly defined PLOs that are aligned with ILOs and CLOs ([Attachment 1.17](#)) a fulsome and transparent budgetary process ([Attachment 1.18](#)). Steps are in place to ensure a close-looped procedure, wherein feedback and results of reviews and assessments are vetted through designated channels followed up by appropriate action and decision-making.

Financial Sustainability

Sofia has made significant improvements in its financial status after several challenging years. While not yet at a break-even status, the 2020–2021 fiscal year ended with a net income of -\$154,469, an improvement from the -\$494,248 projection, and a vast improvement from the extremely disappointing net income in 2019–2020 of -\$3,226,639. This improvement can be attributed, in part, to efforts to reduce expenditures and increased international enrollments in the MBAO (Chinese) program. The three-year operational plan indicates favorable balances in FY 021–22 and FY 2022–23. In addition, Beitou Holdings has committed a Line of Credit that may be drawn upon yearly. Further details on financial matters are described in Component 7.

Preparation for the Accreditation Review and Report

Participation from multiple members has been integral to Sofia's self-study report. A Self-Study/Accreditation Planning Team was established in fall 2020 consisting of faculty, staff, and leadership with provost and president oversight. After several meetings, chapter drivers and support personnel were tasked with preparing chapter drafts. With the provost's resignation in January 2021, an external consultant was hired. Several drafts included coordination with the Office of Institutional Research (IR), Student Services, HR, Finance, and Marketing. A former WSCUC Vice President, Dr. Richard Osborn, was contracted for feedback and guidance. The Board of Trustees reviewed and approved a draft at its June 2021 meeting. The draft was shared with Provost's Council and Faculty Senate. During the 2021 Board of Trustees' meetings, their agenda included updates on the WSCUC self-review process, an Institutional Report draft, and program review. The WSCUC liaison, Mark Goor, visited in fall 2020 and remained in communication. The new Provost, Dr. Carol Humphreys, also added to and edited the report. Feedback from Sofia's consultant, a former WSCUC VP, and Board of Trustee members was integrated into the document. A final draft was approved at the September Board of Trustees meeting.

Overall, there has been a tremendous collaborative effort across the institution in the preparation of this self-study. Sofia has remained mindful of the feedback from WSCUC since its previous accreditation in 2015, and particularly in the last two-year period, has made significant strides in addressing recommendations and concerns. We have faced adversity and learned from our missteps and this process. We remain optimistic that the self-study will reveal that Sofia has turned a corner and is open to guidance as to how we can improve and sustainably grow.

Component 2: Compliance with WASC Standards and Federal Requirements

A. Required Documents

Compliance with WSCUC Standards and Federal Requirements Worksheet

B. Procedure and Practice

The process of data collection for the WSCUC Self-Study and the Federal Compliance Worksheet began under Provost Stuart Sigman's leadership in 2020 with engagement across departments through committee work. After Dr. Sigman's departure, a consultant was hired in 2021 to continue the process and campus constituencies examined Sofia's CFR alignment. Results from this work were presented at individual and team meetings and helped to guide the Self-Study, department improvements, and early drafts of the institutional report.

The new Provost and ALO, Carol Humphreys, was then hired in July 2021, and assumed the responsibilities associated with the WSCUC self-study, Institutional Report, Inventory of Educational Effectiveness, and Federal Compliance Worksheet. She worked with the Associate Vice President of Academic Innovation, Director of Student Services, Global College, CITL Director, human resources, IR, librarian, registrar, chairs, staff, and faculty as they completed the Worksheet, confirmed effective assessment processes for students and programs, considered CFRS across departments, collected exhibits, and discussed strengths and opportunities.

Throughout, participants acknowledged challenges in financial insecurity and turnover in ownership, administration, staff, and faculty. However, they also noted that since the arrival of the new president and CFO, improvement in transparency, integrity, inclusion, and consistency has occurred as evidenced at Campus Conversations, Town Halls, and staff and faculty meetings. The goal of this collaborative dialogical process was not only to educate stakeholders of

compliance requirements and align CFRS with Sofia activities but, to engage the Sofia community in the day-to-day implementation of the WSCUC standards and guidelines.

C. Areas of Strengths and Opportunities

Standard 1. Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

Though the university and its name has changed over the years, Sofia's mission, values, and purpose remain focused. Even as the university has expanded its program offerings beyond transpersonal psychology, it is strengthening its ability to articulate how that translates into other programs, disciplines, and communities. Community members have commended Sofia University for its identity as a mission-driven institution. Therefore, it is not surprising that one area of strength identified in the Self-Review, under Standard 1, according to respondents, remains its ability to define and execute its institutional purpose (CFR 1.1). In legacy and clinical programs, Sofia has been able to articulate and apply it to making positive change in individuals and their communities. Nonetheless, during the review and in cross program discussions, it also became clear that Sofia can improve at articulating how transpersonal theories, tenets, and practices can translate to newer Sofia programs that are not in psychology (business and computer science) and resonate better with international students and their communities (CFR 1.4).

Another highlighted strength was Sofia's commitment to the meaning and quality of its degrees, which remains present in university discussions, administrative decisions, and course content. The creation of international partnerships further demonstrates Sofia's applied approach to global engagement and the public good. Sofia's philosophy is shared with students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the Board of Trustees (CFR1.2). Academic and institutional integrity (CFRs 1.6, 1.7) are essential characteristics of a transpersonal education and institution. Community members believe that Sofia's leadership, policies, procedures, and academic courses

are transparent and demonstrate integrity (CFR 1.7). Many stakeholders have noticed that with new leadership has come an improved relationship with WSCUC, built on honest and transparent communication and a commitment to commission policies and procedures (CFR 1.8).

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

A consistent strength of Sofia's as shared by faculty, students, and staff alike is the rich course content and instructors' abilities to engage students in a transformative education, one that includes active learning, genuine reflection, and application to their careers (CFR 2.5). They also assert that courses, faculty, workshops, and seminars are student-centered, offer experiential opportunities to practice new skills and ways of knowing, and challenge participants to meet high standards through their transformative education (CFR 2.7).

Furthermore, this process elucidated the collaborative and transparent process of aligning PLOs and ILOs across programs ([Attachment 1.17](#)) resulting in increased faculty agency by leading and owning the establishment of standards of performance (CFR 2.3-2.4). Once an area of opportunity, this is now developing into a strength due to university-wide (faculty) buy-in.

Student Services was also identified as a strength, with many well-established services (CFR 2.13) and a dedicated dean. Nonetheless, we recognized the need to provide more support and an additional .5 was hired (CFR 3.1). The new student services associate assists the dean in current operations and will support the career center, due to open December 2021. The provost has also requested improved access to services for our international students and Chinese language programs. The librarian, associate vice president of academic innovation, and dean of student services have since met with Global College to expand access and improve relevance.

This process has further highlighted the need for consistent faculty-led assessment and program review and the collection and use of data to inform decision making. Sofia's willingness to engage in a transparent and thorough review process of all programs ([Attachment 2.35](#)) in summer 2021 says a great deal about the commitment of the faculty and staff. Not only did it add additional data to the systemic process ([Attachment 1.16](#)), already in place but it also identified areas for improvement that might not have been recognized until the next cycle. The collective thought was that in completing a review of all programs, it would inform and engage numerous campus constituencies, add to the Self-study process, and provide baseline data for new leadership to make program prioritization recommendations (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 4.5, 4.6). Furthermore, the fall 2021 Syllabi Project will improve and standardize syllabi (CFR 2.3).

The availability, dissemination, and use of data were also identified as opportunities for growth (CFRs 2.7, 4.2). Due to both the new administration's foci and the self-study, Sofia recognized the need for support in data collection and analysis efforts (CFR 4.1) and a part-time IR position was created in spring 2021, bringing the total FTE to 1.5. IR has provided quarterly dashboards on key performance indicators, external agencies (e.g., BPPE, U.S. Department of Education), quantitative information about students, programs, employees, finances, learning outcomes (CFR 2.7), program reviews and related dashboards, and licensing exams and placement (CFR 2.7). However, Sofia recognizes the need to improve data collection and increase its availability, dissemination, understanding, and use of the data in making decisions, particularly at the program level. Therefore, the provost will be providing education on data sets in Provost's Council and in Chairs' Council to create a stronger process of data-driven decision-making.

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

Stakeholders recognized Sofia's renewed commitment to supporting faculty development, teaching, and scholarship with development of the new CITL (CFR 3.3, 4.4) as a strength. The Center has, thus far, offered seminars on best practices, developed diversity panels, sought CE provider status, planned conferences, and is co-leading syllabi and workflow projects.

This process also highlighted Sofia's lack of an annual performance review process (CFR 3.2) as noted in Standard 3. Therefore, with new executive leadership (CFR 3.8), Sofia implemented a process of performance review in spring 2021 for core faculty, staff, and administrators which will become the basis for future performance goals ([Attachment 2.36](#)).

After periods of financial instability and several changes in ownership, leadership, and the Board of Trustees, it is not surprising that stakeholders continue to view Sofia's financial sustainability as an opportunity for improvement (CFR 3.4). However, they also recognize that the hiring of a full-time CFO and Board members with education backgrounds have increased stability as has the president's strategic plan update ([Attachment 1.09](#)). In addition, the budget has markedly improved (Appendix 1-B, [Attachment 1.18](#)). With increased enrollment and cost control, Sofia projections are much improved. Indeed, community members expressed hope as stability increases with strong financial oversight (see Component 7).

Shared governance (CFR 3.10) also remains an opportunity for improvement. Although there is a dedicated Faculty Senate (FS), its organization is young in development. The provost has implemented once a month meeting with FS chairs to support their organizational, policy,

and procedural development. Sofia remains dedicated to transparency and shared governance as evident in Town Halls, Campus Conversations, Provost's Councils, and Chairs' Council meetings.

Standard 4. Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

Sofia's IR office provides data that supports student census, fact books, program reviews, student experience, surveys, accreditation support, reports, IPEDS, and other mandated reports (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.6). However, as mentioned under Standard 2, consistent data driven decision making continues to be an area for improvement. Although the new administrative team uses data, its previous use in decisions had not consistently occurred (CFR 4.3). The new administration is working to change the culture and is providing training in analysis of the data and is incorporating additional data presentations at university-wide meetings and Town Halls.

Over the past two years, Sofia's stakeholders have completed significant work in CFR 4.1. The systematic program review process, summer 2021 all-program review, ILO project, dashboard project, foci on student assessment, and the current syllabi project reflects Sofia's commitment to deliberate processes of inquiry, reflection, assessment, alignment, and review. Despite being a small university, wide collaboration included students, faculty, staff, administration, external reviewers, IT, the instructional designer, CITL staff, Faculty Senate, faculty committees, and consultants (CFR 4.3, 4.4, 4.5). Nonetheless, regular, and consistent faculty-driven assessment and program review remain an opportunity as we grow. The provost will continue to develop, inform, and support a new culture of assessment at Sofia University.

As mentioned in Component 1, COVID-19 challenged Sofia to increase flexibility and online faculty engagement (CFR 4.7). Most stakeholders recognized this as a strength and pointed

out that we pivoted quickly, moved seminars online, and offered synchronous classes to our international SEVIS students per their requirements. However, it also challenged us to look at our policies concerning online engagement, course syllabi, and IT capabilities. We see these as areas of growth and have already explored other software providers, created a task force to address a new SIS, required CANVAS trainings of all faculty, and initiated the syllabi project.

Sofia's improvements over the past two years are due to a shared commitment to its mission, values and vision, new ownership, and leadership, updated strategic planning, the CITL, rich content, program review, ILO and PLO alignment, caring student services, and transparency. With a renewed relationship with WSCUC, annual performance evaluations, and recent program reviews, Sofia has further demonstrated its dedication to continuous improvement. Areas of opportunities include financial stability, consistent assessment and program review, integration of the Sofia mission into all courses and across cultures, growth of the Faculty Senate and its role in shared governance, and a consistent use of data in decision making at the program level. Sofia University remains committed to improvement in these areas of opportunities.

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

The Sofia Experience (Meaning)

Sofia University has a history of providing a meaningful and transformative education. This component addresses the unique experiences, learning outcomes, and important aspects of an education at Sofia University, and the current institutional processes to address academic integrity, quality, and the meaning of a Sofia experience.

The University's Vision and Mission, as defined in its ([Attachment 1.09](#)), speak to providing a transformative education that empowers students with intellectual growth, ethics, and the development of emotional intelligence. Infused throughout its programs is a focus on a transpersonal experience, defined as the "study of the full range of human experience, which includes the pain of trauma and dysfunction on the one hand and heights of creativity, intuition, and peak functioning on the other" ([Attachment 3.01](#)). Transpersonal psychology also pulls from global wisdom traditions and is inclusive of expanded ways of knowing ([Attachment 3.02](#)). This approach to learning is a hallmark of Sofia's rich educational experience, whose programs share this meaning during the conception, design, revision, and assessment processes that support quality and integrity. Transformative learning is inherent in transpersonal psychology; Sofia's programs, curriculum, and pedagogy require that students engage in self-transformation and apply it to their chosen discipline. These experiences prepare students to make a difference in their local and global communities and workplace during and upon graduation (CFR 1.4).

Program Snapshots: Meaning and Professional Application

Sofia's vision and mission statements guide program development and inform learning objectives. Program specific educational objectives include theories and practices in transpersonal psychology along with objectives related to self-discovery, self-cultivation, and

transformation. Students apply transpersonal learning to professional areas or find meaningful ways to contribute to society and the planet. The transpersonal programs and learning outcomes are made public in the academic catalog, on the website, and in course syllabi. The following program snapshots highlight the ways in which transpersonal psychology is infused in programs:

The bachelor's completion program first aligns Sofia's Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILO) with WSCUC core competencies. Students graduating can write, speak, and reason quantitatively in a thoughtful and well-informed way (See Component 4). Transpersonal ways of knowing are also integrated into their general courses. Psychology courses and electives focus on Transpersonal Psychology and challenge students to apply their new understandings in their personal lives, employment, and advancement to graduate degrees.

Clinical students in the MACP, PsyD, and the MATP-coaching programs blend transpersonal psychology with standards endorsed by their respective professional organization: The International Coaching Federation or the California Board of Behavioral Science. In addition, many students pursue a creative expression concentration when they apply for credentialing from the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. Many students become life coaches.

The master of transpersonal psychology (MATP) program focuses on transpersonal studies with concentrations in spiritual psychology, transformative life coaching, creativity, and transpersonal ecopsychology. MATP students' contribution following graduation varies; for example, one student worked as a researcher in equine therapy, another student worked with suicide survivors, yet another integrated transpersonal learning into a traditional school system.

The PhD in psychology and PsyD programs place value on transpersonal research and students may pursue clinical work through professional licensing. The primary goals include

academic and/or clinical study within transpersonal psychology. Curriculum includes qualitative and quantitative research methods with special attention to transpersonal content. Sofia graduates work as educators, clinicians, and writers. Many work in community mental health.

The MBA, MSCS, MBAO offer courses in transpersonal psychology and, while strong in their individual domains, continue to integrate more transpersonal / transformative education and values. Topics related to ethical practice, protecting rights, and the transpersonal as it relates to marketing, management, network security, leadership, and other practices that evoke reflection on the transpersonal and working with the whole person are part of the curriculum.

Quality

Program Review

Program Review is integral to quality assurance. It provides opportunities for program teams to be in a cycle of assessment, continuous improvement, and to refine offerings in informed ways. Review teams consider PLOs, validity, and compare programs to similar ones in the field. They systematically examine student satisfaction, sustainability, and track improvements, trends, graduation success, and plan for future actions. Review teams assure that the degrees awarded meet institutional standards of quality and consistency, identify gaps, and make plans for improvement. An annual (Program Review Guidelines [Attachment 1.16](#)) process with varying start dates is led by department chairs. Component 6 highlights these processes. As a part of the WSCUC self-study and deliberately out of cycle, additional resources were allocated for program reviews in spring and summer 2021 as a way to access the current state of quality in all programs and to inform program prioritization. ([Attachment 2.35](#)).

Learning Outcomes Assessment

Sofia has in place, an annual process to review Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs; see Component 6), and in recent years has developed more program consistency and quality improvement with the assistance of a consultant who guided a re-mapping of PLOs to ILOs ([Attachment 3.03](#)). A curriculum alignment matrix visibly notes the scaffolding of learning across each degree. New PLOs are placed in syllabi, general catalogs, and on the LMS and website. PLOs, CLOs, and course descriptions were re-worked and implemented in fall 2021.

Responsibility For Academic Programming

Under the university president's guidance, the provost, Faculty Senate, associate vice president of academic innovation, and program chairs provide general oversight and hold collective responsibility for the delivery and quality of Sofia University's programs, in alignment with the institution's academic and educational policies. The provost oversees academic personnel and policies as well as financial resources that support quality programs while guiding established assessment processes including strategic planning. Academic Affairs office is responsible for providing compliance data to requesting agencies and assuring that policies are data-driven. The IR tracks the assessment of academic programs and student learning, historical trends, and forecasts future enrollments. An instructional designer supports consistent placement of courses on the Learning Management System (LMS) using a template. Program chairs lead program reviews and ([Attachment 3.03](#)) are responsible for faculty input.

Degree requirements are rigorously tracked and enforced through the program chair and Registrar's Office, and degree progress is reviewed quarterly by academic advisors. Students identified as having difficulty are reported to the Dean of Student Services at mid-quarter, with appropriate contacts and steps put in place for assistance.

At this time, Sofia plans to activate its automated Degree Audit function or adopt a new Student Information System (SIS). There have been barriers to implementing this component and the costs of a new program are equally daunting. Due to past budget challenges this has not occurred. Nevertheless, it remains a priority. A task force to investigate the need for a new SIS is actively investigating options. Currently, program chairs sign off on degree completion.

The quality of the Sofia degree is dependent on the quality and engagement of the faculty. Their expertise, perspectives, experiences, and commitment to infusing Transpersonal/transformational theories and ways of knowing into their courses adds meaning and quality to the course material. Their further ability to teach online or on-site using best practices that create in-depth and frequent student-faculty engagement with didactic and experiential components is essential. Engaging in genuine collaboration with administration further aids in the quality of the degree. Faculty Senate ([Attachment 3.04](#)) is one way for faculty, administration, and the Board of Trustees to engage in a cooperative relationship. The Sofia Faculty Senate is relatively new and continues to organize its infrastructure, articulate its mission, and set goals. The new provost has begun to meet with their leaders monthly and has offered guidance as the senate matures into an active leader of faculty and shared governance.

Transparency and Integrity

Sofia's new administrators, CEO Dr. Cahoon, and CFO Chris Nguyen, have been instrumental in improving transparency and integrity the past 1 1/2. With the addition of Provost and ALO Dr. Humphreys, the administrative team has continued efforts to share information and seek input from the larger community through Campus Conversations, Town Halls, Provost Council, Chairs Council, Faculty Senate, and responsive, open-door policies. These meetings have included a

wider group of members including faculty and student members. In the case of the Board Meetings, a Faculty Senate member has been invited to present updates at the January meeting. Not only do students have access to administrators in meetings, via social media, and through email, seminars and intensives include various opportunities for additional meetings. (CFR 1.7) A task force of high users of the SIS has been created and is driven by various staff across the campus. The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning has been created and has included the broader community on diversity and social justice panels. The library director offers alternative open office hours over weekends and at night to support and include working students' voices. The Chinese language program and the Global College are aligned with institutional-wide policies and practices including admission, registration, enrollment, and graduation.

Sofia has also developed an improved relationship with WSCUC, often calling for advice or meeting with its liaisons prior to making decisions on sub-changes, or during the self-study. Sofia has participated in an ongoing relationship with WSCUC through a variety of special visits substantive changes, interim reports, and a structural change. In operations and academics, Sofia is responding to commission policies, procedures, recommendations, and concerns.

Academic Integrity

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) unify Sofia's *raison d'être* through three themes: (a) transformation, (b) integration, and (c) application ([Attachment 1.17](#)). Transformative learning is inherent in Sofia's programs and has been well established in psychology programs ([Attachment 3.05](#)); MBA and MSCS programs are currently assessing how well transformative learning is integrated into content ([Attachment 3.06](#)). Integration implies the learning of trans-personally relevant material and incorporating multiple ways of knowing as part of program-

specific learning ([Attachment 3.05](#)). Effective oral and written communication skills are also inherent in this theme (CFR 2.2b). Case studies, modeling, reflection, research, reflective scholarship, and other teaching modalities further contribute to Sofia's rich educational experience. Expectations are delineated in syllabi, on the Learning Management System (LMS), and in the creation of an extensive ([Attachment 3.07](#)). Course Learning Outcomes (CLO) are assessed by chairs and instructors with every course offering, while PLOs are assessed on a rotating basis by faculty assuring a quality program. Instructors design class syllabi that are reviewed quarterly by program chairs. Attendance, grading, and participation are tracked on the LMS ([Attachment 3.08](#)) and in ([Attachment 3.07](#)).

Additional Areas Where Quality Matters

Admissions

Sofia has risen its admissions standards and now includes GPA reviews. As stated in the Strategic Plan Update, requirements now include a GPA of at least 3.0, academic transcripts, letters of recommendation, and goal statements. TOEFL scores are required for students who need to verify language proficiency. Students are interviewed by chairs for genuine interest and readiness. This improved process strengthens the quality of the degree and its graduates.

Advising

Advisors (Assigned faculty and Program Chairs) support and track students' progress from entry through graduation while chairs approve transfer credit, course substitutions, and sign off on degree checks. This level of oversight and mentoring suggests that students will complete a degree in a timely manner that is rich in quality academics and engagement.

Graduation

Students in all programs can expect that upon graduation they will value and understand transpersonal content and processes that hold meaning in today's world and are relevant to their

career paths. Indeed, this is why students choose Sofia. Students learn to adapt transpersonal approaches, methods, and ways of knowing into their careers. For example, an educator may shift their teaching to incorporate moments of reflection, the creative process, or respectful listening. A businessperson may focus on respectful communication in the office.

Reflections and Areas for Growth

Sofia's transpersonal/transformative mission, vision, and values, which translate well to an education in Transpersonal Psychology, have appealed to many students over the years. However, Sofia is also transforming as it meets the needs of a changing global market and student interest. With increased international enrollment and program offerings outside the field of psychology, we have been challenged to consider how the heart of Sofia can be applied to our new programs and students. A Sofia degree is more than the sum of its part and reflects a deeper, more authentic way of learning. As Sofia continues building on its foundation of transpersonal psychology and integrating its concepts across programs, opportunities include:

- Clearly articulate the meaning of a Sofia degree across departments and programs.
- Maintain a continuous improvement mode to improve quality.
- Use Data-driven decision making, program review, assessment practices
- Continue to recruit qualified faculty, staff, and students for institutional integrity.

The educational experience at Sofia University is built on a foundation of transpersonal meaning-making, supported by quality programs and expert faculty and staff with a commitment to integrity. In the midst of a changing higher education environment and a new global market, these qualities will serve us well. As we work to increase sustainability, one of Sofia's greatest strength remains its commitment to transform in an authentic and transpersonal way.

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

At Sofia University, it is understood that quality education requires careful assessment of student learning and thoughtfully developed learning outcomes that build on core competencies and support continuous improvement. This is, in part, a realization of Sofia's vision to be a globally conscious leader in transformative education, empowering students with intellectual growth, ethics, and the development of emotional intelligence. This vision and Sofia's mission have been considered in the formation of the three basic themes of Sofia's Institutional Learning Outcomes: transformation, integration, and application. We readily admit that, in the past, Sofia's record of creating and effecting this cycle of assessing institutional effectiveness has been spotty. As such, over the past 18 months, the faculty and administration have worked to lay the groundwork and begin to assess all programs in a robust and data-informed manner (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3). Detailed information on those processes can be found in Component 6. To that end, efforts began with a data dashboard project([Attachment 4.01](#)) to outline the foundational needs for data and useful information (CFRs 4.2, 4.3, 4.4).

Based, in part, on the creation and organization of this data, a faculty committee developed standards and processes for learning assessment and program reviews at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (CFRs 2.4, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4). Moving forward, each program conducts a basic assessment of educational effectiveness. This collective process, involving faculty, department chairs, administration, and academic leadership, made tremendous strides towards creating a scalable assessment process that can be quickly implemented and deployed in a way that will allow for data-driven continuous improvement, accountability of academic offerings, and a validation of institutional quality.

Undergraduate Programs

In fall 2015, Sofia began to offer two two-year undergraduate degree completion programs—BS Business Administration (BSBA; on-site and distance) and BA Psychology (BAP; distance), which currently enrolls three students. To be admitted students must have completed the university's general education requirements, with the remaining two years continuing to address oral and written communication, research skills/information literacy, critical thinking and quantitative competence. Sofia is committed to the WSCUC core competencies, which loom large in our program development. This is crucial, as in September 2021, a substantive change application was submitted to WSCUC for approval of on-site delivery of BAP.

In support of this commitment, the faculty and chair revised the undergraduate programs, keeping WSCUC's core competencies front and center. With a consultant's help, all program learning outcomes (PLOs; [Attachment 4.02](#)) were mapped to the new institutional learning outcomes (ILOs; [Attachment 4.02](#); [Attachment 4.03](#); [Attachment 4.04](#)). The undergraduate programs and curricula were then restructured to meet competencies and the needs of returning students ([Attachment 4.05](#); [Attachment 4.06](#)) (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.3, 4.4).

A system for assessment was then established in spring 2020 based on assessing the Signature Assignment (SA) in the Capstone courses (CFR 4.2 4.3, 4.4; [Attachment 4.07](#)). Subject matter experts (SMEs), all Sofia faculty or adjunct faculty, were then hired to improve courses ([Attachment 4.08](#); [Attachment 4.09](#)). Using a master template based on the course development checklist, SMEs refined courses to be content rich, consistent with competencies, and easy for students to navigate. Each features an SA that will be used for more robust assessment of learning outcomes. While the process for formal assessment is developed, actual assessments

have not yet taken place at the undergraduate level, since there are no students in the BSBA program, and there are so few students in the BAP, that any data would be meaningless; four students went through capstone in the last year. However, Sofia now has the structure to implement assessment and increase data results as enrollment grows.

In terms of meeting the WSCUC core competencies (CFR 2.2a), undergraduate programs were improved to produce students who can critically think, speak, write, and engage in quantitative and qualitative reasoning. Each SA involves a personalized, research-oriented project that requires the student to investigate issues outside of the classroom (including issues of sustainability, ethics, diversity, and social justice), reflect on the experience, and respond. (The process for assessment of learning at the undergraduate level for the two-degree programs can be found in [Attachment 4.10](#).) Sofia's undergraduate programs will ensure that students graduate with the ability to write, speak, and do math while thinking critically and being fully informed (CFR 2.2a). Thus far, Sofia has graduated 22 bachelor-completion students.

Graduate Programs: Scholarship and Professional Practice

Most of Sofia's degree offerings are in the area of graduate studies, at the master's and PhD levels. In part due to its intimate size, there is no official Office of Graduate Studies; rather, faculty and program chairs are assigned as having oversight for programs, making degree recommendations to the provost. In addition, the Dissertation Office assists students with writing and filing their dissertations and partners with the new CITL.

Sofia's graduate programs advance on the foundation and core competencies of an undergraduate degree and excel beyond the basic WSCUC competencies. This achievement of excellence at the graduate level is due to the highly qualified faculty who work collaboratively

with staff and stakeholders to develop policies and processes for effective teaching and mentoring. For example, through a collaborative process, Sofia MACP, PsyD, and PhD leadership assures that relevant programs comply with licensing and exceed graduate-level expectations.

Though not required, all graduate programs further address WSCUC core competencies related to written, spoken, quantitative literacy, critical thinking, and information literacy. Some programs have specific courses on these topics, while others integrate writing skills in designated classes across programs of study. For example, MATP students begin the writing standard process in the first quarter and work on these competencies along the way, demonstrating mastery in capstone projects. The PhD in psychology and PsyD programs are research programs, and their core curriculum includes research methods in both quantitative and qualitative methods with special attention to transpersonal content and ways of knowing.

Annual outcome assessments of Sofia's six graduate programs—the MACP, MATP, MBA, MSCS, PhD, and the PsyD—were initiated in the 2019–2020 academic year ([Attachment 4.11](#)) and undertaken again in 2020–2021 ([Attachment 4.12](#)), which also included an assessment of the MBAO. The standard format for assessment includes an introduction, program outcomes assessed in 2019/2021 and 2020/2021, overview of the methodology, data highlights, ILO analysis, proposed action plan, status of prior year's action plans, and a conclusion aligned with the relevant PLOs. The assessment also includes a rubric ([Attachment 4.13](#)) and a distribution and analysis of scores for student attainment across the PLOs.

The results of the two-year outcome assessments have yielded a variety of conclusions, but in general, most programs are meeting or surpassing benchmarks. The PsyD and PhD programs surpassed benchmarks with upwards of 49% at the exemplary level. The MBA and

MBAO faculty team developed an assessment rubric, with careful attention to seeing that issues of transpersonal psychology were addressed. However, programs need to strengthen reinforcement of the transpersonal concepts that students learn in their core courses. For example, new courses are being developed that integrate issues of leadership and organizational behavior to help students understand how concepts in transpersonal studies apply to business.

The initial assessment of the MSCS program demonstrated that core computer science competencies and communication skills were lacking to some degree, even though benchmarks were surpassed. An action plan focusing on the core computer science skills and competencies, as well as communication skills, was developed. The 2020–2021 MSCS program assessment showed significant improvement, principally in terms of grasping core computer science and mathematics principles while learning new communication and presentation skills. A better inclusion of core first principles in each class, mandated use of writing lab (VWL) support in certain courses, expanded faculty training, and early course interventions helped produce considerably better results.

The results for the MACP program were the most disappointing because students fell below benchmarks in both years. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that historically, the MACP focused on student performance at the clinical-site level and less on written documentation. Practicum courses relied on students' on-site clinical supervisor's evaluation as a therapist, rather than on their ability to write academically rigorous clinical reports. Going forward, practicums have been revised and a workplan was established for ensuring mastery of PLOs that include increased clarity of assignment prompts, and the rigor with which assignments are assessed to enhance student competency skills and overall proficiency. Additional training

and support through the CITL will be provided to faculty in the area of curriculum development and program design. In general, students completing graduate programs at Sofia are expected to demonstrate advanced competencies in critical thinking, qualitative and quantitative analysis, professional writing, and imbue a transpersonal and mindful approach to their discipline.

Graduate programs have completed recent program reviews and remain in cycle for future reviews. As part of that process, data dashboards have been prepared for each program with current statistics and relevant information that is used as a basis upon which program review can be completed. Curriculum maps and rubrics have been developed for each program providing alignment with learning outcomes and tracking of progress and achievement (see Component 6 for more information).

Indeed, graduation rates speak to Sofia's educational quality. The graduation rate for students in master's degree programs averages 70% after four years. At the doctoral level, graduation rates are at 28.3% after five years. Clearly there is room for improvement, particularly at the doctoral level. This is discussed in in Component 5.

International Education

The strategic partnerships Sofia have recently developed with Chinese universities will enable our domestic students to acquire international exchange opportunities and facilitate their cross-cultural understanding through in-course and aligned program collaboration. International students will be offered residential experiences at our Costa Mesa campus as well as the opportunity to work in cross-cultural teams in online work internships. Faculty teaching in international programs also teach in our domestic programs, facilitating the application of domestic and international learning exchange in the classroom. To ensure academic quality,

Sofia's Global College designates an Academic Lead who manages a team of program support specialists; project support specialists closely track each cohort of students' learning progress term by term and create student profiles that show the cumulative efforts and learning of a particular student over time. The students' learning progress data are gathered, assessed, analyzed, interpreted, and used to create personalized learning plans to ensure individual student success (CFR 4.1).

Quality of the Academic Environment through Faculty and Staff

Sofia University is an institution of modest scale with 20 full-time and five part-time staff, 11 full-time faculty (core), four part-time faculty, and (currently) 32 adjunct faculty. Sofia's administrative staff, supervisors, and management are employed on an at-will basis, which means that the employment relationship may be terminated, with or without cause, and with or without advance notice at any time by the employee or the university ([Attachment 4.14](#)). There are no tenure-track positions; rather, annual contracts are offered.

Under new executive leadership, an annual performance review process was implemented in spring 2021 for core faculty, staff, and administrators, and will become the basis for future performance goals ([Attachment 2.36](#)). The performance of adjunct faculty is considered by program chairs prior to contract re-issuing. Sofia's core and adjunct faculty are accomplished academics and scholars ([Attachment 4.15](#)), many with a long Sofia history and deep expertise in their discipline. Additional information on human resource (HR) matters is addressed in Component 7. The Sofia University Handbooks ([Attachment 4.14](#); [Attachment 4.16](#)) contain policies and processes that apply to faculty and staff, including anti-harassment and Equal

Employment Opportunity, which are also posted in every job description. Sexual harassment training is mandatory every two years ([Attachment 4.14](#)).

Improving the Academic Environment and Educational Quality through Improved Teaching

One of the most significant steps Sofia has undertaken to support faculty teaching and scholarship is the development of the CITL ([Attachment 4.17](#)). The CITL provides support for scholarship, research, teaching, professional development, community engagement, and student learning. CITL has offered community panels focused on diversity, facilitated Canvas (LMS) Training, sought CE provider status, and is co-leading syllabi and workflow projects.

Standards of Performance at Graduation

Sofia students must successfully complete all coursework and program requirements for the conferral of their chosen degree. However, as they near graduation, they are asked to synthesize, organize, integrate, and reflect on what they have learned in their courses, seminars, intensives, practicums, internships, and academic experiences. This process, also built into senior courses, requires students to apply research, theory, and clinical and business skills to various culminating projects (e.g., essays, theses, written exams, presentations, or dissertations).

Not unlike other graduate institutions, there is a mini-proposal course, dissertation office, mentors, Research Ethics process (REC; see [Attachment 4.18](#)), and faculty committees to support and challenge the doctoral candidate's proficiency in their chosen dissertation topic. Dissertation approval by a qualified committee confirms that graduation standards have been met. (For examples of Sofia dissertations, see [Attachment 4.19](#), [Attachment 4.20](#), and [Attachment 4.21](#)).

An example of a master's level culminating project is MATP's Transpersonal Integration Paper (TIP; [Attachment 4.22](#)). Like a thesis, it is a culmination of a student's entire transpersonal

education, driven by a course in intuitive inquiry research method. MBA and MSCS students engage in a two-part capstone and culminating project ([Attachment 4.23](#)) that integrates and demonstrates their knowledge of business. In addition, Sofia students complete final academic projects that demonstrate mastery, and are also applying newly mastered skills and knowledge to their clinical work, teaching experiences, employment, and scientific presentations and articles. Thus far, Sofia has conferred 657 Doctoral Degrees ([Attachment 4.24](#)). Sofia University has also conferred a total of 1,528 MAs in Transpersonal Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Computer Science, and Business Administration. Due to the success of international students, 1,866 Chinese students have completed the MBAO ([Attachment 4.25](#)).

Improvements

A significant improvement at Sofia in the last two years is wider faculty engagement in developing new and important processes, such as program review and learning outcomes assessment (described in Component 6), and realigning PLOs to ILOs. This enhanced consultation has resulted in greater transparency, buy-in from faculty, standardized practices across the institution, and accountability, which is further supported through curriculum committees, the Provost's Council, Chairs' Council, and Faculty Senate. Additional evaluation that contributes to educational quality include: (a) responding to federal, state, and CSU audits; (b) maintaining accreditation standards; (c) the provision of an annual updates to goals identified in the Strategic Plan; (d) completion of annual assessments of learning outcomes; (e) a regular cycle of program reviews including a dashboard analysis of each program; and (e) regular review of the effectiveness of the student services area.

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

Defining Student Success

As Sofia, student success (CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 2.13) is defined through both academic achievement and a journey of personal development. Fostering and supporting successful students is contingent upon: (a) recruiting academically prepared students into each program; (b) delivering an engaging, experiential, and transformative program; (c) committing to high retention and graduation rates; and (d) ongoing monitoring and support of student progress.

The historical focus and strength of the institution has been the unique character of its transpersonal psychology programs. Expanding Sofia's mission through the development of new degree programs in business and technology, has created a challenge in defining student success within the MBA, MSCS, MATPO, and MBAO programs and aligning them with the transpersonal psychology programs. This alignment has required an understanding of transpersonal studies that includes a practical focus on contemporary social and ecological issues and a global vision of the institution that is more comprehensive in scope. Sofia is seeking to increase international enrollments, targeting adult learners from around the globe. The success of these international recruitment efforts holds promise, while simultaneously accelerating the need for additional institutional infrastructure and philosophical integration to guarantee student success.

Defining and Supporting Student Success

To address this component, an ad hoc student success committee consisting of faculty, staff, and members of institutional research (IR) met over several months to review relevant data. IR prepared additional disaggregated data to create a comprehensive view of student

success, and the director of student services provided input into the status of student support and initiatives to expand that support into an enhanced culture of caring.

Student success begins with recruiting qualified students who are a match for Sofia's programs and academically prepared to enter a degree-completion or graduate-level program of study. Looking across nine quarters, overall student enrollment for programs fell from 247 students to 153 students, with a spike in enrollment in 2018 due to increased numbers in the MSCS program. This drop is attributed to administrative and financial instability in the institution during those same years (See Enrollment Planning Projections 2019–20, [Attachment 5.01](#)). However, the percentage of full-time students held steady across the nine quarters. Enrollment numbers varied by program, with the MBA and MSCS programs showing sharper declines, and the MATP, MACP, and PhD programs, with a longer history and focus on transpersonal psychology, maintaining more consistency.

The international MBAO (MBA Overseas) program witnessed a dramatic growth in enrollment across 13 quarters from 2016 to 2020, increasing from 69 to 1,508 students (See Disaggregated Data by Program Slide MBAO 5 Year Total Enrollments, [Attachment 5.02](#)). Such enrollment figures point to the potential for growth in the international market that is a current target of the university. Admittedly, such rapid growth brings with it the challenge of expanding the institution's infrastructure to meet the demand for student support in an international and online environment. Efforts to build that infrastructure are described below.

It is noteworthy that enrollment at Sofia is lower than comparable institutions, as identified by the STAMATS Report (See Stamats Program Assessment slides 17 & 18, [Attachment 5.03](#)). Nevertheless, Sofia identified new enrollment targets of 500 and 1,000 Full-Time

Equivalents (FTEs) respectively, in the Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan page 42, [Attachment 1.07](#)), which has been surpassed with 1,066 FTEs reported to IPEDs for 2019–2020. In addition, individual programs have begun to explore the branding and marketing strategies of comparable institutions with the goal of improving marketing and recruitment efforts. A new strategic enrollment management plan is under development with an anticipated completion date of December 2021. The goal of this plan is to determine how to attract students at the appropriate level of competence and scholarship to undertake a rigorous program of study. The Strategic Plan Update calls for enrollment policies that include a minimum of 3.0 GPA, meeting the expectations of the Statement of Purpose, and, for international students, degree equivalency.

Retention Rates

First-term retention rates provide an initial view of student success. The most recent first-term retention rates, over five years from 2016 to 2020, show the BAP completion at 81%, master's programs at 84%, and doctoral programs at 79% (Retention2021Mar Slide 1 Categories, [Attachment 5.04](#)). In contrast to rates for domestic residential and online programs, the MBAO program shows near perfect retention rates of 99%. This is an impressive figure and provides an opportunity for reflection on the structural and academic features contributing to these rates, as well as the cultural factors that influence retention.

A better projection of student success and approximation of potential graduation is the percentage of new students who enrolled for three or more terms. For all domestic programs from 2014 to 2016, the average percentage of students enrolling in three or more terms was 66%. Between 2016 and 2020 this average jumped to 77%, a significant improvement in persistence rates (RETEN2021APR-3+TRM slide 1 By Year, [Attachment 5.05](#)). Disaggregating these

data by gender, between 2014–2017, 59% of men completed three or more terms as opposed to 78% of women. However, between 2017–2020 these percentages stabilized to 77% for men and 75% for women, showing more parity in long-term retention for gender (RETEN2021APR-3+TRM slide 2 Gender, [Attachment 5.05](#)).

When disaggregated by age, the percentage of students completing three terms was evenly split across all ages over 25 years with an average of 80% completion (RETEN2021APR-3+TRM slide 4 Age, [Attachment 5.05](#)). Disaggregating by ethnicity, between 2017–2020 the three-term retention for all ethnic groups averaged 77%, except for students identifying as Black or multiracial. Here, the percentage is 50% with the caveat that the total number of students identifying as Black was four, and for multiracial, the total was four. Overall, these data show an absence of disparity in retention rates based on gender, age, and all other ethnicities. Sofia anticipates that students identifying as Black and multiracial will soon reach comparable retention rates and that students in the MBAO program will remain near 99% (RETEN2021APR-3+TRM slide 3 Ethnic, [Attachment 5.05](#)).

Graduation Rates

The most long-term data on graduation rates available are for psychology programs beginning with the 2011–2012 school year. Other programs were not in place until 2015 (Retention2021Mar, Slide 2,4,7 Rates, [Attachment 5.04](#)). The two-year BAP completion program shows a 43% graduation rate over two and four years. This figure is based on a total of 12 students. As this is a new program with small enrollment, these data are preliminary and indicate a need for more targeted student support. As this program expands to include a STEM focus, it will increase its attractiveness thereby increasing graduation rates.

Master's programs show an almost 70% graduation rate by four years. Master-level programs are necessarily shorter term, which is reflected in fewer years to completion. In the MATP program, 61.4% of students graduated within two years, while 88.6% graduated within four. The MACP program found that 54.7% graduated within four years. Clearly, there is variability in graduation rates even within the master's programs. Sofia University has recently set new targets of 60% for retention and 60% for graduation rates, as identified in the Strategic Plan Update. In support of these targets a new strategy for more effective student support has been developed including enhanced career services, a fully staffed writing lab, and a counseling center to deliver a marked improvement in retention and graduation rates.

University wide time to degree is between three-and-a-half and four years. For the PhD program, 28.3% of students had graduated within five years, with nearly two thirds of students who initially enrolled in the program not earning a degree after seven years. By way of comparison, according to the American Psychological Association, doctorates in psychology research programs in 2013–2014 took an average of seven years from starting graduate school to completion (Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/02/datapoint>). There is much room for improvement in years to completion for doctoral programs. In 2019, a sequence of six dissertation courses was created with specific deliverables for each course to reduce the average time students take to complete a dissertation. The Dissertation Office supervises every student enrolled in the dissertation courses to offer the necessary academic support for timely completion of dissertations, which includes progress reports twice a quarter.

Disaggregated Data

In undertaking a deeper investigation of enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, data were disaggregated along several demographics, including gender, age, and ethnicity (Disaggregated Data by Program Last Slide Graph Data, [Attachment 5.02](#)). Across all programs, the ratio of females to males is approximately two to one. This indicates that Sofia's programs may be more naturally attractive to women and points to potential marketing strategies to increase enrollment from this population as well as additional marketing to target men. Overall, students are older, which is consistent with Sofia's emphasis as primarily a graduate institution offering advanced degrees. Outside the bachelor's completion program, students enroll having completed a bachelor's or master's degree and have an average age of 38. Students enter programs with a decade or more of life experience and may be in their second or third career.

With an increasing international student body, it becomes more difficult to determine ethnicity with certainty. Sofia has not always tracked these data with consistent measures, and some programs have as much as 25% of students of unknown ethnicity. Consequently, there is a lot of variability in the data. What can be gleaned from more recent data and enrollment efforts is that the student population is becoming more diverse. The new international outreach and global programs highlight the importance of tracking ethnicity and country of origin with as much accuracy as possible, something IR has committed to implementing.

Increasing Student Success

As indicators of student success, retention and graduation rates are some of the most critical and revealing data and are influenced by the recruitment of qualified students and the supports in place for success, reflecting the nature of the student experience while enrolled. As percentages, the retention rates are encouraging, but when considered alongside decreasing

enrollment over the past five years, and graduation rates for doctoral programs, more structures need to be put into place. The new initiatives for improving student success are outlined below.

Identifying Student Learning and Performance (CFRs 2.10 – 2.14)

As defined in the Strategic Plan, students at Sofia are offered an engaging curriculum filled with opportunities for experiential learning, involving hands-on activities that require active engagement with the academic material, paired with opportunities for reflection (CFR 2.3). Sofia has had a robust online-education platform for almost two decades, a history that has supported a sophisticated pedagogy that engages students in multiple ways of knowing (i.e., cognitive, affective, intuitive, symbolic, somatic, discursive) while educating at a distance. This expertise facilitated Sofia's ability to quickly transfer residential programs to online formats during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sofia now has a full-time Instructional Designer to assist instructors with making the best use of Canvas as the primary learning management system, and other online technologies in a way that addresses Sofia's unique strength of transpersonal focus while maintaining a consistent student experience from course to course.

Measuring student learning and performance through data has only been formalized in the past four years. Assessment of program learning objectives (PLOs) began in the 2019–2020 school year with a comparison of the alignment of PLOs with institutional learning outcomes (ILOs). Through an assessment of course deliverables it was revealed that most assignments assessed supported PLOs, while there were some assignments that did not. This initial assessment highlighted the importance of regular and ongoing review of the alignment of course objectives, ILOs, and PLOs. The results of the assessment are currently being used by each program chair to modify learning objectives at the level of courses (CLOs) to improve alignment

with ILOs. Assessment of course learning objectives will now become a regular function of each program (see Component 4 & Component 6).

Course Evaluation Data

A critical indicator of student success is course evaluation data. Course evaluations are identical for all courses and use a 14-question survey (Sofia Course Evaluations All Programs 2-15-2021 pages 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, [Attachment 5.06](#)). Low response rates in 2020 are likely due to all residential courses having to convert to online formats during the COVID-19 pandemic. To improve this response rate, additional reminders are sent to all students. The average satisfaction rate for 2020 is 87%, which is 2.6% higher than in 2019. Positive responses to evaluation items have been consistent ranging between 84% and 88%. Responses to open-ended comments were equally consistent. Program chairs review course evaluation data each quarter to assess quality of content and delivery of instruction. These data are then used for improvements and revisions to course structure and the alignment of CLOs with ILOs and are being used in current program review efforts to determine course-level student engagement and learning.

The international program and Global College have committed to regular assessment of student satisfaction. Since 2017, the MBAO program has implemented a designated online questionnaire in Mandarin after student finish each course to collect information regarding how Chinese MBAO students are satisfied with their learning experience (CFR 2.10). Quantitative and quality data including students' opinions of instructions, course content, student support services, suggestions on course improvement have been gathered. Twenty-five thousand, nine-hundred four (25,904) surveys were sent to 2,216 students from December 31, 2017, to October 1, 2020. A total of 19,762 surveys were returned yielding a response rate of 76%. The survey

results have been regularly analyzed and translated to English version and reported to the MBA program chair and core faculty for program improvement. For example, five more bilingual teaching assistants were immediately hired to ensure more individualized academic support when students' needs of more personalized instructional feedback for assignments were identified through the survey analysis.

Student Satisfaction Surveys

In 2020, Sofia implemented an initiative to help assess and quantify student success by conducting a survey of alumni (Alumni Survey Updated Slide 1 Quiz Summary, [Attachment 5.07](#)). The survey generated 125 responses, clearly an initial effort that needs to be expanded with more effective strategies for engagement. Responses were spread across students graduating over the past 10 years, with a range of graduates from master's degree programs (54%) and doctoral programs (35%; Alumni Survey Updated Question 3, [Attachment 5.07](#)).

The majority expressed that they were satisfied (34%) or very satisfied (53%) with their academic program at Sofia (Alumni Survey Question 4, [Attachment 5.07](#)). More than 58% of respondents were currently working in the field of psychology (Alumni Survey Question 10, [Attachment 5.07](#)) and 77% shared that their program of study at Sofia gave them tools and skills for their current career (Alumni Survey Question 13, [Attachment 5.07](#)). Respondents indicated that what they most liked about their academic program were personal connections with faculty and students, diversity and quality of students and professors, the transpersonal nature and focus of the program, and the flexibility of the hybrid program.

For areas of improvement, respondents suggested: (a) building a sense of community through in-depth alumni outreach; participants expressed a desire to stay connected with

professors and staff), and (b) offering more career advice and events. It is recognized that the respondents to this survey were likely skewed toward those with positive experiences; however, there is acknowledgement in the value of continuing to survey alumni annually and creating opportunities for their involvement with the institution, despite the challenges of alumni outreach and communication. The student satisfaction survey will be administered annually.

Creating a Culture of Caring: Student Support

Critical to student success is effective support initiatives that assist in achieving academic excellence, delivering fulfilling programs of study, and providing additional assistance to those students who may be struggling personally or academically. Collectively, these endeavors are designed to create a culture of caring in fostering student success.

Monitoring Student Progress

Class attendance is recorded by all instructors on a weekly basis. To facilitate more timely intervention with students who may be struggling, Sofia requires instructors to complete a midterm evaluation of progress on all students. Those identified as struggling are brought to the attention of the student services director so that early interventions can be offered during the quarter rather than waiting until the course is completed. Students not meeting satisfactory academic progress are put on academic probation and given a detailed learning contract that is implemented immediately. Failure to fulfill the requirements results in program dismissal.

Given the high number of years to completion in the doctoral programs, students completing a dissertation are now tracked each quarter by their dissertation committee chair and the dissertation office to determine whether they have met benchmark goals toward completion. Support by the dissertation chair and additional time are given to students to maintain steady

progress toward completing a dissertation and reduce time to graduation. The student services director convenes a weekly meeting with admissions, financial aid, dissertation office, and the registrar to case-manage students who are struggling. The Student Information System does have a degree audit function; however, costs and tight budgets have been a factor in its implementation, and it is not currently operating. It has been identified as a financial priority going forward. However, student advisors regularly review progress toward graduation and program chairs conduct a degree audit upon completion.

Student Advisement

A central feature of student support is student advisement. At Sofia, every student entering a program is assigned an advisor, and the master list is distributed to all faculty. In the psychology programs, Sofia created a classification of associate core faculty whose additional responsibilities include student advisement. Advisors for all students in every program reach out to their advisees each quarter to offer guidance in course selection, research topics, progress toward graduation, and problem solving. Student advisors become the first point of contact and advocate for each student in navigating the academic curriculum, but also for challenges related to program success, technology, financial aid, and other issues. Students with disabilities work directly with the student services director to set up accommodations and monitor progress. With higher international enrollment, additional advisement structures are being established, with expertise in providing a supportive and welcoming environment for international students that tracks the frequency and quality of contact between advisor and student.

Virtual Writing Lab

The virtual writing lab (VWL) was created in 2019 to support student academic and professional writing. Staffed by several paid coaches, the lab was created in response to

observations by faculty that students in psychology programs struggled with academic writing skills, and students in business and technology courses struggled with professional and technical writing skills. With a growing international student body, there is an increasing number of students for whom English is not their first language, and for whom such writing supports would be beneficial. Sofia's students can access the VWL for support at any time, and some courses require assignments to be submitted to the VWL ([Attachment 5.08](#)).

Career Resource Center

Further expansion for student support will be the career resource center due to open in December 2021 to assist students in identifying and creating the necessary bridges and support to advance chosen careers. Data from the center will also be instrumental in marketing and recruiting students with specific career aspirations and in enhancing retention and graduation rates (Strategic Plan, Student Services/One University: Two Campus page 48, [Attachment 1.07](#)).

Student and Faculty Senate

Faculty Senate meets quarterly, with the majority of faculty present. Senate members give input to programmatic decisions such as class-size, course development, faculty representation on the Board of Trustees, and the marketing and branding of programs ([Attachment 3.04](#)). Student Senate is seen to be an important vehicle for student representation and voice. By December 2021, the Student Senate will be invigorated by appointing a student leader, empowering the body to create a new charter, and designating a liaison between the Student Senate and the Faculty Senate (Strategic Plan page 46, [Attachment 1.07](#)).

Program Review and Student Success

Over the past two years, Sofia has made a commitment to engage in a robust process of program review, focused on current programs and the development of innovative programs.

The Office of Institutional Research compiles data on student success and forecasts enrollment figures; an annual assessment of learning outcomes forms part of the university's review process in determining the effectiveness of current programs. Sofia is committing resources to undertake regular program review for every academic program on a rotating schedule (Tracking Annual PLO and ILO Coverage 2019-20, [Attachment 1.17](#)). Though a cycle is in place, during spring and summer of 2021, a review of most programs was completed. This was done as part of the self-study process and to provide all programs with a starting point. A Sofia adjunct faculty member and expert in program reviews was hired to complete review and led the process, coordinating with chairs, faculty, and two outside experts for each program. These teams met regularly, collaborated on data gathering, analysis, and review. Reviews were then completed for PhD, PsyD, MATP, MACP, MBA, and BAP. Though we have only recently received the results and more analysis will be done, we are seeing some trends. Most reviews suggest there is solid content and overall good student satisfaction. However, they also suggest that Sofia can improve canvas courses, syllabi, and some policies. These results are informing decision-making regarding program prioritization and improvement and have been disseminated to chairs. ([Attachment 2.35](#)). For example, based on the review, the MACP has been deemed a growth program and will receive additional resources, a new .5 FTE (Full Time Equivalents), and consideration of professional accreditation. Similarly, this data is informing decisions regarding next steps for the PsyD program at the Board of Trustees, Cabinet, and Provost level.

Student Success by Program (CFRs 2.6, 2.10, 2.13)

When disaggregated by domestic degree program, the percentage of new students completing three or more terms between 2014 and 2020 varied from 68% to 100% with a mean

of 82%. Despite decreasing enrollment overall for domestic programs, retention rates have held steady or improved, providing a solid foundation from which to enhance measures of student success (RETEN2021APR-3+TRM Slide 1 By Year, [Attachment 5.05](#)). Sofia's programs with the highest retention rates are currently the MACP and the MBAO programs, with the master's programs showing the highest graduation rates. This is particularly encouraging since the MBAO is a new university initiative. Retention rates for the PhD program have been lower than the university as a whole but have recently shown an upward trend. Institutional data have been disaggregated by program to better understand how programs compare with each other and across the institution, with a goal of identifying the programmatic features that can support an overall increase in graduation and retention rates (RETEN2021APR-3+TRM By Program, [Attachment 5.05](#)). Chairs and faculty from each of the six programs continue to meet to review the current data with the intention of program improvement.

Two programs prepare students for clinical licensure. In 2018, licensure exam pass rates in California for graduates of the MACP program was at 71% for the Board of Behavioral Sciences for Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor clinical examinations. From 2018 to 2019 the clinical psychologist license exam pass rate in California declined from 69% to 64% for graduates of Sofia's Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (PsyD) program (Sofia Licensing Exam Results Slide 1 Doctorate, [Attachment 5.09](#)). The PsyD has completed a program review, and, although not in teach out, new enrollments are no longer being accepted. Meanwhile, its viability is being explored by the provost, cabinet, and Board of Trustees. Without APA accreditation, it limits portability and student employment options.

Recommendations and Challenges (CFRs 2.6, 4.1–4.4)

The strategic plan acknowledged that in 2019 Sofia was in survival mode, a characterization based on Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, when it should in fact, be moving toward *security* mode. This transition to security mode requires additional efforts that include achieving accreditation compliance, creating a more effective organizational structure, and developing the right initiatives that place student success at the forefront. Further information on these initiatives is identified in the Strategic Plan Update (see Strategic Plan, Student Services/One University: Two Campuses, page 48, [Attachment 1.07](#)) with timelines for completion. These include a focus on increasing enrollment, implementing an effective program assessment process, and useful collection and interpretation of data and other monitoring processes, such as enhanced advising and review of student progress. In the past four years, Sofia has placed a higher emphasis on the use of data to understand and better support student success, with a renewed appreciation for data-driven strategies, processes, and comprehensive evaluation of student progress, which will lead to increased overall student achievement.

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

Introduction

Sofia University is mindful of the importance of assessment, reviews, and use of data in assuring the delivery of quality programs to its learners. Until recently, assessment and data collection practices were not fully established nor defined with clear and routine practices. For example, program reviews and annual assessment of learning outcomes were concepts that were understood and accepted but not actualized; some Institutional data were available but not fully utilized. Challenges with revolving executive leadership, ownership and financial struggles consumed the institution in a fight for sustainability. Nevertheless, Sofia has recently taken significant steps to demonstrate a commitment to quality improvement through the creation of comprehensive processes for supporting program review, the assessment of student learning, and program effectiveness across all academic programs. This process of assessment, while managed centrally, is faculty-led and the responsibility of the staff and faculty who are closest to the programs. Annual outcome assessment reports are submitted and reviewed by discipline at a university-wide faculty level, and by the program chair, Provost's Council, and provost.

Office of Institutional Research

An important element of Sofia's assessment efforts that will assist in the making of well-informed decisions, is the data analysis and presentation services provided by The Office of Institutional Research (IR; CFRs 4.1-4.7). IR is responsible for the creation of quarterly dashboards on key performance indicators, filing reports in response to the requirements of external agencies (e.g., BPPE, U.S. Department of Education), and providing the administration with assorted quantitative information about students, programs, employees, finances, student

achievement of learning outcomes (CFR 2.7), program reviews and related program dashboards, and licensing exams and placement (CFR 2.7). IR plays a central role in planning the enrollment management function by reporting historical admissions, retention and graduation rates (CFR 2.7), and modeling and forecasting scenarios for enrollment growth. Additionally, IR is involved in creating and analyzing results from surveys. As the role of IR is essential, an additional part-time position was created in spring 2021, bringing the total number of staff to 1.5 full-time employees, to better support the needs of Sofia in the collection and analysis of data (CFR 4.1).

Indeed, Sofia has integrated the IR function into its operational and strategic decision-making. IR contributes data so that the university can respond to demands for reports from external bodies and internal stakeholders. Monitoring of quarterly operations, strategic plan targets, and other benchmarks are made possible through the efforts and data analysis expertise of this office. (See 2021 factbook to Sofia's Board and Leadership, [Attachment 1.03](#)).

Program Review

In [Attachment 1.14](#) the Commission expressed concern that there was a lack of a cohesive, well documented, and regularly scheduled program review process that included the incorporation of course learning outcomes (CLOs) and institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) in university curricula. In response to this concern, please see the formal document titled [Attachment 1.17](#), which sets out a process, guidelines, and a timetable for regularly scheduled program reviews [Attachment 1.16](#). This process was developed and approved by the Board of Trustees in fall 2020 and launched spring 2021. (See [Attachment 6.01](#).)

In forming the guidelines, a committee of faculty members determined the processes and criteria for assessing all programs. In addition, program dashboards (see sample PhD [Attachment 4.01](#) and narrative [Attachment 6.02](#)) were developed for each program to assist academic units with preparation for program reviews. The dashboards provide data and identify course/program strengths and opportunities for program review preparation; course/program readiness occurs when faculty align course.

The Program Dashboard Initiative involved the collection and analysis of data. Six programs participated in the inaugural Program Dashboard exercise. Program faculty, chairs, and administrators met to discuss the data. Dashboard data focused on five-year total enrollments disaggregated by: gender, ethnicity, and age; five-year new student term counts; enrollments by degree code; first-term retention comparison by two-year intervals; degrees granted by academic year; and two-to-six-year graduation rates.

These reports served three purposes: (a) as evidence of the faculty's growing awareness and study of their respective institutional data, (b) to offer action plans for continuous improvement, and (c) to propose suggestions for additional data sets and lines of inquiry on program performance as the university moves toward the implementation of comprehensive program reviews. The Program Dashboard Initiative was designed as a precursor to the more expansive program review self-study process that began in spring 2021. Programs not undergoing a program review each year will still receive an annual dashboard dataset, monitor their performance metrics, and propose and report to the provost on suitable follow-up activity. Faculty fully participated in the inaugural dashboard process providing valuable insight with an acknowledgment that academic programs were now poised to engage in the richer work of a comprehensive program review.

Upon completion of a program review, the chair works with all stakeholders to ensure implementation of the recommended action plan with careful consideration of budgetary implications. Updates are provided in the program's annual assessment report. The [Attachment 6.03](#) (CAC), monitors the program review process and follow-up actions. The CAC is charged with recommending modifications to the academic program review guidelines to ensure their relevance and robustness, with monitoring annual progress in a program's implementation of its action plan, and the university's support for these efforts.

Of note, all program reviews have now been completed ([Attachment 2.35](#)). Outcomes are currently being disseminated and discussed with the Faculty Senate, Provost's Council, Chairs' Council and course faculty. Thus far, trends suggest that reviewers recognize Sofia's rich course content and faculty engagement and suggest improved coursework that better integrates transpersonal tenets and skills and focuses on issues of diversity.

Annual Process of Assessing Learning

In fall 2019, IR, instructional designers, program chairs, and an external consultant came together to reinvigorate the university's assessment initiatives. It focused on improving student learning and assuring that the institution's educational programs were appropriate in content, standards of performance, rigor and nomenclature for the degree-level awarded (CFR 2.1), and quality assurance of program offerings (CFR 4.1). Prior to academic year 2020, Sofia had discussed, but not implemented a university-wide outcomes assessment protocol for student learning.

Sofia has since taken steps to set itself on a sustainable path of learning outcomes assessment. Core and adjunct faculty participated (CFR 2.1) in the evaluation of the assessments, which included data from IR, to establish a considered and solid foundation for evaluation and

decision making, ensuring that the process was participatory, iterative, and evidence based.

Programs have reviewed and, where necessary, restated their PLOs to ensure their capacity for operationalization and measurement. The revised outcomes point to skills, behavior, attitudes, and knowledge that guide students toward mastery and attainment of subject matter. Rubrics have been created, and direct assessment in the academic year 2019–2020 (AY19-20) was conducted for six degrees, which included reviews of student work at the mastery or capstone level.

The university appointed a bilingual (Mandarin) adjunct instructor to develop an assessment proposal for the MBAO. The remaining three programs had insufficient enrollments or other operational challenges; thus, these programs developed assessment plans in lieu of a formal assessment. Implementation of these plans were poised as part of the university's second phase of assessment activity in AY20–21. In instances in which the results of data analysis were not positive, program chairs conducted follow-up assessment or proposed curricular modifications in the next academic year. Highlights of assessment results for AY19–20 can be found in page 18 and 19 of [Attachment 6.04](#) for full results see [Attachment 4.10](#), submitted to WASC in June 2020. Additionally, results of assessment activity for AY 20–21 can be found in [Attachment 4.12](#).

In summer 2020, the university adopted restated institutional learning outcomes (ILOs). It is important to note that, at the time of writing, Sofia has not yet completed course learning outcomes (CLOs) for every program and linked them to PLOs. It is acknowledged that this is an integral piece in the architecture of student-learning assessment, and efforts are underway for their development, with a targeted completion date of December 2021, as identified in [Attachment 1.17](#). Updates enabled chairs and faculty to select a variety of points in a program sequence for annual assessment. Maps address academic gaps, misalignments, and redundancies to improve coherence

in courses of study and effectiveness of the curriculum. The revisions include changes in PLOs, alignment of course codes with rubrics, and a catalog with course descriptions (CFR 2.2).

Provost Council established annual outcome assessments (using [Attachment 1.16](#)), reflecting a commitment by the administration and faculty to support Sofia's goal of academic excellence, one of five strategic goals stated in the 2019–2023 Strategic Plan Update ([Attachment 1.09](#); CFRs 1.1, 4.3, 4.4). [Attachment 4.10](#) (Academic Year 2019–20) was shared with Provost Council, chairs, and Faculty Senate, demonstrating Sofia's important progress in the development of an assessment culture. Discussion and feedback in turn influence adjustments to course content and support efforts for continuous improvement (CFRs 2, 4.1; see [Attachment 3.04](#)).

Strengths and Challenges to Annual Assessment of Learning

The development of a comprehensive process for assessment of student learning has been strengthened through a thoughtful series of steps infused with faculty participation and feedback. Assessment tools were identified, such as final capstone papers and pre-dissertation proposals; assessments per PLO were outlined and task forces were created to assess the programs. Assessments were submitted to the provost, evaluated at the level of the Provost Council, and recommendations formulated for addressing weaknesses. A schedule and guidelines for yearly assessments was created by a small task force, reviewed by the provost and president, and approved by the board in late 2020 (see [Attachment 6.01](#)).

The Program Dashboard Initiative yielded some additional questions to be addressed moving forward. First, demographic data seemed especially problematic, with large swathes of students not providing information on their nationality or ethnicity. Several programs questioned whether it is time to supplant the IPEDS demographic categories with more inclusive ones, such

as allowing for student selection of multi-racial identities or Hispanic affiliation by country of origin. In addition, some programs allow students to complete more than one concentration or exceed the number of required electives. As a result, the current calculation of time to degree may be clouded by the total number of credits typically completed by students at the point of graduation. Therefore, total units at graduation should be included with each program's dataset, and further correlated with degree completion length of time.

Faculty expressed some concern that for programs that are primarily clinical in nature, a capstone project may not capture evidence of the most important learning outcomes in those programs. Academic leadership asked programs to select artifacts that students generate at a culminating stage of their programs to capture outcome attainment at a designated mastery level. Discussions with core faculty in the clinical programs were initiated, and the process was revised to be more inclusive for the 2021 self-study. Faculty addressed outcomes at a spring 2021 retreat and subsequent Provost Council. Some faculty also expressed that they felt pressured to develop international programs that may not meet ILOs or rigorous academic standards, and that they were excluded from discussions. With new leadership, better communication across programs has been addressed with a focus on greater participation and feedback from faculty.

Accreditation of Academic Programs

Given that California is not a signatory to the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) and is not a member of NC-SARA, Sofia undertook a review of its online enrollments in winter 2020, researched those states for which operating exemptions were not automatic or available, and prioritized the submission of state applications for authorization. A few states (i.e., Georgia and Oregon) agreed to allow Sofia to continue to enroll students but not admit new ones

while a full application is submitted. Other states allowed for time-limited “grandfathering” or clarified their exemption process. In all, Sofia has been able to confirm its eligibility to provide “online + low-residency” programs in 22 states and continues to pursue applications for authorization in three remaining ones (See [Attachment 6.05](#)). The results of this effort have eased the conversation with prospective applicants about the university’s ability to enroll from particular states, and to confirm the national market that our advertising and recruitment efforts may target. On Sofia’s website, prospective students can identify which states are verified for enrollment.

Assessment in Student Affairs

Steps have been taken to enhance student learning and services including quarterly course evaluations and other surveys for graduate seminars, exit, and alumni surveys (See Component 5). IR works with faculty, program chairs, and the provost in the design, implementation, and data collection of surveys with the results widely disseminated under the supervision of the provost. Other initiatives to advance quality include [Attachment 5.08](#) to assist students with professional writing, and the new [Attachment 4.17](#) (CITL), to support scholarship, research, teaching, and psychological applications. As well, a new Career Resource Center will be in place for December 2021 to help students reach their career goals, receive guidance, and gain access to jobs in relation to their degree program. As some of these initiatives are new, an important step will be for Sofia to move towards an advanced culture of assessment in terms of identifying how assessments are used in strengthening the quality of the Student Affairs area, including assessment activities to examine services and programs. For example, tracking the frequency of students’ use of these resources will be an indicator of effectiveness, a periodic review of the quality of surveys administered will be

important to ensure currency and relevant data, and the improvement of students on academic probation receiving additional supports will be a strong indicator of success.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the past two years, Sofia has taken considerable steps in developing and successfully implementing more clearly defined, iterative, and participatory practices to ascertain quality assurance. The newly established program review process provides a base for continuous improvement, involving all major program constituents within the university, using data to examine program outcomes, and aiming for collaboration for the advancement of both the program and the university. Revisions to student learning outcomes and improved alignment of those outcomes, as well as guidelines for all programs, have fostered a steady annual process of learning assessment. The recent Strategic Plan Update makes a strong commitment to both program review and learning outcomes assessment, with newly created strategies that identify gaps and timelines for completion (See [Attachment 6.06](#) pp. 9–10). Additionally, the provost continues to fully integrate the international programs into the university-wide community and practices.

Moving forward, it is vital to ensure that yearly assessments are completed, that the program review process utilizes these assessments, and that program portfolios remain up to date. The Provost Council has developed a plan to ensure that teaching faculty incorporate respective learning outcomes into their classes and curricula. Sofia continues to build on the program review and assessment processes already underway and to ensure that CLOs, PLOs, and ILOs are connected in measurable ways; appropriate artifacts and rubrics are used to measure outcomes; data from reviews is available and utilized to foster continuous improvement; and initiatives connect assessment with faculty development through the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning.

Component 7: Sustainability: Financial Viability and Preparation for the Changing Higher Education Environment

Financial Sustainability

Sofia University is a for-profit university that derives 100% of its revenue from student tuition and fees. Consequently, Sofia's financial sustainability and viability are directly linked to enrollment. The university has faced financial challenges in recent years, posting negative balances for as much as \$2.3 million in 2018–2019 to \$3.2 million in 2019–2020 respectively (Appendix 1-A, [Attachment 1.18](#)). While a significant issue, the budget situation has markedly improved, as reflected in the current 2020–2021 fiscal plan as well as year-end projections (Appendix 1-B, [Attachment 1.18](#)). Moreover, with increased enrollment and cost control, Sofia is projected to show a surplus starting in fiscal year 2021–2022 (Appendix 1-E, [Attachment 1.18](#)). Some of the past financial turmoil can be attributed to complications with a change in ownership, senior executive leadership, and loss of international students. With leadership stability provided in the appointment of President Allan Cahoon in 2020 and the additions of a full-time vice president of administration and CFO and a vice president of academics and provost, Sofia University is set up for stability at the senior ranks and is getting back on track financially, taking steps to develop a fulsome and transparent budgeting process. The latest projection for yearend 2020–2021 shows a smaller loss than originally projected and significantly better than fiscal year 2019 (Appendix 1-B, Appendix 1-A, [Attachment 1.18](#)). As part of the recent strategic plan update, a commitment to create a new formalized strategic enrollment management plan has been identified as mission critical, with an anticipated completion date of December 2021. The plan will provide an overarching strategy for the recruitment of students, corresponding recruitment

spend, and tactics to develop robust and stable enrollments. The plan will be supported by the formation of an Enrollment Management Committee ([Attachment 7.01](#)).

With domestic enrollments Sofia experienced several years of decreasing enrollment with a peak of 348 students in fall 2017 declining to a low of 212 in fall 2019. This can be attributed in part to an internal review of Sofia's Curricular Practical Training offerings (CPT) for international students and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) guidelines. Sofia's CPT policy was found to be noncompliant with our academic standards nor with regulatory guidelines and international enrollment was affected. Of note, Sofia has since gained compliance and is again enrolling F-1 students.

Enrollment has rebounded somewhat to reflect 213 students for fall 2020, which is encouraging and perhaps an indication of a more stabilizing trend. Not wishing to remain complacent, Sofia is focused on growing the domestic population through quality, relevant programs and a rewarding academic environment (Enrollment Projections 20–23, [Attachment 7.02](#)), and has recently hired an admissions director with a successful track record of recruitment ([Attachment 7.03](#)).

On another positive note, international enrollments are realizing a significant uptake, with a growing list of partnerships. The university has expanded its international market by almost 100%, from a low of 680 students in fall 2017 to 1,393 in fall 2020 through a five-year renewal of an agreement with one of our international partners, officially known as Tsinghua Holdings Zijing (Beijing) Education Group, created by Tsinghua University, a top university in China ([Attachment 7.04](#)). Sofia also recently concluded agreements with two additional entities in China, the first with Shiji Guodong International Education Technology Co., Ltd, for an online MBA program, and

the second with Qiwen Education Group for MATP ([Attachment 7.05](#), [Attachment 7.06](#)). All three agreements are five years in length, providing a level of enrollment and revenue certainty.

Table 1

Domestic Enrollment

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Fall	348	267	212	213

Table 2

International Enrollment

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Fall	680	1278	1530	1393

Revenue Diversification

Sofia is focused on increasing both domestic and international enrollments as reflected in its board approved three-year Operational Budget (Appendix 1-E, [Attachment 1.18](#)), showing a slight deficit for fiscal year 2020–2021 but a surplus after fiscal year 2020–2021.

The Global College was created to develop and drive international partnerships and enrollment. Though separate in some administrative tasks, all academics fall under academic affairs. The Global College has succeeded in forging partnerships with four entities (i.e., Zijing, Guodong, Qiwen, and Shantou) resulting in enrollment, revenue, and diversification. Furthermore, the Global College’s three-year projection details its revenue streams ([Attachment 7.07](#) and Attachment 7.09; CFR 3.4). Sofia has been successful in the expansion of graduate enrollments internationally resulting from new and/or renewed strategic partnerships in China, coupled with innovative and revised programs, recruitment of new bilingual (Mandarin) faculty, and implementation of enhanced academic oversight of the MBAO Zijing (Finance), MBAO Guodong (Leadership), MATPO Qiwen, and non-degree certificates.

Exciting additions to current domestic offerings include a newly certified STEM-based MBA (Data Analytics), Master of Science in Computer Science (MSCS), and a newly approved MBA/MSCS (Data Science and Analytics) pathway, which take advantage of existing courses to make new STEM concentrations. The MACP is also currently developing a part-time timeline for working students, which will be available in spring 2022. Sofia is working on agreements for degree-completion students at the undergraduate level with U.S.-based institutions (i.e., Davis College and College of Southern Nevada). Additionally, marketing opportunities are being explored with respect to professional certificates.

To further augment revenues, the institution is considering the potential leasing of unused space at the Costa Mesa and Palo Alto campuses, which could generate several hundred thousand dollars a year. In aggregate, these efforts will provide diverse revenue streams enabling the university to have greater certainty over its financial resources, focusing on several domestic and international revenue pipelines. New ownership since 2018 and new leadership ([Attachment 7.09](#); CFR 3.4) have focused on financial viability, supported with the extension of a \$5M Line of Credit ([Attachment 7.10](#)) by the owner to ensure sufficient financial resources are in place to improve the University.

Budgeting Process and Transparency

In addition to seeking diversified funding sources as a method for achieving financial stability, senior leadership is committed to a transparent, collaborative budget process with an emphasis on alignment, accountability, and integrated budgeting. Given the intimate size of the university, a formal budget committee was never created. Instead, for fiscal year 2020–2021, department heads had an opportunity to review operations and submit funding requests. Once

all requests were consolidated and considered, the Finance Office developed, received approval from the Board, and released an operating budget. Multiple cabinet-level discussions were held to adjust revenues and expenses so that the two-line items came closer into alignment. Due to the imbalance between revenue and expenses created over the past several years, a balanced budget for 2020–2021 was, unfortunately, simply out of reach, resulting in a Board-approved operating budget projecting a half million-dollar deficit. As stated, this forecast is much improved with an anticipated shortfall not as severe as originally projected.

For fiscal year 2021–2022, collaboration and input have been expanded. A framework and guiding principles document were vetted at cabinet level, shared with the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees for review, and subsequently distributed university wide. Departmental input is still a key element of the budget building process. Budget updates have will continue to be shared with the Provost’s and Chairs’ Councils and the Faculty Senate.

The CFO provides quarterly updates to the entire Board of Trustees and its Finance Committee and regular updates to the cabinet and the Provost’s Council ([Attachment 7.11](#), [Attachment 7.12](#), [Attachment 7.13](#)). The updates consist of quarterly revenue and expenses and year-end forecasting. Major spending requests are vetted, and financial analysis is completed against break-even thresholds with strategic plan links. Work is underway to provide program-level productivity to the Board on a regular basis (Appendix 1-D, [Attachment 1.18](#)).

Starting with fiscal year 2020–2021, a cohesive and comprehensive approach was taken with marketing initiatives, enrollment, and curriculum design resulting in a more robust fiscal year 2020–2021 ([Attachment 1.18](#)). An emphasis was placed on developing the international MBA strength of the university (Appendix 1-E [Attachment 1.18](#)) with an online MBA agreement

with Zijing (China) Education Group that was renewed for five years. In addition, a new five-year agreement was recently signed with Guodong (China) Education Group and Qiwen Education Group for the master's in psychology program.

In total, a conservative estimate of new international students is in the 400–600 range annually. Additionally, Sofia recently signed an MOU with Shantou University to provide short-term programs for Shantou's students. We expect a few cohorts (20-40 students) in the first year ([Attachment 7.14](#)). These agreements are the result of a coordinated effort by the Global College working with Academic Affairs and senior management to diversify growth and build partnerships through quality academic programming (CFR 3.4; agreements can be found in [Attachment 7.04](#), [Attachment 7.05](#), [Attachment 7.06](#)).

Audited Financials

The institution is audited on an annual basis by an independent national auditing firm with higher education expertise. The new CFO has brought stability to Sofia's finances, including the implementation of consistent accounting practices as well as systemic internal controls with timely and accurate reporting. The two recent auditing reports for fiscal years ending June 2020 and June 2019 ([Attachment 7.15](#) and [Attachment 7.16](#)), provided an unqualified opinion for both audit years with a strong non-Title IV revenue to Title IV revenue ratio (CFR 3).

Technology and Facilities

Sofia University recognizes the need to maintain currency in Information Technology (IT), especially as the university engages in more distance instruction. The university's IT department works closely with all departments, especially Academic Affairs, to ensure a smooth and effective learning experience for students. The director of IT regularly meets with the provost and chairs to

assess technology needs. The university maintains a student information system (Campus Café) dedicated to supporting student needs. Since 2013, the institution has utilized Canvas Learning Management System for all academic programs. Additional systems currently being used are Office365 (productivity and communication suite), Teams (electronic communication and meeting), 8x8 (telephonic communication), Slack (direct communication, video meetings), and Zoom (video meetings; CFR 3.5). The Office of Institutional Research uses data from Campus Café to provide support and analysis regarding retention rates and trends, program productivity, and program reviews. Institutional Research also provides student data to various government agencies (CFR 3.5).

The university maintains two physical locations, each with its own library and classrooms. The Palo Alto campus has three classrooms with audio/visual and support VGA or HDMI cables (CFR 3.5). The Cosa Mesa facility in Orange County, California, has 13 classrooms plus a courtroom and presentation room. All but two of the classrooms have a built-in smart podium (i.e., projector, sound system, document camera operated by a touchscreen). The campus has a full library, café, full commercial kitchen, a student lounge, and a large open outdoor green space (CFR 3.5). The Costa Mesa campus also has wireless internet access with an investment of over \$100,000 in 2018 to upgrade the campus.

Organizational Chart and Decision-Making

Sofia is emerging from a period of transition, including new ownership and several changes in executive leadership, organizational structure, and membership on the Board of Trustees ([Attachment 7.09](#)). Such has delayed the opportunity to provide clear and consistent processes for transparent decision-making and institutional stability. However, the hiring of

President Cahoon, followed by a VP admin/CFO and a new provost, as well as the addition of new Board members, has strengthened the institution and its decision-making processes.

Recognizing the need to be competitive in a dynamic higher education environment and to continue to offer academic excellence, the university recently reorganized to be more student centric with reduced levels of bureaucracy while ensuring academic operations are fully supported. The elimination of administrative positions Org-1 (pre, [Attachment 7.20](#)) and Org-2 (post, [Attachment 7.09](#)) are reflected in the pre-and post-organization charts. The reorganization resulted in a leaner structure to better align costs to revenues and improve decision-making (CFR 3.7). The Cabinet consists of the president, provost, CFO, and chief of staff. The Cabinet meets on a regular basis to resolve issues and track progress against the strategic plan in conjunction with the Strategic Planning Committee (CFR 3.7). The driving force behind Sofia's activities is the strategic directions of the president ([Attachment 7.17](#)), which are developed annually in alignment with the strategic plan and discussions with the Board. The Org Chart ([Attachment 7.09](#)) defines formal lines of authority that are supported by a strong commitment to broad consultation and shared responsibility. This is realized through committees such as the Provost's Council, Curriculum Committee, Policy and Procedure Committee, and Scholarship Committee, as well as regular meetings of program chairs ([Attachment 7.18](#) Attachment 7.20).

Employee Equity and Compensation

Sofia is an at-will workplace and does not have collective bargaining agreements. However, it is committed to a fair, equitable, and safe work environment. HR provides the Staff and Faculty Handbook ([Attachment 4.13](#)) and annual training on issues such as harassment, discrimination, equity, and workplace culture. HR has also completed benchmarking to ensure

duties and compensation are market aligned and internally equitable. A few misalignments have been corrected. In anticipation of growth, a plan for 25–32 support staff is being embedded in the 2021–2022 operations plan. Training and professional development is an important Sofia tenant and staff attend conferences, seminars, and obtain industry memberships such as NACUBO, SHRM, and NASFAA. Sofia also has a tuition waiver program for enrolled staff. Sofia offers medical and dental coverage. A 401K retirement plan is available for staff and faculty ([Attachment 7.19](#)).

Academic Sustainability and Sofia’s Role in 21st Century Higher Education: Program Review

The environment in higher education is intensely competitive and rapidly changing. Sofia’s future will be contingent upon its positioning within that market and the ability to present innovative, relevant, competitive, and demand-based academic programing that delivers an extraordinary student experience. Sofia must meet the needs and demands of learners, particularly those in mid-career seeking upgrading opportunities at the graduate level. While continuing to build on its solid foundation, the university has recently approved an MBA/MSCS pathway that speaks to this renewed commitment. In addition, a STEM certification from the Department of Homeland Security is being sought for a new MBA in Data Analytics and for the existing MSCS degree. The MBA STEM program proposal is the result of a careful analysis of market needs balanced by a commitment to transpersonal studies. This degree will provide potential MBA students with a more science-based curriculum that is industry competitive and particularly appealing to international students seeking to secure a longer-term stay. In addition to these initiatives, Sofia has submitted new proposals to its partner, Beifang Educational Group, for an MBA as well as undergraduate and dual-degree pathway options. Sofia has leveraged

technology to increase its reach and achieve greater efficiency as evidenced with the online instruction of the MBA and MATP courses in Mandarin. The ability to develop and roll out two programs in less than six months is evidence of Sofia's capacity to be adaptable and responsive to the market (online MBA with Guodong and MATP with Qiwen). Sofia will also be examining opportunities to deliver short-term programs and micro credentials that could ultimately provide ladder into existing degree programs.

An important component of academic sustainability is well-developed processes for quality assurance. These, in alignment with the Strategic Plan and the soon-to-be completed Academic Master Plan and Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, will drive resource allocation. Quality assurance is detailed in Component 6 and is evident in Sofia's annual learning outcomes assessment and its newly created program review processes.

While finances have been tight in recent years, Sofia has made several small investments in critical initiatives: (a) the addition of part-time staff in Institutional Research, (b) a Virtual Writing Lab to assist students with their writing skills, (c) resources for effective program review, (d) learning assessment processes including a consultant to complete program reviews and help map PLOs to ILOs, (f) a new CRM system to better track potential applicants, and (g) completed Wi-Fi network upgrades on the Palo Alto campus and a full-network upgrade of the Costa Mesa campus. In addition, funds are being invested in the new Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, which will support faculty in their efforts to excel in their teaching and scholarship.

To further academic sustainability, the provost instigated a dashboard review for each of Sofia's programs (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4). Key members of the program met with the provost, the director of Institutional Research, and the program chair to review relevant including enrollment

(together with demographic data of enrollees), retention, graduation rates, resources, and revenues (CFR 1.3, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6). The university also commissioned a marketing study from the firm STAMATS in 2020 (CFR 4.7). Each program had input and reviewed the results with the goal of increasing the sustainability of all programs through increased enrollment (CFR 3.7).

Learning assessment, program review, and the dashboard initiative were designed to be inclusive and consider feedback from across the institution including faculty, staff, and senior management (CFR 3.10; [Attachment 4.01](#)). The university's CFO has transparently reported the financial results of operations and projections and future operations at regular gatherings of the staff, faculty, and administration (CFR 1.7, 3.10). Results are discussed in Provost Council, Chair's Council, and Faculty Senate (CFR 3.10).

As a result of some of the past instability the institution has suffered, some contact with alumni has been lost. A concerted effort to maintain contact with recent and elder alumni has been instigated. Feedback from current students regarding courses and curriculum is sought regularly through course evaluations, surveys, the Student Senate, and Faculty Senate. Also, a student representative is invited to participate in Faculty Senate (CFR 2.5, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5).

The recently developed Strategic Plan Update lays out a pathway for financial stability and sustainability as a platform to academic excellence. As evidenced in the recent financial statements (year-end projections Appendix 1-B, [Attachment 1.18](#)), Sofia has made substantial progress toward a more secure financial future with key initiatives in place (CFR 4.6).

Conclusion

After a challenging period, Sofia University is emerging and evolving into an organization that is re-positioning itself in the arena of higher education. Financial forecasting ([Attachment](#)

[7.12\)](#) speaks to a more promising and stable outlook with a renewed understanding of the discipline, strategic approach, innovative spirit, and nimbleness required to excel. New opportunities and partnerships are being explored for revenue diversification, including a junior college strategic pathway program, a dual-degree proposal for Beifang Educational Group, and domestic and international recruitment initiatives using agents in India and Latin America. These efforts will position Sofia well for the future.

The immeasurable global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed the world of higher education. Interestingly, Sofia, with its substantial experience in the delivery of quality online education, had to make very few adjustments to the delivery of its programs. In cases in which Sofia offered hybrid or in-person meetings, it was possible to quickly adapt to virtual offerings and, in fact, received positive feedback from participants who claimed that the courses were extremely successful (CFR 2.10, 3.10, 4.7). The pandemic has illustrated that pure online delivery of education, with less emphasis on physical infrastructure, can be effective, and in fact, desirable. These circumstances signal that the scope and scale of traditional higher education may become challenged by the flexibility and accessibility of full-time online education which may be a better match to the demands of the learners of tomorrow. Sofia looks to the future with renewed enthusiasm, grounded preparation, nimbleness, and focus to succeed.

Component 9: Conclusion: Reflection and Plans for Improvement

Over the past few years, Sofia University has made substantial progress in addressing WSCUC's concerns. In the process of doing so, and through this self-study, Sofia has identified gaps, strengths, opportunities, and new directions.

The development of the institutional report and commensurate preparation for the re-affirmation process have been a comprehensive effort that has drawn upon the energies and support of faculty and staff across Sofia. As part of this process, the university has examined and re-affirmed its purpose, academic offerings, and developed new processes and systems to ensure a quality learning experience, integrity, and transparency, as demonstrated in the Strategic Plan Update. In addition, organizational restructuring in HR and Enrollment Management areas to achieve maximum efficiencies, and a review of institutional policies to ensure currency have taken place. Admittedly, there were gaps where accurate assessments and methods were not properly in place, in part due to transition in senior leadership positions and significant financial challenges. Fortunately, the self-study process has enabled Sofia to make changes where such gaps were discovered, which has been one of the most valuable parts of this effort. Nevertheless, the need for thorough preparation in advance of the re-affirmation process has brought faculty together, working collaboratively with senior management to fully address disparities with a clear and strong desire to create a learner-centered, transformational experience of the highest quality for Sofia's students. Deep and enthusiastic engagement occurred as faculty coalesced in the creation of new processes such as data dashboards, learning assessment, revision of learning outcomes, and the establishment of program reviews that included full participation from the Office of Institutional Research. A stronger, more experienced Board, as is evidenced by new

appointments in the last two years of highly qualified individuals, and efforts at better communication with the Faculty Senate, including more regular meetings with the president and provost, contribute to stronger shared governance.

The preparation for accreditation in conjunction with previous reviews by WSCUC brought to light several areas where there were opportunities for improvement. The most obvious were the lack of a well-developed cyclical process for program reviews, an established and thoughtful data-driven process for learning assessment, and a much-needed refresh of PLOs and their alignment with ILOs. Sofia has responded well to these oversights and taken the necessary steps to address omissions; the university community is confident that going forward, these important activities will be closely monitored with outcomes used for defining next steps: informing decisions and resource allocations.

The lack of reporting on activities related to Sofia's 2019 Strategic Plan was also noted and formed the impetus for the creation of the Strategic Plan Update. This comprehensive document is a strong testament to the work that has been accomplished across the institution to date, while simultaneously defining clear accountabilities, and a call to action for expectations and future outcomes. The Update generated enthusiastic responses from faculty and staff, who not only took pride in some of the successes, but also appreciated having a clearly defined roadmap of activities and responsibilities that will lead to future successes. In addition to these flagged areas, Sofia's downward trend in domestic enrollments and corresponding decreased revenues had serious implications not only to future sustainability, but also to mission critical aspects of quality degree programs and student services. The development of a formal strategic enrollment management plan and a completed reorganization of staff positions in the marketing area will

form the basis of an energetic campaign of student recruitment, in addition to a significant increase in international students through efforts by the Global College.

The self-study also brought to light a deeper appreciation for data gathering and analysis, which in turn will drive informed decision-making. Going forward there is a commitment to better integration and collaboration between the Office of Institutional Research and both the academic and student services areas of Sofia. Data is critical as the institution sets goals to improve retention and graduation rates, and track results of learning assessment, program review, and the continued development of program data dashboards.

Strengths and Exemplary Institutional Performance

An opportunity that has clearly played a critical role in Sofia's financial turnaround is the success of initiatives in the Global College that include the expansion of partnerships with Chinese institutions resulting in the sweeping growth of the MBAO program and the initiation of the Master of Arts in transpersonal psychology—overseas (MATPO). This business model lays the groundwork for further expansion of strategic partnerships by offering our courses to international students. The model, in conjunction with planned efforts to use agents to assist with the recruitment of students in India and Latin America, and continued growth of domestic students, will appreciably increase enrollments, provide financial security, and the ability to plan with a measured level of confidence while maintaining an appropriate balance between domestic and international enrollments. New opportunities and partnerships will continue to be explored with an aim to diversify revenues; such opportunities include a junior college strategic pathway program and other domestic and international recruitment initiatives.

While Sofia has lagged in the collection and analysis of institutional data throughout its history, it has gained significant ground in the last two years, resulting in the implementation of

learning outcomes assessment, the creation of program data dashboards, and fuller attention to graduation and retention rates. This relatively new focus is a positive beginning and has served Sofia well in the preparation of this application for re-accreditation and for establishing a baseline from which progress can be assessed going forward.

Sofia's CITL furthers the mission of Sofia by helping faculty, staff, students, and alumni become engaged leaders and learners while nurturing academic and teaching excellence. Though new, CITL is already being viewed as the central hub for innovation in teaching and learning at Sofia. At its core is the UN Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>).

Looking to the Future: Opportunities and New Directions

It is understood that Sofia must strictly adhere to its newly developed processes for quality assessment and that such processes must be close-looped and lead to recommendations, actions, and implementation. This is mission critical as we look to the future.

Sofia plans to expand its relevant, student-centered, accessible, flexible programming and is considering more short-term programs in the way of micro-credentials (certificates, badges) that provide laddering and pathway opportunities into existing programs. For example, we are developing: (a) a certificate in transpersonal psychology in Chinese that could then increase enrollment in the PhD program, and (b) a mini-MBA program (for mid-career professionals who may not have the time or resources to engage in a full-on MBA program) to provide initial training and upgraded skills. Sofia has already demonstrated a nimbleness in its ability to launch new and relevant programs, as seen with the newly developed STEM degree programs discussed in Component 7, including the pathway to both MBA/MSCS in Data Science and Analytics, MBA Data Analytics and MSCS, the MATP part-time programming, and the MATPO programs.

Transformation and Priorities

Sofia University has survived a challenging period of instability with a new appreciation for the power of collaborative stakeholder engagement, the necessary balance between finances and academics, and WSCUC alignment. COVID-19 has also transformed us, inviting, even demanding, us to step back and reflect on the personal and professional choices we have made in career paths, relationships, education, and life. Those of us at Sofia have stepped back, committed anew, and focused our priorities as well. As a result, Sofia University is different than it was even a few years ago. Indeed, it is better, with a new and dedicated leadership team, owner, faculty, and Board of Trustees. We believe that Sofia, with its offering of a personal journey of self-transformation and academic excellence delivered through flexible and accessible models, is perfectly positioned as the world emerges back into the active workforce, and learners pivot into new opportunities. Our readiness relies on continued improvement and implementation of Sofia's Strategic Plan Update. Therefore, our priorities remain:

- Financial viability and sustainability
- Mission-aligned academic quality and credibility with faculty-driven assessment
- Innovative, relevant, competitive, demand-based academic programing
- Regulatory accreditation, compliance, and alignment with WSCUC standards
- A renewed culture of collaboration, transparency, and integration across programs
- Marketing and recruitment for 2021 and beyond

We at Sofia University look to the future with renewed optimism, energy, grounded preparation, nimbleness, and a commitment to meeting the needs of today's diverse student population.

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