



REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM SPECIAL VISIT

**To: The Fashion Institute of
Design and Merchandising (FIDM)**

March 3-5, 2021 (virtual)

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The Team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Description of Institution, Accreditation History, and Visit

FIDM/Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising is a proprietary degree-granting college. The President of FIDM is Tonian Hohberg, who founded the school in 1969. Since its founding, FIDM has offered educational programs in fashion design, marketing, and related fields with an emphasis on graduating students who are career ready. FIDM's original campus in Los Angeles started by offering Associate of Arts (AA) degrees. Over time, FIDM's offerings expanded and now include a range of degree programs such as apparel industry management, interior design, menswear, costume design, and visual communication. In 2005, FIDM offered its first Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in business management; since then, seven other BS and Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) were added. FIDM also expanded from its original campus in Los Angeles to add additional campuses in San Francisco (1973), Orange County (1981) and San Diego (1985). The San Francisco campus offered AA, BS, and BA degree programs; the Orange County and San Diego campuses offered AA programs. FIDM also offers several fully online degree programs.

With the addition of the BS and BA degrees, the accrediting body for FIDM moved from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and University Commission (WSCUC) in 2013. In granting initial accreditation, the 2013 Commission letter to President Hohberg noted three areas that warranted attention. The first area involved its governing structure and policies. In particular, the letter stated that there needed to be "appropriate delegations of authority and autonomy by the owners to the Board, which WASC holds responsible for compliance with the Standards" and the development of Governing Board committees with appropriately qualified members. The second area involved faculty engagement. The Commission letter indicated that FIDM should explore faculty organizational models at peer institutions and develop a faculty governance structure that more fully integrates the faculty into decision making processes. "The collective voice of the faculty can only make the institution stronger." The third area involved the need for FIDM to respond to the needs of non-traditional students and students in the Professional Designation Program.

In fall 2018, FIDM hosted a visiting team for reaffirmation of accreditation. As part of the review, the team members visited each of the FIDM campuses. The team report and the 2019 Commission Letter had five recommendations, which included two areas identified in 2013. Although FIDM had developed bylaws for the Board, the team and the WSCUC Commission stated that the Governing Board did not appear to be fulfilling its charge. The report also stated that FIDM needed "to expand the role of the faculty in institutional governance, academic oversight, and decision making."

In addition to these two recurring themes, the team noted that FIDM had multi-year decline in enrollment followed by loss in net income; FIDM was advised to create a turn-around plan that would be immediately implemented by the Governing Board and the Board of Administration. The team also noted that the institution should increase transparency and communication to all its constituents and adopt best practices in reporting financial, enrollment, administrative decision making, and changes to institutional

policies and procedures. The last area involved making public data on student completion and job placement.

Since the 2018 visit, student enrollment has continued to decline and FIDM has incurred financial deficits since 2016-17. The global pandemic has contributed to these trends. However, the enrollment declines started a decade ago. The institutional leadership has moved slowly in taking necessary steps to cut costs and to look for new ways to increase enrollment and revenue streams. In a special meeting of the Governing Board on September 3, 2019, the Board approved a plan to close the San Diego campus in Fall 2020. At that same meeting, the Board also moved to enroll only first-year students at the San Francisco campus beginning winter of 2020 with the intent of closing that campus in 2021. Following that meeting, FIDM submitted teach-out plans for those campuses. The San Diego campus closed September 2020 and the San Francisco campus is slated to close in August 2021.

Description of Team's Review Process

The team reviewed FIDM's Self-Study and the supplementary materials prior to the virtual visit. From these materials, the team requested additional documentation from FIDM, including updated enrollment and financial data, as well as planning documents; some materials were received prior to the visit.

During the virtual visit, the team met with students, faculty, and staff, and had the opportunity to speak with members of the FIDM Governing Board and industry experts who serve as adjudicators for reviewing student projects.

The remote visit was organized into five broad areas, structured around the various issues noted in the Commission Action Letter and the identified CFRs. The areas were Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes, Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources; Integrity and Transparency; and Institutional Purposes Financial Sustainability; Assessment and Use of Data; and Leadership. Each team member was assigned as lead for one area with an assigned second reader for each as well.

The team conducted interviews and meetings with senior leadership, Finance (including the Audit Manager), Marketing, Enrollment, Institutional Effectiveness, Co-Curricular areas, and Academic Affairs. Open meetings were held separately with faculty, staff, and students. A list of those attending the meetings is available (if needed). Before and after meetings, the team spent time in the virtual workrooms sharing findings and discovery of various issues, raising additional questions, and requesting documents and data supporting statements in the report. Additionally, the confidential email account was checked daily with some significant responses during the visit. This report is organized around the five areas, with an additional section for any new concerns or issues the team found. Each section begins with the issues as defined in the 2018 Action Letter.

The commendations and recommendations in this report were developed based the team's evaluation of the evidence provided.

Institution's Special Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

The Special Report was organized along five recommendations the institution received from its reaffirmation visit in 2018. In addition to the recommendations, the institution included an institutional context section focusing on major changes since the 2018 visit, and added a section identifying other changes and issues.

The report included supporting documents in an appendix. The report contained all required components and provided a contoured view and current perspective of FIDM. The materials showed FIDM's commitment to provide a high-quality education to its students.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

Issue 1: Standard 3; CFR 3.9 [Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes]

Standard 3: The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through investments in human, physical, fiscal, technological, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high-quality environment for learning.

CFR 3.9: The institution has an independent governing board or similar authority that, consistent with its legal and fiduciary authority, exercises appropriate oversight over institutional integrity, policies, and ongoing operations, including hiring and evaluating the chief executive officer.

Issue 1: WSCUC Standards call for "an independent governing board ... that exercises appropriate oversight over institutional integrity, policies, and ongoing operations." The governing body is to be comprised of members with the diverse qualifications required to govern an institution of higher learning. Since the last accreditation review, FIDM has developed a set of bylaws for the Governing Board. As provided in the bylaws, the responsibilities of the Board include review of academic programs, provision of legal counsel, succession planning, and review and oversight of operating budgets to ensure fiscal sustainability. In the Commission's view, the Board does not appear to be in full compliance with WSCUC Standards. The Board should be expanded to include members with diverse qualifications, specifically with higher education, legal, and financial expertise, who can provide leadership and commitment to help the Board fulfill its responsibilities regarding independent oversight (CFR 3.9).

As noted in the overview of this report, Board governance has been an area of noted concern in both the 2013 and 2018 accreditation reviews. Unfortunately, the team found that FIDM governance continues to be an area in which FIDM is not in full compliance the WSCUC standards for accreditation. In arriving at this conclusion, the team met with Board members and reviewed copies of the minutes from recent Board meetings as well as the minutes from meetings of the Finance, Audit, Academic Affairs, and Nominating committees.

The FIDM bylaws state that as a for-profit corporation, the “Governing Board represents the corporation for institutional and education policy matters.” The responsibilities of the FIDM Board are enumerated in the bylaws of the Board and include reviewing and approving academic programs, student outcomes, annual operating budgets, and institutional planning. Although these responsibilities are clearly stated, there appear to be a range of opinions among Board members on the role of the Board in executing its mission and the role of the owners of FIDM. Without a collective understanding of the Board’s responsibilities combined with other issues, as described in the paragraphs below, the team felt that the Board was ill-positioned to fulfill its charge in providing the necessary leadership that FIDM needs at this critical time. The team concluded that FIDM was not in compliance with the WSCUC Standard.

A key area involves fiduciary oversight. Although the full Governing Board meets four times per year, the Board’s committees, such as the Finance Committee, typically meet only once per year. In reviewing minutes of both the Finance Committee and the Governing Board, the team did not see a process in which the full Board considers and approves an annual budget. In fact, the minutes did not show any discussion of the budgeting process to ensure that the budget is based on sound projections for the upcoming year. In discussions with Board members, members acknowledged that there is not a formal vote to approve the annual budget. Several Board members indicated that they communicate informally with FIDM’s leadership and that they have been made aware of the financial issues facing FIDM, including the declines in enrollment. Board members also noted that they were involved in decisions on not renewing spaces leased by FIDM and in deciding to sell a key piece of real estate. The Board, however, was not involved in creating or approving FIDM’s updated “Turnaround Plan 2019-21”. In addition, Board members were not aware that multi-year budget deficits are not consistent with the guidelines of the WSCUC Standards for Accreditation. The FIDM Board needs a process in which members take ownership of the annual budget and the overall financial outlook of FIDM.

Besides the budget, the team also noted that the Audit Committee did not have a process to review and approve FIDM’s audited financial statements. The Audit Committee typically meets once per year. The recent meetings, however, did not include direct feedback with the individuals who conducted the audit. During the review team’s visit, one of the team members spoke with the auditor by phone. The auditor indicated an interest in meeting directly with members of the Audit Committee in the future. Regarding the Academic Affairs Committee, the Board should be reviewing and approving academic programs and changes to those programs. Based on the minutes that were provided to the visiting team, the Academic Affairs Committee was not involved in reviewing the processes that led to the decisions to close the two campuses. Based on recommendations from the FIDM administration, the full Board voted on the closures in 2019 and 2020.

In the past two years, the Nominating Committee has recommended and approved two new Board members. One individual is an experienced attorney who is also a CPA; the second new member is a retired accountant, whose firm had, prior to 2020, audited FIDM financial statements over several decades. Although several Board members have experience in working with post-secondary institutions, none of the members, except for the current FIDM President, has worked as a faculty member or an administrator in higher education or served on a governing body (such as a board of trustees) for a post-

secondary institution in a capacity in which they oversaw institutional leadership, budgets, academic programs, or accreditation processes. Currently, the Governing Board has 10 members in addition to the President. The bylaws limit membership to a total of 14. Hence, several new members can be added.

An additional responsibility of the Board involves the review and evaluation of the President of FIDM. As noted in the bylaws, the President is elected by the Governing Board and serves as a voting, ex officio member of the Board. In the past year, the evaluation of the President involved a short survey of Board members. The Board is strongly encouraged to develop a more robust structure to evaluate the President based on input from other stakeholders and on metrics that reflect FIDM's goals, values, and prospects for the future.

The team also recommends that the FIDM Governing Board consult the WSCUC's Governing Board Policy, especially regarding the fulfillment of Board responsibilities. As noted above, the FIDM Governing Board needs to adhere to best practices regarding an annual review of the budget and audited financial statements. In addition, the Board should develop a Board self-review process to ensure that the Board duties and responsibilities are being fulfilled, create a robust nomination process that brings in new members with needed skills and experience, and engage in processes that enable the Board to provide broad oversight of FIDM's academic mission. Importantly, the Board also needs to demonstrate leadership to ensure the sustainability and long-term health of the institution, including a critical and constructive process for evaluating the President and the adoption of best practices in hiring key positions, such as a commitment to nationwide searches.

Issue 2 Standard 3; CFR 3.4 [Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources]

Standard 3: The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through investments in human, physical, fiscal, technological, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high-quality environment for learning.

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

Issue 2: FIDM has experienced a multi-year decline in enrollment that has been accompanied by reductions in revenue and net income. The Commission is extremely concerned about the sustainability of the institution. FIDM is advised to create a concrete turn-around plan based on realistic actions that can be immediately implemented by the Governing Board and Board of Administration (CFR 3.4).

The financial sustainability of FIDM was noted as a major concern by the Commission after the 2018 accreditation review, particularly related to persistent declines in enrollment that have resulted in

reductions in revenue and net income that began following FIDM receiving initial accreditation in August 2013 (FIDM Key Indicator Reports). Unfortunately, this downward trend has continued, despite significant cuts to the operational budget and the sale of a significant asset. As a result, the team has determined that FIDM is not in full compliance with the WSCUC standards for accreditation in this area.

In addition to the information provided by FIDM in the context of the December 2020 Institutional Report, the team reviewed the available documents related to evaluating FIDM's financial status. This included, but was not limited to, current and historical enrollment data, annual audited financial statements for FYE2020 and prior years to FYE2017, internally prepared current year-to-date financial statements, and FIDM's multi-year financial plan with projections through FY2023-24. The team also interviewed members of the Governing Board, the Board Finance and Audit Committees, the Board of Administration, and the fiscal operations team. The manager of the new (as of FY2019) external audit firm that recently completed the FY2020 audit was interviewed as well.

Since the 2018 accreditation review, FIDM has made major cuts to the operating budget of approximately (\$10MM) including layoffs of personnel, suspension of certain under enrolled programs, the shuttering of the San Diego and San Francisco campuses, and selling a major property near the Los Angeles campus (FY2019 & FY2020 Audits, Dec 31, 2020 FS Proj FYE2021). While the financial impact of some of these efforts have not yet been fully realized (such as the attempt to renegotiate the lease of the SD campus), taking these into consideration in the multi-year financial plan, FIDM expects at least three more years of deficits even while projecting an average of 8% increases annually in enrollment for FY2021-22 through FY2023-24 (Multi-year Financial Projections document).

FIDM did not provide the team with a "turn-around plan" in the evidence provided with the December 2020 Institutional Report. However, with the additional documents requested by the team, a document "FIDM Turnaround Plan 2019/2021 Updates" was provided to "...update the WSCUC team on the progress that has been made on its turnaround plan since the 2018 visit." In this document dated 02/26/2021 and the December 2020 Institutional Report, FIDM acknowledges its agreement with the Commission that "...sustainability is not just a function of enrollment numbers. It is also a function of achieving an optimal alignment between projected income and projected expenses, including balancing expenses for plan and physical capacity against anticipated enrollments."

The team appreciates the seriousness with which FIDM approached this matter, making some very difficult decisions resulting in the closure of two campuses, the release of underutilized leased space, and the sale of other valuable property. However, FIDM is still projecting a loss of (\$10MM) for FY2020-21, (\$5MM) for FY2021-22, and (\$1.6MM) for FY2022-23. In discussions with FIDM leadership, the team learned that there are additional budget cuts planned for 2021; however, they were not yet defined or quantified in a way that could be shared with the team. The team is very concerned that the significant gap between institutional income and expenses for the current and projected future years has not been eliminated and that even the projected deficit years of the financial plan are based upon reaching enrollment growth targets of around 8% each year that are not based on historical trends (Multi-year Financial Projections document).

Through review of the audited financial statements and interviews with staff, the team learned that FIDM has pending financial matters that may have significant impact to the operational budget in the coming years. Of particular concern is a pending legal matter and the scheduled maturity of long-term debt of \$28MM in FY2024, the first year in the multi-year financial plan showing a projected surplus. However, this debt is presumed to be refinanced in the financial projections. The ability to refinance this debt may be in jeopardy if the financial position of FIDM does not improve. Neither of these matters are accounted for in the multi-year financial plan budgets.

Ultimately, FIDM has continued to function with yearly deficits and is projected to continue with deficits for (at least) the current (FY2021) and following two years (FY2022-FY2023). While the challenges of COVID are real and acknowledged, FIDM did not create and implement a turn-around plan based on realistic actions to eliminate the deficit. FIDM is advised to take the necessary steps to eliminate the deficit and establish short-term financial stability to support realistic enrollment growth goals for longer-term sustainability.

As the team met with various FIDM groups, it learned that knowledge of the specifics of the financial status of FIDM was restricted to the members of the Board of Administration. Members of the Governing Board, specifically, the Audit and Finance committees had some general knowledge, but did not have intimate knowledge of the current fiscal year status, projected fiscal year-end or the multi-year financial plan. Members of staff and faculty were generally aware that FIDM has had financial challenges, particularly as it resulted in layoffs, campus closures, and salaries that have not increased in some years. As discussed previously in this report, the team is concerned at the lack of fiscal oversight by the Governing Board and its committees. The team is also concerned that FIDM lacks processes that allow and facilitate transparency, including the appropriate dissemination of critical information across the institution. FIDM must ensure that established processes and procedures are followed to ensure transparency regarding the financial position of the institution at appropriate levels.

According to the "FIDM Turnaround Plan" 2019/2021 Updates" FIDM continues to adjust their recruitment and enrollment plans to better address the issue of declining enrollments. In particular, "...FIDM has created a long-term plan to expand its degree options and broaden its entry pathways in an effort to widen the field of qualified applicants to include upper-division transfer students" (1). FIDM reported that "in 2019, transfer students made up 33% of the FIDM student body" and that "the transfer population was down to 11.5% for 2020, an effect the institution attributes to the impact of the pandemic on community college populations" (2). The team applauds these efforts to reach the transfer student market but realizes that it will take some time (cycles) for FIDM to understand the effectiveness of these strategies and whether the pre-pandemic levels can become the new expected norm.

FIDM enrollment and recruitment team provided an updated enrollment funnel showing 2018 through 2020 actual results and the projected goals for 2021. It is notable that the report shows actual results of 778 matriculants for 2020 based on a 38% yield of applications > enrolled, and 67% yield of enrolled > matriculated. The projected 2021 yield is expected to result in 950 matriculated (an increase of 22% over 2020) based on a 42% yield of applications > enrolled, and 75% yield of enrolled > matriculated. These projected 2021 yield percentages reflect the 2019 actual results not the most current year 2020. The

monthly enrollments report for January 2021 shows the enrollments at 132 lagging slightly (12.5%) behind 151 at the same time last year in 2020 (no information provided for January 2019). Because the yield percentages from 2019 are being used, the projected 2021 enrollments should be tracked against 2019 and not 2020 enrollment. While the team appreciates FIDM's optimism in basing the 2021 enrollment off pre-pandemic 2019 numbers, no one can be certain of the ongoing impact of the pandemic on future enrollments, whether they will continue to be depressed for some time or if they might rebound because of pent-up demand; it seems imprudent, therefore, to base financial projections on growth metrics above what is currently known.

FIDM's document "2021 Marketing Assessment/Planning: Goals, Challenges, Opportunities & Planned Programs" outlined the institutions response to the challenges for marketing and recruitment presented by the pandemic. The team was impressed to see the ways in which FIDM has adapted their recruitment and marketing efforts within the context of the pandemic restrictions. Many of these new strategies for outreach and engagement have proven valuable, reaching far more potential students than previous in-person only events. FIDM has embraced such approaches, intending to build on these successes. Additionally, the ability for FIDM to carefully track and evaluate these various points in the recruitment process via the Salesforce system provides a way to assess effectiveness of strategies and pivot accordingly "in order to streamline workflow and maximize yield" (2).

In addition to adopting a new integrated procurement system and exploring more robust payroll and human resource information systems, FIDM has been engaged in the transition to a new comprehensive student management system from their old legacy system. This new system "is in the final stages of deployment and, like the procurement software, is expected to offer operational efficiencies and significantly-enhanced access to real-time student progress data for staff" (FIDM Turnaround Plan p. 2). FIDM is to be commended for adopting more robust and integrated information systems across the institution, bringing greater operational efficiencies and greater reliability of data.

Issue 3 Standard 1; CFR 1.7 [Integrity and Transparency]

Standard 1: The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with those purposes. The institution has a clear and explicit sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in both the higher education community and society, and its contribution to the public good. It functions with integrity, transparency, and autonomy.

CFR 1.7: The institution exhibits integrity and transparency in its operations, as demonstrated by the adoption and implementation of appropriate policies and procedures, sound business practices, timely and fair responses to complaints and grievances, and regular evaluation of its performance in these areas. The institution's finances are regularly audited by qualified independent auditors.

Issue 3: The institution should increase transparency and communication to all its constituents. FIDM is advised to adopt best practices in financial and enrollment reporting, administrative decision making, data reporting, and changes to institutional policies and procedures (CFR 1.7)

In the 2019 Commission Action letter to FIDM, the institution was asked to increase transparency in its decision-making and reporting processes. The visiting team reviewed the 2020 Progress Report to WSCUC, and the 2020 Special Visit Report. While these reports demonstrated plans and decisions, there was no evidence of transparency or collaboration in these decisions. For example, FIDM made the decision to close two additional locations (San Diego and San Francisco); however, there were no detailed plans distributed or discussed with the campuses. The team asked for additional documentation as well as a decision tree or a committee report that could document the transparency in the decision-making process. The team also asked about the closures in meetings with various constituents and received feedback from those groups.

The team could not conclusively determine first, where (at what level) decisions that impact the institution and its students are being made, and second, how these decisions are being communicated back to the community at large. Additionally, it does not appear that there is representation from all constituents in the planning and decisions being made at FIDM. For example, faculty and staff reported that they did not receive the 2019 Commission Action letter to FIDM and that it was not readily accessible on the website. They also reported that they were not informed of the decision to close the San Francisco campus, with some faculty saying they heard of this through a forwarded email that students received.

While the FIDM administration believes and describes an inclusive and transparent planning and decision-making process, the faculty and staff do not appear to be fully aware and a part of these important processes. Therefore, more work needs to be done by FIDM to address the initial concern from the 2018 team report, that of working to "...increase transparency and communication to all its constituents." Additionally, while reporting of enrollment and program specific data has improved, reporting in other areas such as finances, administrative decision making, and changes to institutional policies and procedures (CFR 1.7), has yet to occur.

It is important that FIDM focus efforts on adopting and implementing policies and procedures that ensure timely and transparent communication to all constituents. To fully exhibit integrity in its operations and practices, FIDM should begin creating realistic financial (turn-around), hiring and retention, marketing, enrollment/recruitment, succession, and strategic plans that are accessible, socialized, implemented, and used to guide all practices of the institution. The creation of these plans should include representation from all FIDM constituents. This includes faculty, staff, administration, Board, alumni, and students where applicable.

Once these plans have been successfully developed, FIDM will then need to begin to implement regular assessments of these plans and evaluation of all activities, including business practices and procedures. Through these plans and the evaluative processes, FIDM will be better equipped to ensure they are meeting the current and future needs of the institution (CFRs 1.7 and 3.6).

Issue 4 Standard 3; CFR 3.10 [Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes]

Standard 3: The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through investments in human, physical, fiscal, technological, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key

resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high-quality environment for *learning*.

CFR 3.10: The institution's faculty exercises effective academic leadership and acts consistently to ensure that both academic quality and the institution's educational purposes and character are sustained.

Issue 4: FIDM depends on the expertise and commitment of faculty. FIDM needs to expand the role of the faculty in institutional governance, academic oversight, and decision making (CFR 3.10).

In several respects, FIDM's activity this past year is to be praised. First, as regards faculty governance, in response to the Commission's charge to "integrate the faculty's voice into formal decision-making and policy-development processes at the college," FIDM tasked the Joint Academic Committee (drawn from the Faculty Council and Education department) with "developing classroom-level policy as well as providing input into personnel matters relating to faculty, such as developing instruments for assessing faculty performance" ("FIDM Dec 2020 Report to WSCUC," p. 34). It also elicited faculty input at the annual faculty in-services regarding "professional development, participation in shared governance, enhancing communication between faculty and FIDM administration, and about education practice at FIDM" (34). Second, as regards faculty development, in response to COVID-19, the eLearning department provided faculty with Zoom and Canvas training (6), and FIDM Productions "began working with the faculty teaching hands-on studio classes to develop video libraries for demonstrations and to teach faculty how to work between Zoom, standard webcams, and iPhones to critique student work" (6–7). Third, as regards curriculum delivery, FIDM successfully transitioned online in last two weeks of winter quarter (6), as the college took specific, practical steps to support learning in remote (synchronous) or online (asynchronous) formats, providing physical resources to Fashion students, technological resources to Digital Media/Digital Cinema students, and digital options for final presentations for Fashion Design students (7). Conversations during the Special Visit made it clear, moreover, that faculty did more than scramble to survive the pandemic: they seized the opportunity to improve their digital and hybrid pedagogy, galvanizing students and yielding lasting benefits. Commendations are due for such tangible steps in a particularly trying year.

This said, areas of serious concern remain. In terms of faculty governance, our 2018 visit made it clear that faculty felt unheard and unable significantly to influence policy. This year's Special Visit did reveal some movement in this regard: not only did the Joint Academic Committee start to meet before the pandemic, but faculty involvement in other FIDM teams has been somewhat encouraged. At the same time, the Joint Academic Committee—designed to increase faculty input into institutional decision-making—did not convene in 2020, even by Zoom (36). Faculty on various teams report that their contributions are resisted or ignored. Faculty representatives do not regularly report to the board of administration and governing board. And faculty across the institution express frustration at the lack of communication from leadership: the governing board, they say, does not know what faculty experience; the Vice President of Education does not report their concerns or relay information from the board; and even major decisions are not clearly made known. Faculty from the San Francisco campus, for instance, noted that they heard about the campus closure from students rather than administration, and still may be waiting on an official word as to their termination. The next WSCUC review should examine these issues, as well as the "Moving Forward"

sections of Appendix 3.4.1 (pp. 2, 3, and 4), evaluating to what extent FIDM has addressed them in concrete, measurable ways.

Next, moving to faculty development, attention needs to be paid to employment and continued education. Regarding employment, first, FIDM has closed campuses, furloughed numerous instructional staff, and planned further cutbacks this year (5). Specific decisions, of course, are enrollment-dependent; nevertheless, no concrete contingency plans appear to have been developed for faculty hiring or reduction, little effort seems to have been made to encourage faculty retention, and minimal communication has been extended to faculty to inform them of the current situation or future possibilities. Furthermore, there is continued education. Even if FIDM increasingly views its instructors as part-time adjuncts, without research responsibilities or long-term guarantees of employment—a troubling trend—the ever-changing nature of the industries for which it prepares its students demands that FIDM help its faculty remain current in their respective fields. Even the \$3,500 in total that had been allotted to support FIDM’s 230 instructional staff has been tabled indefinitely, even though the Faculty Council had maximized such funds by having conference attendees present to their peers through professional development workshops. This lack of investment will hardly support the “ambitious professional development schedule” that the Faculty Council put in place early in 2020, that “was sidelined with the pandemic,” and that needs to be rekindled and tangibly implemented (36).

Finally, there are issues regarding curricular planning and faculty ownership. To begin with, the college lacks a master plan. While FIDM may have planned on a “comprehensive examination of the structure and curricular focuses of the degree programs” that would be “supplemented by information gathered from program advisory boards, alumni, and industry partners” (27), no such comprehensive assessment has taken place, and it is unclear what plans exist for its implementation. In the meantime, decisions regarding programs are being taken in what seem to be a reactive and piecemeal rather than strategic, coordinated manner. Several programs scheduled for launch, for example, were postponed indefinitely (7) – no doubt in part due to the pandemic – while others were placed on hiatus due to low enrollment (5). Such decisions might have been pragmatic during the COVID crisis, but an institution-wide plan needs to be formulated and put in place to meet FIDM’s commitment in its 2016–2021 Strategic Plan to expand its educational offerings (16 and App. 3.2.0, p. 1).

Equally if not more concerning, faculty, as a whole, feel that they do not own the curriculum. In the Special Visit, despite the assurance of chairs that curriculum is “faculty driven,” numerous rank-and-file instructors spoke of their exclusion from curricular decisions and program review, their inability to have their concerns acknowledged, and their fear of retaliation from administrators for perceived criticism. Granted, it is difficult to determine precisely to what extent such voices reflect widespread opinion. These concerns, however, can impact the overall morale of the faculty and the delivery of the program.

Issue 5 Standard 1; CFR 1.2 [Institutional Purposes]

Standard 1: The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with those purposes. The institution has a clear and explicit sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in both the higher education community and society, and its contribution

to the public good. It functions with integrity, transparency, and autonomy.

CFR 1.2: Educational objectives are widely recognized throughout the institution, are consistent with stated purposes, and are demonstrably achieved. The institution regularly generates, evaluates, and makes public data about student achievement, including measures of retention and graduation, and evidence of student learning.

Issue 5: The educational objectives are recognized throughout the college and are consistent with FIDM's mission. However, FIDM should generate, evaluate, and make public data about student achievement, job placement, and enrollment (CFR 1.2)

Since 2018, FIDM has made strides in providing public information on student achievement. The FIDM website posts the Student Performance Fact Sheets for all degree programs for 2018 and 2019. The Fact Sheets include the number of students enrolled in the program, the completion rate, and information on alumni job placement that includes the number of graduates working in their field of study, and their average annual salaries. The Fact Sheets also include the cost of the educational program, the federal student loan debt, and the default rate on student loans. The Fact Sheets are available to prospective students.

In addition, the FIDM website provides statistics on the percent of students in an academic program who met expected levels of performance. This information is developed through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness with input from the faculty. The site provides information on the 6-year graduation rates. For the 2013 cohort, for example, the graduation rate was 70.9%.

SECTION IV – COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The team found evidence to support the following commendations and recommendations.

Commendations

1. Faculty and staff continue to demonstrate strong loyalty to the institution and passion for helping their students succeed.
2. FIDM is to be commended on the evident progress made in generating, evaluating, and making student achievement, job placement, and enrollment data available.
3. FIDM is to be commended for adopting more robust and integrated information systems across the institution, bringing greater operational efficiencies and greater reliability of data.
4. FIDM is to be commended for the work done with faculty adjudicators. This connection to the industry demonstrates a collaborative process giving FIDM the ability to pivot and meet current and changing industry needs.
5. FIDM's faculty showed remarkable creativity not just in weathering the pandemic but adapting in-person and digital pedagogy to excel still more hereafter.

Recommendations

1. Over the past 50 years, FIDM's mission has been to educate students to become leaders in fashion and design related industries. To continue its mission into the next 50 years, FIDM needs high-performing leadership, at all levels, with the capacity, background, and vision to steer the institution in a direction that is innovative, sustainable, and ensures its fiscal health (CFR 3.6).
2. As outlined in the FIDM Governing Board bylaws, the Governing Board has legal and fiduciary responsibility for the institution. The Governing Board, however, is not fulfilling its role in providing oversight and leadership for the Institution. The Governing Board should adopt best practices in its operation, including the review and approval of annual budgets and audited financial statements; the oversight of academic programs and student outcomes; a process for providing leadership in institutional planning and assessment; a self-assessment of its effectiveness ; a nomination process to bring in new members with critical skills and experience; a plan for the constructive evaluation of the President; and the development of a strategy for the succession of institutional leadership (CFR 3.9 and WSCUC Governing Board Policy).
3. FIDM has continued to function with operational deficits and is projected to continue to with deficits for the current and following two years. While the challenges of COVID are real and acknowledged, FIDM did not create and implement a turn-around plan based on realistic actions to eliminate the deficit. FIDM is advised to take the necessary steps to eliminate the deficit and establish short-term financial stability to support realistic enrollment growth goals for longer-term sustainability. FIDM must ensure that established processes and procedures are followed to ensure transparency regarding the financial position of the institution at appropriate levels (CFRs 3.4 and 1.7).
4. FIDM should focus efforts on increasing transparency and communication to exhibit integrity fully in its operations and practices. Initiatives should include adopting and implementing policies and procedures that ensure timely and transparent communication to all constituents. To start, FIDM should direct attention to creating realistic hiring and retention, marketing, enrollment/recruitment, succession, and strategic plans that are accessible, socialized, implemented, and used to guide all practices of the institution. The creation of these plans should include representation from all FIDM constituents (faculty, staff, administration, Board, alumni, and students where applicable). Additionally, FIDM should begin to implement regular evaluation of all activities, including business practices and procedures to ensure they are meeting the current and future needs of the institution (CFRs 1.7 and 3.6).
5. To equip FIDM's faculty as a whole to ensure academic quality, FIDM must expand their role in curricular decision-making and program review, support their continued education, and develop clear avenues of communication between them and the administrative and governing boards (CFR 3.10).