

Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report
University of Nevada- Las Vegas
Las Vegas, Nevada
October 22-25, 2017

A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Table of Contents

I.	Evaluators.....	4
II.	Introduction.....	5
III.	Response to Student Achievement Data.....	5
IV.	Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials.....	7
V.	Topics Addressed as Addenda to the Self-Study.....	7
VI.	Eligibility Requirements.....	10
VII.	Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations	
	Standard 1.A Mission.....	10
	Standard 1.B Core Themes.....	11
VIII.	Resources and Capacity	
	Standard 2.A Governance.....	12
	Standard 2.B Human Resources.....	14
	Standard 2.C Education Resources.....	15
	Standard 2.D Student Support Resources.....	17
	Standard 2.E Library and Information Resources.....	18
	Standard 2.F Financial Resources.....	19
	Standard 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure.....	20
IX.	Planning and Implementation	
	Standard 3.A Institutional Planning.....	20
X.	Core Theme Planning, Effectiveness, and Improvement	
	Core Theme 1: Advance Student Achievement	
	Introduction.....	21
	Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning.....	21
	Standard 4.A Assessment.....	22
	Standard 4.B Improvement.....	22
	Core Theme 2: Promote Research, Scholarship, Creative Activity	
	Introduction	
	Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning.....	22
	Standard 4.A Assessment.....	22
	Standard 4.B Improvement.....	23
	Core Theme 3: Create an Academic Health Center	
	Introduction.....	23
	Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning.....	23
	Standard 4.A Assessment.....	24
	Standard 4.B Improvement.....	24
	Core Theme 4: Foster Community Relationships	
	Introduction.....	24
	Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning.....	25
	Standard 4.A Assessment.....	25
	Standard 4.B Improvement.....	25

XI.	Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability	
	Standard 5.A Mission Fulfillment.....	25
	Standard 5.B Adaptation and Sustainability.....	26
XII.	Summary.....	26
XIII.	Commendations and Recommendations.....	27

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II. Introduction

The Evaluation Team (listed on the previous page) visited UNLV on October 22-25, 2017. This visit took place just three weeks after the major shooting that occurred in Las Vegas. The University played a significant role in responding to the tragic event. Their Administration remained highly responsive to the Evaluation Team's requests in the midst of the turmoil. The Evaluation Team wishes to recognize the work of the University around the tragedy.

Commendation: The University is to be commended for its compassionate responses to the tragic events of October 1. Those responses, by students, staff, and faculty, exemplify the engagement with the community that has existed from the University's beginnings and that the strategic plan seeks to enhance.

As context for this Review, during the seven-year period covered by the evaluation the state of Nevada was recovering from the economic recession. The recession hit Nevada particularly hard. Budget reductions at the University were serious, resulting in salary reductions and furloughs. Tuition and fee increases were significant, (although still remaining relatively inexpensive for the region). Changes to the funding formula were implemented in 2012 and performance-based funding was implemented in 2013-2015. Staffing levels at the University decreased significantly in all categories, but have now largely returned to numbers similar to those at the beginning of the seven years. The institution underwent multiple presidential changes during this time period. The institution's enrollment during the past seven years has slowly recovered from a drop during the recession to an all-time high with rapid recent growth. In summary, this seven-year time period has been a difficult one for UNLV, but the University has recovered in large measure and the atmosphere currently on campus is one of optimism and high-energy.

In the narrative below, Compliments, Concerns, Commendations, and Recommendations are all embedded in the text at appropriate places. The latter two are then compiled at the end of the report.

III. Response to Student Achievement Data

The NWCCU specifically requested institutional response to several sets of data regarding graduation rate, cohort default rate on student loans, and enrollment. Summarizing the data, since 1993 default rates have varied from a high of 8.8% in 2012 to a low of 3.4% in 2003. Currently the default rate is near 7%. The trend shows that default rates were lowest from the period of 2000 to 2008, took a significant jump to the 8% range in 2010 and have remained there. These rates are not unusually high or low for public institutions. Enrollment since 2004 has shown a gradual increase from 21,488 to 24,308, with a period of slight decline between

2009 and 2012. Graduation rates have been quite steady since 2004, hovering around 40%, slightly higher than that for women and slightly lower for men. The institution has graduation rates as a specific goal (see Core Themes below). Regarding this data, the Commission requested attention to the specific questions below.

1. *What are the key challenges of the institution related to the institution's graduation rate and other data provided?* Graduation rates are trending upward, albeit at a slow rate. Because of the recession and the corresponding financial stress of the institution, students who are graduating now didn't have access to the range of student services that are currently in place. Furthermore, a significant number of students (many from service families that needed to leave the community) were exiting the University during the difficult financial times. UNLV remains, for all practical purposes, an "open admissions" institution. As a University recognized as having among the most diverse student bodies in the nation (indeed, recognized as so), it enrolls many first-generation college students. These factors all contribute to the challenge of increasing graduation rates.
2. *What is the institution doing to improve graduation rates?* The University has a wide range of actions and tools in place to help strengthen graduation rates. They have a new general education program in place, which requires that gateway math and English courses be completed within the first 30 credit hours. Incoming first-year students undergo "block-scheduling" through a common registration program. Upon entry to the University, financial management guidance is provided for students and parents at orientation, and a financial aid "hotline" is available for students and advisors. A new Academic Success Center has been built and is operational. Through the Center and related offices, a wide range of student-success efforts is underway, including expanded tutoring programs, departmental-level free tutoring, supplemental instruction, and intrusive advising. Specific "RPC (Retention, Progression, Completion) Advisors" are housed each academic unit. The University has created a Math Learning Center. They have recently purchased the EAB Student Success Collaborative software package. A special "Did Not Graduate" Committee identifies students with more than 120 credits and asks why they aren't graduating. Performance funding, which is based partly on retention/completion, is going well for the campus. Fundamentally, the institution is focusing its energy on high-quality instruction, under the presumption that quality instruction will, in the end, significantly improve student performance.
3. *What initiatives appear to be effective in improving graduation rates?* Institutional response emphasized that intrusive advising and assessment of advising have been especially effective, as has the Math Learning Center.
4. *What might accreditors do to assist institutions to improve graduation rates?* The institutional representatives felt that having accreditors keeping a close watch

on these student-success parameters provides added incentive for the University to take action and monitor results.

IV. Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The self-study was well organized and addressed all of the standards, eligibility requirements, and prior recommendations. Most of the document was thorough and provided specific evidence demonstrating compliance with standards. The document had many links, quite a few of which were not active in the electronic version that was provided to team members. Those links that were active did bring the reader to valuable information. Support materials (mostly electronic) were exhaustive, but in some cases dated, and not readily available. During the visit, the team requested additional information regarding metrics, assessment, and mission-fulfillment. The institution responded immediately and with appropriate materials.

The Evaluation Team expressed concern about Sections 4 & 5 of the self-study. Our expectation was that those sections would present ample evidence in support of mission fulfillment and substantial reflection and analysis on the part of the university regarding its mission. The section presented some data, but with relatively little reflection and little analysis. We will comment further on this in various sections below.

During the visit, the people who attended the various sessions were highly engaged and enthusiastic participants. Participation at sessions by the administration and “administrative faculty” was excellent. However, the Evaluation Team was disappointed in the turnout of academic faculty, classified staff, and students. The Committee felt it difficult to develop a sense of those groups given the limited number of contacts.

Concern: The Evaluation Team was concerned about small and non-representative turnouts of student, faculty, and classified staff at the sessions set up for them by the University. We don’t know if this reflected a lack of interest or challenges with communications.

V. Topics Addressed as Addenda to the Self-Study

The recommendations below were generated in response to earlier interactions with UNLV. Specifically, Recommendations 1 and 2 resulted from the Spring 2013 Year Three Peer-Evaluation Report and were to be addressed in an Ad-Hoc report Spring 2015. The Commission received and accepted that Ad-Hoc Report from UNLV, but determined that the Recommendations had not been satisfied and requested the institution again respond to Recommendations 1 and 2 in this Year Seven review. Recommendations 3-5 were also a result of the Spring 2013 Year Three Report, and were to be addressed for the first time in this Year Seven Evaluation.

Recommendation 1: There has been refinement in the core themes and in the development of associated measurable metrics. The Year Three Self-Evaluation Report suggests that achieving the defined “indicators of achievement (or outcomes)” will be an indication of mission fulfillment. The questions raised in the Year One report still remain: How will an evaluation of the metrics, or achievement of the desired values established in the metrics demonstrate mission fulfillment, what is an acceptable threshold level of mission fulfillment, and who will make the evaluation? As such the Year One recommendation has not yet been satisfied (Standard 1.A.2). UNLV should clearly articulate how it will determine whether the salient goals, as outlined in its statement of mission, are being met. *Note: This recommendation relates to Recommendation One in the Year One Peer Evaluation Report.*

This recommendation is still relevant and is revised as the new Recommendation 1 in this 2017 Year Seven review.

Recommendation 2: While UNLV has defined objectives and assessable metrics for each of the core themes that did not exist at the time of the Year One review, UNLV must continue to have conversations about, and refine how it articulates, its core themes as a framework to achieve the stated mission of the institution. As presented in the Year Three Self-evaluation Report, the objectives of the core themes do not appear to have been constructed with consideration of the explicit goals contained in the mission. It will therefore be difficult for UNLV to provide evidence that the institution has fulfilled its mission (i.e. Standards 1.A.2 & 1.B.2). *Note: This recommendation relates to Recommendation Two in the Year One Review.*

This recommendation is still relevant and is revised as the new Recommendation 2 in this 2017 Year Seven review.

Recommendation 3: The evaluators found that substantial progress has been made by UNLV in increasing the consistency in use and implementation of assessment of learning outcomes: (i) the university has an office dedicated to assessment and has organized a variety of workshops, presentations, etc., regarding assessment, (ii) all program learning objectives are presented in a nicely organized manner, (iii) most program show evidence of having carried out assessment of learning goals and of making improvements based on resulting information. However, there was indication that although documents for all programs could be found, for a number of programs the actual substance of those document showed a lack of completeness and lack of rigorous intent that is expected of a robust assessment process. The evaluators recommend that the University continue to monitor and support the use of direct assessment of learning outcomes and to use the results of assessment for continuous improvement. *Note: This recommendation relates to previous recommendations (Recommendation One of the spring 2010)*

Comprehensive Evaluation Report based on a prior set of standards and Recommendation Three of the Year One Peer-Evaluation Report).

The Evaluation Team determined that this recommendation has been appropriately addressed. Since the last review, UNLV has continued to enhance its efforts to assess student learning outcomes. Programs submit assessment reports every year and are provided with feedback from the Office of Academic Assessment and the Academic Assessment Committee. A review of the quality of assessment reports (as documented in the institution's review rubric) indicates that significant improvement has been made in many academic programs as a result of assessment. The variety of direct assessments, coupled with action steps and efforts to "close the loop," has also become more robust. The Office of Academic Assessment has a newly created position of an academic assessment analyst to further support evaluation efforts. Therefore, Recommendation 3 of the 2013 Year-Three review has been successfully addressed.

Recommendation 4: UNLV has worked diligently and creatively to revise its General Education curriculum. The University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs) for the general education curriculum are well designed and described in detail in the Year Three Self-Evaluation Report. Because the new curriculum has not yet been offered all the way through (UNLV just completed its first year of the program), assessment of the program is just beginning. This recommendation recognizes the work done to date, encourages the campus to continue the development of general education assessment strategies, and request information on the continuous adjustment and improvement of the program in its formative years (Standard 2.C.9, 2.C.10)

This recommendation has been met with demonstrated progress in the assessment of the General Education curriculum. UNLV has an innovative four-year model that includes a First-Year Seminar, Second-Year Seminar, Milestone Experience, and Culminating Experience. The University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs) have been assessed in each of these courses, with specific findings and action steps being presented for many areas. Indirect assessments that capture first-year and senior student perspectives on the UULOs have been implemented. Direct assessments have included rubrics derived from the AAC&U Value Rubrics. The Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency was also administered to assess critical thinking and writing. Recommendation 4 of the 2013 Year Three review has been successfully addressed.

Recommendation 5: UNLV provides a wide range of services and programs to support student success. However, there appears to be little assessment of the effectiveness of those services and programs, and little evidence of the use of assessment results as a basis for improvement. The University should develop the means to determine if its activities in this area are appropriate and useful (Standard 2.D.1). Two areas requiring particular focus, because of their

importance to students, are financial aid services (2.D.8) and advising (2.D.10).

The University responded appropriately to this recommendation. Information was provided regarding comprehensive assessment of programs and services. Detailed assessment data were shared regarding student support initiatives, admissions, and financial aid. These data included, among other items, survey results regarding student satisfaction, enrollment statistics, financial aid distribution, student contacts and interactions, and achievement of specific outcomes for students utilizing support services. While some of the measures used, such as an 8-year completion rates for doctoral students, were outside the norm for similar institutions, these discrepancies were explained to the satisfaction of the Review Team. Further, the University has created a dashboard, which affords any approved campus user the opportunity to review enrollment, retention, and completion data. Recommendation 5 of the 2013 Year-Three review has been successfully addressed.

Compliment: The University has done an excellent job of responding to Recommendations 3-5 of the 2013 Year Three review.

VI. Eligibility Requirements

All twenty-four Eligibility Requirements (ER's) are satisfied by the institution. Aspects of certain ER's will be discussed in the relevant sections on Standards to follow. Specifically, comments are made pertinent to ER 3 (Mission and Core Themes), ER 22 (Student Achievement), and ER 23 (Institutional Effectiveness). Still, from the standpoint of meeting the ER's, the institution has addressed and is in compliance with all of them.

Compliment: A special note should be made regarding ER 5, Non-discrimination. UNLV has been recognized as a Minority Serving Institution and has been ranked by U.S. News and World Reports as among the nation's top ten most diverse universities for undergraduates.

VII. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard 1.A Mission

UNLV adopted a new mission statement upon the arrival of President Jessup in 2015. The Board of Regents adopted the mission statement, vision, and strategic plan (named the *Top Tier* plan) in March 2016. The mission statement is:

UNLV's diverse faculty, students, staff, and alumni promote community well-being and individual achievement through education, research, scholarship, creative activities, and clinical services. We stimulate economic development and diversification, foster a climate of innovation, promote health, and enrich the cultural viability of the communities that we serve.

The mission statement is readily accessed on the university's web site and the *Top Tier* idea has high visibility, with campus forums held regularly to describe advances toward the goal. The *Top Tier* goal is to be among the nation's top 100 universities in approximately 10 years.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

Top Tier "Pathways" serve as UNLV's Core Themes, with objectives and indicators of achievement that are connected to elements of the institution mission. An original set of Core Themes was outlined at the beginning of this review cycle in 2011, and those Core Themes were modified in 2015 in accordance with the development of the "Top Tier" strategic plan. *Top Tier* actually has five "Pathways," but only four of them are translated into Core Themes, the fifth being more of an operational direction for the University. The four Core Themes are now:

1. "Advance Student Achievement,"
2. "Promote Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity,"
3. "Create an Academic Health Center,"
4. "Foster Community Partnerships."

The Core Themes will be discussed individually in the sections to follow (Section X).

Collectively, the Core Themes manifest essential elements of the University's mission. For example, for "Promote Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity," the mission statement includes corresponding language about "individual achievement through education, research, scholarship, creative activities," as well as a commitment to "stimulate economic development and diversification." The Core Theme, "Advance Student Achievement," relates clearly to the mission statement regarding individual achievement. The Core Theme, "Create an Academic Health Center," ties directly to the section of the mission statement about health, and finally, the core theme, "Foster Community Partnerships" derives from the mission statement as well.

The new Core Themes mostly align well with those that were originally developed in 2011, with the exception of "Create an Academic Health Center." However, as we will discuss in further detail, the shift of Core Themes in 2015 has limited the institution's ability to evaluate the past seven years, given that many of the objectives and indicators changed. For some indicators of achievement, there are years of data that can be evaluated. For other Core Themes, only limited data sets exist or only plans for data collection are presented. As one example, for "Foster Community Partnerships," all three indicators still seem quite broad, making measurement challenging. These indicators are annotated with action steps that signify an intent to understand the level of the University's commitment to serving community needs, increasing service learning, and cultivate intellectual and cultural vitality, but there is no guidance on how actually to evaluate accomplishment in

these areas. This observation and other like it will form the basis of Recommendations later in the report, noting that UNLV does not have meaningful, assessable, and verifiable objectives/indicators for all of its Core Themes.

VIII. Resources and Capacity

Standard 2.A Governance

Governance (Standards 2.A.1-8): Structurally, UNLV has a governance system similar to most major public state institutions. The overall responsibility for higher education in the state resides with a Board of Regents, its thirteen members elected by the public for six-year terms. The Board President, Mr. Kevin Page, is an experienced Board member and made himself available to the Evaluation Team, demonstrating a thorough understanding of major directions in higher education both nationally and in Nevada. The Chancellor, Dr. Thom Reilly, is the professional who oversees the Nevada System of Higher Education (NHSE). Dr. Reilly just began his work as Chancellor in August of 2017, but he is a long-time member of the Las Vegas community and knows UNLV and Nevada public policy well. The Board selects the UNLV President (Dr. Len Jessup as of 2015) and evaluates that individual annually. UNLV has experienced significant turnover in the Presidency, with four different people serving in that role (one interim) since 2008. Dr. Jessup brings to his position experience as a faculty member, dean, and vice president for development. The Evaluation Team determined that Dr. Jessup is highly respected on and off-campus, and although he has been there just three years, many people expressed an appreciation of the stability, optimism, and effectiveness he brings to the campus.

Leadership and Management (Standards 2.A.9-11): The President's Cabinet is active, representative and consists of a healthy mix of people who have had a number of years of experience at UNLV and as well as others new to the institution. The Provost, for example, has been at UNLV for approximately one year. The Cabinet reflects a high degree of diversity, and serves as a model for the rest of campus in that regard. In addition, the President's Advisory Council is highly representative of the campus, including students, and meets monthly. Structurally, UNLV has a cadre of Deans, an active Faculty Senate, and ample means for organized input.

Following 2008, faculty, administrative and staff numbers collectively declined in numbers by about 19% due to financial issues. The numbers have gradually increased back to within 10% of previously high numbers (prior to the recession). Streamlining of administrative processes has resulted in a decreased number of classified staff numbers over that time period, whereas faculty and administrative numbers are about equal to what they were before the recession. Enrollment over that time period has increased a few percent (with a dip along the way). The current Fall 2017 enrollment has shown a rather dramatic increase, and if that trend continues, staffing levels will have to continue to adjust. On an FTE basis, the FY

2015 student-to-faculty ratio is approximately 20:1, quite typical for a public research university.

Academic Policies (Standards 2.A.12-14): Academic, library, and transfer of credit policies are communicated to the campus community in appropriate ways. Some policies are more difficult to gain access to than others, especially on the University's website, but all can be found through searches. Policies are clearly communicated to students in the University catalogs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Policies, including those regarding syllabi, are clearly summarized to faculty through internal memos. Complete policies are more difficult to find, being listed not on the Provost's website but on the University's "Policies" website. Library policies are available on the Libraries website, but they are not easily found, being hidden under "Services." The Wiener-Rogers Law Library provides policies on its website that are relatively easily accessible. Transfer-of-credit policies, including policies related to transfer from other NSHE schools, are easily accessible from the Admissions website. Furthermore, help in the form of checklists and links to advising is readily available.

Concern: The University is encouraged to continue making all policies readily accessible on the appropriate web site.

Students (Standard 2.A.15-17): Student policies, including rights, responsibilities, and procedures are outlined in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools catalogs. Additionally, policy workshops are offered to students in various settings throughout campus. Current policies are robust and appropriate to the campus community. The majority of information is available online; however, printed copies are also available in various offices on campus. Students reported familiarity with UNLV policies and expressed general comfort with their ability to navigate the information contained in the web sites. Student policies are updated annually with the input of constituents throughout campus.

Additionally, there is wide involvement in the student disciplinary and disability accommodation processes across both academic and administrative units. Individuals engaged in these processes are appropriately trained and appear to be highly collaborative.

The admission standards are consistent with the mission of the institution and are regularly reviewed by the UNLV Board of Regents. These standards are evolving as the University seeks to achieve goals outlined in their *Top Tier* Initiative.

Human Resources (Standard 2.A.18-20): Human resource practices, including annual evaluations, are strongly governed by UNLV and NSHE policies. However, at various points during the visit, concerns were shared with the Review Team regarding the length of time it takes to process requests and obtain services from the Human Resources department. There appears to be efforts underway by the senior leadership of the university to address these concerns.

Concern: The Evaluation Team made note of comments on several occasions that Human Resources processes can be slow and cumbersome. The University may want to work at streamlining and expediting HR matters.

Institutional Integrity (Standards 2.A.21 -26): Policies are comprehensive and readily available through web links. The policies cover ethical and behavioral matters, conflict-of-interest, intellectual property, and contractual agreements. Communications in general at UNLV are the responsibility of a University Communications office. Policy updates are overseen by a Policy Committee.

Academic Freedom (Standards 2.A.27-29): The institution strongly supports academic freedom, as outlined in the NSHE Board of Regents handbook, as well as the UNLV Human Resources home page. Academic freedom extends to research and teaching, allowing faculty to share their views without censorship or disciplinary measures. The Faculty Senate has a standing committee devoted to academic freedom, and the role of the committee is to investigate academic freedom complaints. The University also ensures academic responsibility by requiring research and teaching that avoids any form of academic misconduct. UNLV's bylaws confirm that faculty members have the freedoms of being a community citizen. The University's library policies also protect researchers' freedoms. The Office of Research Integrity provides resources and trainings to ensure that research is conducted appropriately.

Finance (Standard 2.A.30): Financial policies, procedures, budgets, progress reports, and other financial information are monitored and approved by the Board of Regents on behalf of NSHE. These policies and procedures are available to all constituents on the University website. The standard is met.

Standard 2.B Human Resources

Information shared with the Evaluation Team about the organizational structure of UNLV is consistent with national practices for this type of institution. The institution employs over 3,100 individuals in various faculty and administrative capacities, which provides sufficient resources for mission fulfillment. An online hiring process allows for numerous individuals to join the UNLV workforce each year. There are also significant professional development opportunities offered which are designed to enhance the performance of faculty and staff. Despite budget constraints, financial support for faculty awards programs and travel funding are consistently made available by the campus leadership and NHSE.

Over the last six years, the campus has been managing fluctuations in staffing levels after a reduction from almost 3,500 employees in 2008 to the current level of approximately 3,100 employees. These reductions have necessitated the elimination of some academic programs and the shifting of responsibilities for both faculty and staff.

Standard 2.C Education Resources

(Standards 2.C.1-8) UNLV demonstrated adherence to these standards. Rigor in academic programs is enhanced by the required review of new programs at three, five, and ten years, and for ongoing programs every ten years. The program and degree learning outcomes are posted on the Academic Assessment website. The requirements for all degrees are listed in the undergraduate and graduate catalogs. Academic programs submit annual assessment reports to evaluate student learning.

The faculty plays a central role in the selection of new faculty and in curriculum development. The faculty integrates library resources into their curriculum through the online course management system, WebCampus. UNLV does not award credit for prior experiential learning, and the BOR handbook provides guidelines for transfer students. Given that 10-15% of undergraduates transfer from the College of Southern Nevada (CSN), a CSN/UNLV Transfer Office was created to support these students.

Undergraduate programs (Standards 2.C.9-11): The university general education program is an integrated course of study that develops the “breadth and depth of intellect to be effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work citizenship and personal fulfillment”. The University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs) are:

- Intellectual Breadth and Lifelong Learning,
- Inquiry and Critical Thinking,
- Communication,
- Global and Multicultural Knowledge and Awareness,
- Citizenship and Ethics.

A complete description can be found in the General Education section of the undergraduate catalog and is available to students, faculty and advisors. The general education program is regularly assessed for learning outcomes with a continuous cycle of improvement. For example, the Political Science 101 assessment results indicated that students failed to reach the benchmark, mastery of concepts of separation of powers. To understand why students were struggling with the concept, a single exam item was replaced by a number of exam items involving multiple levels of learning. This example demonstrates that an iterative process of experimentation and modification for continuous improvement is ongoing.

With respect to two-year programs, the university does not offer any transfer associate degree programs. The university has a single 73-credit certificate program in Radiology where only 24 of those credit hours are general education. Furthermore, the university does not offer Bachelor of Applied Science degrees, which are four-year occupational degrees specific to workforce training. Finally, the

university has analyzed cohorts that had the revised UUOs starting in 2012 (compared to those in 2011), and found a slight increase in first-year retention rates with the exception of fall 2014, where the admission cohort was atypical.

Graduate Programs (Standards 2.C.12-15): The University's graduate programs are reflective of the mission in that they promote community well-being and individual achievement through education, research, scholarship, creative activities, and clinical services. Research/creative activity and professional programs cover a broad range of disciplines. There is some concern that half the credits for a graduate degree could be earned through undergraduate classes, thereby lessening the differential in depth of study between graduate and undergraduate programs. The University's graduate programs display appropriate focus, whether directed toward research, artistic creation, or professional practice. Requirements for scholarly activity or supervised practice exist in programs, as does support for such requirements. Policies related to Standards 2.C.13 and 2.C.14 meet those standards.

Graduate admission, retention, and transfer-of-credit policies are appropriately located at the program level, subject to University minimums. As stated earlier, the University does not allow graduate credit to be earned through experiences prior to matriculation. The faculty through a review process must approve experiential learning credit within a program, and faculty supervises such credit.

The University's graduate programs display appropriate focus, whether directed toward research, artistic creation, or professional practice. Requirements for scholarly activity or supervised practice exist in programs, as does support for such requirements.

Concern: In some programs, up to half of the credits toward a graduate degree can be earned through undergraduate classes, lessening the depth of study that distinguishes graduate work from undergraduate work.

Continuing Education and Non-Credit Programs (Standards 2.C.16-19) UNLV Division of Educational Outreach (DEO) programs appear compatible with the institution's mission and goals and clearly align with Core Themes and *Top Tier* Pathway Goals to advance student achievement and foster community engagement. The recent reorganization of the Office of Online Education to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs holds promise to offer students greater flexibility and improve connectivity to the robust student assessment efforts related to student learning and success. Great care should be given to ensure that the transition doesn't negatively affect the responsiveness of DEO programming to community partnership needs.

All DEO courses offered for credit appear to follow applicable university policies for approval and assessment of student achievement. Program approval processes engage the university senate or its relevant committees and student data are managed through the MyUNLV platform in a similar manner to any other academic course. Non-academic courses offered through UNLV Continuing Education (CE) are managed through a separate system—ACEware Student Manager—but also appear

to align with the university's mission and follow appropriate institutional approval processes and data management responsibilities.

UNLV CE is guided by generally accepted standards of the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). Standardized templates for New Certificate Programs and Course Syllabus creation presented for review contribute to a cohesive framework for CE courses, which include clearly defined learning outcomes. Evaluators suggest that UNLV explore mechanisms to better utilize CE ACEware Student Manager data to understand and articulate the impact of DEO programming on Pathway Goals/Core Themes 1 and 4.

Although it is clear that the UNLV community has embraced *Top Tier* Pathway Goals and linked them successfully to core themes, the DEO website continues to display the former university mission and core themes. The committee suggests that the website be updated promptly and that the connections between DEO programming and the new UNLV *Top Tier* mission and core themes be highlighted.

Concern: UNLV should update its Division of Educational Outreach website to reflect the new core themes associated with the Top Tier initiatives.

Standard 2.D Student Support Resources

The Division of Student Affairs offers an abundant and comprehensive array of programmatic engagement opportunities for students. These activities are appropriately tailored to the diversity of the student body and appear to be well attended and beneficial to the intended audiences. Support and accountability for the more than 300 registered student organizations also appears to be appropriate for both the undergraduate and graduate student bodies and are also consistent with the mission of the division.

There are numerous support resources available to students. Of particular note is the robust academic advising service offered for students. It is clear that considerable effort has gone into enhancing this important service and students report high satisfaction with the assistance received in this area.

The increased level of assessment undertaken by the division is laudable. Significant information was presented to document the positive impact of the Student Affairs programs on both undergraduate and graduate students. The Review Team encourages the division to continue its efforts in assessment and to expand into other areas, such as the international student experience.

Commendation: The University is to be commended for its robust assessment efforts related to student learning and success. Many faculty members engage in the multifaceted assessment of the General Education curriculum. Additionally, the level of attention paid to ensuring positive outcomes for students who utilize support services, especially students from historically

underserved populations, is particularly impressive. The thoughtful approach to academic advising in the schools and in the Academic Success Center has resulted in high student satisfaction because of positive impacts on course and major selection.

Standard 2.E Library and Information Resources

The University Libraries and the Wiener-Rogers Law Library hold and provide access to extensive library and information resources in support of the mission, core themes, programs, and services of the institution. Despite continuing inflation and other financial pressures, collections are of sufficient currency, depth, and breadth to meet the needs of faculty, staff, students, and members of the public. A variety of approaches, including patron-driven acquisitions, unmediated interlibrary loan and document delivery, and consortial partnerships have been used to expand access to library and information resources. Special Collections & Archives provides access to primary collections in support of education, research, and community engagement. Robust information technology and facilities support access to information and the libraries' role in fostering an environment of intellectual and cultural curiosity.

Many data collection tools, including LibQual+ and Ithaka S+R, are used to solicit feedback from faculty, staff, and students in support of planning for library and information resources. Subject liaisons in the University Libraries and faculty liaisons in the Wiener-Rogers Law Library engage with their communities for input on planning for resources and services.

Library faculty in the University Libraries and the Wiener-Rogers Library teach in the curriculum, extending information services into the educational life of the campus. From credit-bearing courses taught by law librarians to University Libraries course-integrated instruction linked to learning objectives, librarians enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of students in use of library and information resources. Faculty Institutes support educators in creating learning experiences that engage inquiry and critical thinking in the General Education and graduate/professional curricula, as well as enhancing pipeline programs for K-12 community partners. Library liaisons provide customized instruction and consultations in support of the expanding research mission of the university.

Through an impressive array of evaluation programs, the University Libraries perform continuous assessment of services and resources. From in-depth analysis of collections to innovative work with consortial partners to evaluate the positive impacts of library instruction on student retention and success, the University Libraries have created feedback loops to improve programs and services. Every aspect of the University Libraries strategic plan is linked to well-defined measures of success in support of institutional goals.

Compliment: The evaluators were impressed by the breadth and depth of integration of librarians in the design and delivery of curricular and other

education programs across UNLV, in both the University Libraries and the Wiener-Rogers Law Library.

Concern: Narrative and quantitative information about the Wiener-Rogers Law Library was not provided in section 2E Library and Information Resources of the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report.

Commendation: The University Libraries are commended for embedding assessment into the culture of the organization, including development of a strategic plan that explicitly links well-defined measures of success to the Core Themes / Top Tier mission.

Standard 2.F Financial Resources

The institution demonstrates sufficient financial resources in the areas of cash flow, reserves, and net position. Resource planning and development include realistic budgeting, enrollment management and projections of revenue sources, with the biennial state appropriated budget and self-supporting budgets prepared and submitted to and approved by the Board of Regents. The financial planning and budget development utilize the Top Tier strategy to guide these processes.

The institution utilizes generally accepted accounting principles and effective internal controls to report summary transactions on the unaudited financial statements. The campus and NSHE internal audit function perform compliance audits of various activities. The institution is transitioning to a new ERP System for finance, human resources, and payroll. In addition, the institution recently hired a new Vice President for Finance and Business and Chief Financial Officer. These changes are significant and are expected to enhance the financial reporting of the institution.

The institution recently presented to and received approval from the Board of Regents for a new master plan for capital projects. The document was developed utilizing the Top Tier initiative. The Board of Regents controls debt issuance, with high ratings by Moody's and Standard and Poor's. Routine equipment acquisition and replacement is "covered through salary savings within the units or by year-end funding" which is a cause for concern. The auxiliary self-supporting annual budgets approved by the Board of Regents are evidence of the definition of the financial relationship between general operations and the auxiliary enterprises. The institution's financial statements are combined with the other institutions in NSHE. The annual NSHE audit is evidenced by the report issued by the auditing firm, Grant Thornton. While the use of a consolidated audit is a cause for concern, evidence was provided in the form of unaudited financial statements and a schedule attached to the audited financial statements specific to the institution, adequately demonstrating the institutions financial health.

The Audited Financial statements document the fundraising activities of the UNLV Foundation and the policies submitted in the Self Study Appendix. The policies and

procedures as evidenced on the Foundation website indicate the purpose of the Foundation is to raise funds to support the institution's mission. The standard of financial resources is met.

Standard 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure

The physical facilities support the institution's mission by being accessible, safe, secure, and sufficient as evidenced by the customer service surveys. The Risk Management and Safety website demonstrated the adoption, and published policies and procedures regarding safe use, storage, and disposal of hazardous or toxic materials. A concern was raised in multiple open forums about the institution's ability to keep pace with the expected growth projected in the Top Tier. This concern was addressed by the master plan.

Equipment is replaced as needed with available departmental funds consistent with funding sources as evidenced by verbal verification of comments in the Self Study. The institution is undergoing a four-year upgrade of four separate software systems, offloading server storage to an independent third party, and upgrading switch, servers, data centers, and wireless systems. Appropriate instruction and support for faculty, staff, students and administrators in the effective use of technology is evidenced by the OIT website. The 2017 Information Technology master plan is evidence of the technology infrastructure planning developed from input from staff and constituencies. The 2017 Information Technology master plan describes the replacement plan to ensure technological infrastructure. The standard of physical and technological infrastructure is met.

IX. Planning and Implementation

Standard 3.A Institutional Planning

The campus has gone through various iterations of planning and varying degrees of planning effectiveness during the timeframe of this review. Beginning in 2009, the campus was operating under a plan called, *Focus: 50 to 100*. In 2013, the plan migrated to a form called *Tier One*, which in 2015 became *Top Tier*, the current plan. The Board of Regents has now officially approved *Top Tier*. The process of planning was widely inclusive of campus and has had high visibility on campus and beyond. The plan is readily available to the public through the web site. The number of people involved in developing and monitoring the *Top Tier* plan is impressive. *Top Tier* is built around five Pathways, four of which have become the Core Themes for UNLV beginning in 2015, as described in detail below.

Commendation: UNLV is to be commended for developing a thorough and forward-looking strategic plan entitled "Top Tier." The plan has stimulated great enthusiasm and excitement for the trajectory of the institution. The development and implementation of "Top Tier" has involved a large number of constituents and is therefore well known across the campus. The plan has

brought a high degree of unity for UNLV and its constituents.

The institution utilized data effectively in the comprehensive planning process for the *Top Tier* initiative. However, as will be a recurrent theme in the Core Theme descriptions to follow, evaluation of the institution's plan and progress has been hampered by two major factors: 1) indicators for the various objectives are either not well-defined or not verifiable; and 2) data quality has been an issue in assembling a complete and reliable narrative that is supported by analysis and reflection. In response to these observations, the Evaluation Team forwards the following recommendations:

Recommendation: A significant disconnect exists between the current Top Tier strategic effort and the accreditation process. The Commission recommends that the two processes be effectively integrated so that meaningful assessment of progress and mission fulfillment on the Top Tier initiatives can inform the accreditation process. A robust and detailed accounting of the progress on accreditation core themes should be presented in an organized manner so as to accurately assess and demonstrate mission fulfillment. (Standards 1.A.2, 3.A.1, 3.A.3 5.A.1, 5.A.2)

Recommendation: The University's lack of accurate data was noted and appears to have hindered decision-making, planning, and assessment efforts. The institution is encouraged to ensure that accurate data are available to all appropriate constituents. (Standards 3.A.3, 3.B.3)

Core Theme Planning, Effectiveness, and Improvement

Core Theme 1: Advance Student Achievement

Introduction – Core Theme 1: Advance Student Achievement incorporates essential elements of UNLV's mission, and virtually all sectors of the campus have engaged to move this core theme forward. Enhancing student success has long been a priority at UNLV, and this emphasis has increased in recent years. Core theme 1 was changed in 2015 from Student Learning and Success, which is conceptually similar to Advance Student Achievement. The objectives and indicators were changed as well.

Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning – The University has made investments to improve first-year retention and six-year completion rates by hiring a Retention, Progression, and Completion (RPC) Advisor in each unit (college). Many other advising and student success efforts have been implemented in recent years. A higher retention and graduation rate is also being addressed through the recruitment of higher quality students. The increase in enrollment standards and the growth in honor student enrollment will provide a foundation for higher retention and graduation rates.

It should be pointed out that detailed targets for reaching an 85% first-year retention rate were not delineated into milestones, but simply given as 85% by 2025 along with a 50% six-year graduation rate in 2025 as well. The University would benefit from dividing this goal into measurable milestones between now and 2025. Also, the second objective relates to increases in both graduate and undergraduate full time FTE. The undergraduate FTE goal for 2025 is to reach 22,186, with a schedule based on a 4% enrollment increase between 2018-20 and a 2% increase between 2020-26.

Standard 4.A Assessment – The University regularly assesses its programs using verifiable data in the Student Achievement sections of the Top Tier document. The university has ten key measures of success, two of which are common with those of Core Theme 1 - Advance Student Achievement. The other eight indicators are specific, are easily measurable, and are related to those in Core Theme 1. The discussion with Cabinet members revealed the rationale for relying exclusively on freshman retention rates and six-year graduation rates as indicators for objective 1. The idea is that if the freshman retention rates and six-year graduation rates are improving, then that will encompass the other eight indicators in the *Top Tier* document. Hence, the university is involved in regular assessment of Core Theme 1 in a somewhat indirect way. The committee suggests that the University improve the linkage between the *Top Tier* indicators and those of the Core Theme 1.

Standard 4.B Improvement – The university is currently assessing Core Theme 1 through a number of meaningful indicators of achievement. For example, the six-year graduation rate for non-minority alternate admit students was analyzed and found to be negatively impacting six-year graduation rates to a significant extent, while receiving the full benefit of the Academic Success Centers resources. For the overall student body, the data show that for the past seven years, both the six-year undergraduate graduation rate and the first-year retention rate have been essentially flat, suggesting that fulfillment of the Core Theme was unsuccessful over that past seven years. Given that Core Theme 1 is in its early stages of the assessment/improvement cycle, the committee is hopeful that this will yield improvement in the years to come.

Core Theme 2: Promote Research, Scholarship, Creative Activity

Introduction – Core Theme 2: Promote Research, Scholarship, Creative Activity is clearly identified as an essential element of UNLV's *Top Tier* mission and an important aspect of any successful public research university. Associated "Pathway Goals" adequately serve as required NWCCU Core Themes, but the significant change from previously identified "objectives" and "indicators of achievement" makes it very difficult to conduct meaningful assessment of "accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes" during the past accreditation cycle (1.B.2).

Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning – The "Top Tier" strategic plan has clearly galvanized the UNLV community into action and institutional aspirations to improve

academic success, research productivity, and community impact are palpable. Planning for Core Theme 2 is evident and clearly influencing resource allocations and key policy discussions—such as faculty professional responsibilities—that will contribute to the accomplishment of the key objective. Community engagement in the Top Tier planning process through its many committees and subcommittees increases the likelihood of longevity and success. Given the significant changes in core themes, objectives, and achievement indicators in the past evaluation cycle, it is important that the institution develop a consistent set of objectives and key indicators that clearly reflect its mission and contribute to the assessment of mission fulfillment.

The three indicators of achievement identified for Core Theme 2, research expenditures, patent applications, and doctoral graduates, are important metrics but do not appear to account for the breadth of activities within Core Theme 2. The institution should consider additional or alternative metrics that incorporate scholarly and creative activity more clearly. Evaluators also note the importance of establishing and collecting “appropriately defined data” to evaluate achievement of the key objective (3.B.3). Research expenditure data presented in the 2017 self-evaluation report appear to increase significantly without a clear explanation or attribution, and conflict with other data presented on the university website and in other submitted materials.

Standard 4.A Assessment and 4.B Improvement – The change from core themes and objectives established in 2011 to those established through the *Top Tier* strategic planning process (2015) make an evaluation of Standard 4.A *Assessment* and Standard 4.B *Improvement* difficult. Data associated with 2011 objectives and indicators of achievement were not provided for review, and the institution’s self-evaluation does not reflect on assessment of earlier indicators. Still, it is clear that the institution has established a process for review and assessment of objectives and key indicators associated with the Top Tier initiative, and the evaluation team applauds the assessment framework that appears to be in place moving forward.

Evaluators encourage the institution to utilize the “results of core theme assessments” in the future to continuously improve performance by “informing planning, decision making, and allocation of resources and capacity” (4.B.2).

Core Theme 3: Create an Academic Health Center

Introduction – As noted earlier, *Core Theme 3: Create an Academic Health Center* was introduced in 2015 as a new Pathway Goal / Core Theme in the *Top Tier* strategic plan. The core theme has one objective: creating a medical school that is fully accredited by 2021. It was noted during the visit that additional objectives are being considered that will broaden this Core Theme to health/medical areas beyond the medical school.

Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning – The proposed programs and services of the UNLV School of Medicine will have a positive impact on the health of Southern Nevada, which is consistent with the institution’s purpose and comprehensive plan. Administrators and faculty conducted extensive analysis of peer institutions and trends in medical education to design an innovative curriculum. Initial planning for an ambitious portfolio of research grants and contracts has led to the hiring of personnel with experience supporting clinical and health sciences research.

Standard 4.A Assessment – The institution has identified a clear timeline and metrics for accomplishing the first indicator of achievement, which is establishing a fully Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) accredited medical school by 2021. Other indicators of achievement are targeted for completion in 2025 and 2030, and do not have interim milestones that occur during the current NWCCU evaluation cycle.

Standard 4.B Improvement – The institution is closely tracking progress toward LCME accreditation, and has achieved the first milestone on schedule. Learning outcomes of the first cohort of 60 students, who matriculated in fall 2017, are being tracked with bi-weekly testing based on the USMLE question bank. Other milestones are difficult to assess at this time without interim targets. However, it was noted that the second indicator, hiring 120 faculty members by 2030, has already been achieved. UNLV should be commended for designing an innovative medical school curriculum that integrates problem-based clinical learning with cutting edge technology to prepare physicians to provide compassionate care in community settings.

Commendation: UNLV is commended for opening a medical school based upon an innovative curriculum that integrates problem-based clinical learning with cutting edge technology to prepare physicians who will provide compassionate care in Nevada communities.

Core Theme 4: Foster Community Relationships

Introduction – Core Theme 4: Foster Community Partnerships arises from the close connection the university and the community have forged throughout UNLV’s existence. Its purpose is to strengthen that connection through identification of community needs, creation of programs that help address those needs, expansion of curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students to serve the community, and contribution to the community’s intellectual and cultural vitality.

The University has a long tradition of engagement with the community, one that dates to its founding. The University continues to have a high level of engagement as it broadens its program offerings and remains committed to increasing the well-being of the communities in which it is located, through curricula, co-curricular, and outreach activities.

Standard 3.B Core Theme Planning – Foster Community Partnerships is consistent with the University's *Top Tier* strategic plan goal. However, the Core Theme objective and indicators are not consistent with objectives and indicators in the *Top Tier* strategic plan. For example, service learning is mentioned prominently in the Pathway Goal/Core Theme; however, it is not to be found in the *Top Tier* strategic plan (although it is in the action plan for 2016-17). Conversely, the strategic plan has more detailed discussions of and objectives related to economic development than does the Pathway Goal/Core Theme. The University has formed a new Office of Community Engagement, which provides an intentional planning structure. The Office is currently engaged in data gathering preparatory to identifying specific objectives, which will then lead to appropriate data, but this has not been accomplished as of this report.

Standard 4.A Assessment – The University has a robust planning and assessment process, with all organizational levels involved in both planning and budgeting, comprehensive assessment documents submitted annually by non-academic departments, and quarterly data gathering related to Core Themes. However, for Pathway Goal/Core Theme 4, there are few meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data that have been collected, as the objective and indicators do not point to such data. Such data have been collected for objectives in the *Top Tier* strategic plan, but these need to be analyzed and translated for accreditation reporting.

Standard 4.B Improvement – For Core Theme 4, no evidence is presented that allows the review team to judge whether results of assessments are based on meaningful indicators of achievement, used for improvement by informing planning, decision making, and the allocation of resources. No indicators identified in the report allow evaluation on progress to date on this Core Theme.

Recommendation: Although UNLV has outlined a strong set of Core Themes, progress was difficult to evaluate, given that Core Themes and indicators were modified in 2015, and targets were not provided for 2017. The evidence related to assessment and improvement of these Core Themes is still lacking, particularly for the Core Themes related to the Academic Health Center and Community Partnerships. To address these concerns, UNLV should refine its indicators so that effective assessment can occur regularly in the future. (Standards 1.B.2, 4.A.1, 4.A.4, 4.B.1)

X. Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability

Standard 5.A Mission Fulfillment

Section 5A of the self-study is rather superficial and lacks significant synthesis, analysis, or reflection. It reports in summary form progress on indicators, but even especially for the Community theme and the Academic Health Center theme, indicators are at a preliminary stage.

The recent flux in terms of defining goals and indicators is evident in the lack of thoroughness in this section. Basically, a new set of Themes, with objectives and indicators, was adopted in 2015. Many of the previous indicators are no longer tracked, and the new indicators have been tracked only since 2015. Consequently, the Evaluation Team often had difficulty meshing the two, and therefore conducting a thorough evaluation of the seven-year timeframe. The Universities process of determining mission fulfillment therefore appears to be more at the beginning stages than that of a mature, seven-year review.

UNLV did provide to its Board of Regents in 2016 a fairly comprehensive presentation on *Top Tier* accomplishments, well organized and containing data. The institution provided the Evaluation Team with all of that material during the site visit, which helped a great deal in understanding the transition from one set of themes to another, and which demonstrated progress toward meeting goals. Nonetheless, the relatively recent of adoption (2015) of those themes, goals, and indicators still made it difficult to conduct a clear longitudinal examination of progress.

The Evaluation Team does believe, based on the evidence it saw, that the institution is on a solid track toward operating around a solid strategic plan. Again, the presence of *Top Tier* was felt throughout the visit. With a thorough updating according the recommendation here, we believe that mission fulfillment will be clearly evident.

Standard 5.B Adaptation and Sustainability

The University developed the *Top Tier* Mission, Pathway Goals, and comprehensive plans for facilities and information technology over a two-year period. The *Top Tier* is utilized to routinely determine the adequacy of resources, resource allocation, space, institutional capacity, emerging patterns and trends, programs and services.

With respect to Standard 5.B., the institution took an important and bold step in 2015 in completely rethinking its mission statement, its core themes, and related objectives and indicators. While that step may have made it somewhat difficult for the Evaluation Team to conduct its analysis, the University will be stronger in the long run for having taken this step. The broad participation from the campus in developing a clear direction, combined with a strengthening resource base as the state and institution continue its recovery, its growing size and position in the community, and its energized new leadership, position the institution for a sustainable and successful future.

XI. Summary

UNLV is at a dynamic point. Considering that it is a relatively young institution that has grown dramatically in size, mission, and aspiration over a matter of 60 years, the University is on a highly positive trajectory. Attention to the Commendations

and Recommendations below will help the University track its progress and report to its constituents and to the NWCCU.

XII. Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

1. UNLV is to be commended for developing a thorough and forward-looking strategic plan entitled “Top Tier.” The plan has stimulated great enthusiasm and excitement for the trajectory of the institution. The development and implementation of “Top Tier” has involved a large number of constituents and is therefore well known across the campus. The plan has brought a high degree of unity for UNLV and its constituents.
2. The University is to be commended for its robust assessment efforts related to student learning and success. Many faculty members engage in the multifaceted assessment of the General Education curriculum. Additionally, the level of attention paid to ensuring positive outcomes for students who utilize support services, especially students from historically underserved populations, is particularly impressive. The thoughtful approach to academic advising in the schools and in the Academic Success Center has resulted in high student satisfaction because of positive impacts on course and major selection.
3. UNLV is commended for opening a medical school based upon an innovative curriculum that integrates problem-based clinical learning with cutting edge technology to prepare physicians who will provide compassionate care in Nevada communities.
4. The University Libraries are commended for embedding assessment into the culture of the organization, including development of a strategic plan that explicitly links well-defined measures of success to the Top Tier strategic plan.
5. The University is to be commended for its compassionate responses to the tragic events of October 1. Those responses, by students, staff, and faculty, exemplify the engagement with the community that has existed from the University’s beginnings and that the strategic plan seeks to increase and enhance.

Recommendations:

1. A significant disconnect exists between the current Top Tier strategic effort and the accreditation process. The Commission recommends that the two processes be effectively integrated so that meaningful assessment of progress and mission fulfillment on the Top Tier initiatives can inform the accreditation process. A robust and detailed accounting of the progress on accreditation core themes should be presented in an organized manner so as to accurately assess and demonstrate mission fulfillment. (Standards 1.A.2, 3.A.1, 3.A.3 5.A.1, 5.A.2)

2. Although UNLV has outlined a strong set of Core Themes, progress was difficult to evaluate, given that Core Themes and indicators were modified in 2015, and targets were not provided for 2017. The evidence related to assessment and improvement of these Core Themes is still lacking, particularly for the Core Themes related to the Academic Health Center and Community Partnerships. To address these concerns, UNLV should refine its indicators so that effective assessment can occur regularly in the future. (Standards 1.B.2, 4.A.1, 4.A.4, 4.B.1)

3. The university's lack of accurate data was noted and appears to have hindered decision-making, planning, and assessment efforts. The institution is encouraged to ensure that accurate data are available to all appropriate constituents. (Standards 3.A.3, 3.B.3)