

# **Special Visit Report**

**Submitted to**

**WASC Senior College and University  
Commission**



**SOFIA**  
UNIVERSITY

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### Key Term Acronyms

AMP	Academic Master Plan
ASA	Academic and Student Affairs committee
BAP	Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Degree Completion
BSBA	Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Degree Completion
BOD	Board of Directors
BOT	Board of Trustees
BPPE	California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education
CAC	Curriculum and Assessment Committee
CFR	Criteria for Review
CITL	Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning
CLOs	Course Learning Outcomes
COD	Common Origination & Disbursement
CPT	Curricular Practical Trainings
CS	Composite Score
DBA	Doctorate in Business Administration
DBAC	Doctorate in Business Administration in Chinese
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
ED	Department of Education
FISAP	Fiscal Operation Report and Application to Participate
FTEs	Full Time Equivalents
FY	Fiscal Year
HR	Human Resources
ILOs	Institutional Learning Outcomes
IR	Office of Institutional Research
LDA	Last Day of Attendance
MACP	Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology
MATP	Master of Arts in Transpersonal Psychology
MATPC	Master of Arts in Transpersonal Psychology in Chinese
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MBAO	Master of Business Administration Overseas (Chinese Language)
MSCS	Master of Science in Computer Science
NSLDS	National Student Loan Data System
PhDC	Doctorate in Transpersonal Psychology in Chinese
PhD TP	Doctorate in Transpersonal Psychology

PLOs	Program Learning Outcomes
PsyD	Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
SEM	Strategic Enrollment Management
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
SIS	Student Information System
SP	Strategic Master Plan
VWL	Virtual Writing Lab

## **Component 1: Institutional Context**

### **Sofia's History**

Sofia University is a private, academic institution with campuses in Palo Alto and Costa Mesa California. Originally inspired by the theories of Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and William James, its' founders responded to the cultural and psychological zeitgeist of the 1970's by creating The California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in 1975. The institute's initial focus was on offering graduate degrees solely in transpersonal psychology. However, the university has since expanded to offer graduate degrees in counseling, business administration, psychology, and computer science in addition to undergraduate degree completion programs in both psychology and business. The institution changed its name in 1986 to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology as its reputation and programs grew to include psychology students from outside its home state. First granted candidacy by Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) in 1992, the Institute achieved initial accreditation in 1998 as a not-for-profit university. A Special Visit occurred in 2000, two reviews followed in 2004 and 2006, and the university was reaffirmed by WASC in 2007 for six years.

In 2012, the university's name was again changed, this time to Sofia University. In 2013, its mission was subsequently expanded and received a WSCUC structural change approval. This change was in preparation for program offerings outside of psychology but within the context of transformative education. Shortly thereafter, in 2014, a group of investors purchased Sofia and ownership transitioned from Sofia University to Sofia University SSPC. In 2015, Sofia hosted a WSCUC accreditation visit, and received reaffirmation for seven years with a notice of concern. In that same year, after significant changes in faculty, leadership, and program offerings, the institution sought and attained for-profit status. During this period, the university community increased their focus on developing programs, partnerships, and purpose, viewed by many as external to the field of Transpersonal Psychology. The shifting focus created significant challenges as Sofia endured fiscal crises, leadership transition, identity

confusion, staff and faculty resignations, enrollment decline, campus discontent, governance concerns, and unfavorable media coverage. A Special Visit focused on mission and vision, student success, and strategic planning occurred in 2016 with a continuation of the notice of the concern in 2017.

Ownership of Sofia University SPC was then transferred to Beitou Holdings (Canada) Ltd. (a previous ownership partner) in 2018 with Substantial Change Final approval provided by WSCUC in 2020. Beitou, led by president and chief executive officer (CEO) Ms. Miao Yang, and chief financial officer (CFO) Michael Zhu, maintain investments in education, property, and hotels in Canada, US, and the UK. Today, Beitou is Sofia University SPC's sole shareholder with 100% of shares.

In 2019, Sofia University hosted a Mid-cycle Special Visit where the notice of concern was removed by the Commission. In addition, WSCUC approved a substantive change for Sofia University's Costa Mesa location to become a branch campus. In 2021, WSCUC followed up with a Special Visit to review the change in ownership.

Under Beitou's ownership, Sofia experienced positive changes in key leadership positions. Dr. Allan Cahoon, a former Sofia Board of Trustees' Member, was appointed as the university's president in spring 2020. Dr. Cahoon, a Syracuse University Graduate with a PhD, previously served as president and vice-chancellor of Royal Roads University (Canada), and vice president, research and international, at the University of Regina, where he was also appointed acting president. He has served as president of the Inter-American Organization of Higher Education and has a variety of experiences in strategic academic partnerships in China. that include an appointment as honorary president of Shanghai Lida University in 2020. Dr. Cahoon then led the search for a new provost, Dr. Carol Humphreys, who assumed the role on July 1, 2021. With a PhD from Miami University of Ohio, Dr. Humphreys had previously served as provost and vice president of academic affairs, executive faculty, faculty senate co-chair, and acting dean at Saybrook University from 2011-2018. During her tenure at the previous

institution, she also served as a WSCUC Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) and led a successful reaffirmation process.

Shortly after Provost Humphreys was hired at Sofia, a WSCUC off-site review occurred in fall, 2021. The University then hosted the accreditation visit in spring 2022 and received a six-year reaffirmation of accreditation. A progress report focused on financial aid compliance, internal financial controls, and audited statements followed in 2023 ([Attachment 01 Sofia University Progress Report](#)). In his response, WSCUC Vice President Goor wrote, “The audits include favorable opinions. Sofia appears to be financially sustainable at this time.” The upcoming Special Visit is scheduled for spring, 2024 and is focused on the status of financial aid compliance, internal financial controls, and institutional planning.

Dr. Cahoon’s and Dr. Humphreys’ commitment to honoring Sofia’s history, while also embracing mission-aligned growth opportunities, brought much-needed stability to the university and a sense of hope and renewal to its dedicated community members. In spring 2023, a nation-wide search for a new president occurred in anticipation of Dr. Cahoon’s retirement. Dr. Humphreys successfully applied and was appointed President of Sofia University on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

At the time of Dr. Humphreys’ promotion, Dr. Nami Kim was appointed as Interim Provost and accreditation liaison. A clinical psychologist, Dr. Kim served as Associate Provost/Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Saybrook University from 2015 to 2020 where she led and assisted in regional and program accreditation efforts and drove the professionalization of university operations to improve the student experience and academic rigor of the university’s degree programs. She received her PhD at Alliant International University-CSPP San Francisco Bay.

Since Provost Kim’s hire, she has focused on implementing the new DBA, hiring a Chair for both the MBA and DBA programs, further integrating the PHD TPC into the larger academic community,



supervising a growing registrar’s department, improving academic data collection, and aligning academic policies practices with WSCUC standards and best practices in higher education.

In August of 2023, CFO Chris Nguyen left Sofia and an Interim CFO, Bill Chen, was hired, in large part due to his previous role as CFO of Sofia. With his prior experience and knowledge of the university, Dr. Chen’s appointment has assured continuity, minimized inefficiencies in onboarding, and demonstrated fiscal confidence and stability during the first months of the new presidency. A search for a new CFO is planned for after the WSCUC visit and prior to the new 2024/2025 fiscal year.

### **Sofia Today: Mission, Purpose, Values, and Vision**

Despite past challenges, Sofia University has remained committed to its founding principles of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, as both are concerned with seeking humanity's highest potential for the whole person (i.e., body, mind, soul, and spirit). Transpersonal theory and self-reflection are integrated into all of Sofia’s academic programs, whether business, computer science, or in leadership. Across all programs and as a university, Sofia aspires, “to be a globally conscious leader in transformative education that will empower students with intellectual growth, ethics, and the development of emotional intelligence.” Guided by its mission, “Sofia is a passionate, dynamic learning community that fosters multiple ways of knowing.” Members of the Sofia community are dedicated to “academic excellence with a shared commitment to authenticity, inclusivity, cultural humility, ecological stewardship, and service to others.” Our curricula focus in six areas of inquiry: the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and creative aspects of life. The core values of Sofia, which are integrated across programs and within courses are:

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

Aligned with these values, Sofia is committed to serving the global community, building local community and civic engagement, and creating economic contributions and opportunities. In addition to providing a transformative education that has a positive impact in our students' lives and communities, Sofia's faculty and staff have contributed to the public good in many ways, including the following:

- Creating an international conference with a post-covid examination of mental health
- Presenting fire-side chats focused on leadership and mental health to community members
- Offering use of Sofia's Costa Mesa campus to community organizations, educational groups and conferences
- Hosting cultural events such as the 2024 Multi-cultural Community-wide Dragon Lighting Ceremony at the Costa Mesa campus
- Providing tutoring for local children
- Hosting library author visits
- Developing partnerships with local businesses and Chambers of Commerce

Students and alumni at Sofia, who are frequently working professionals, are consistently encouraged to become engaged in social advocacy efforts to combat racism, discrimination, and xenophobia in their local and global communities. As an example of this engagement, Sofia created and sponsored the [Global Mental Health Conference in August 2023](#) delivered online to over 1,000 participants in multiple countries. It included diverse, in-person simultaneous presentations in both the US and in China. Over 35 international experts in various health care and education professions shared information about diverse experiences in mental health post-COVID across the globe. Subsequent publications and presentations online and in-person have followed. The conference provided Sofia students with opportunities to present their research, dialogue with international experts, participate in the conference at low to no-cost, and learn the logistics of planning such a large and prestigious event as

a volunteer. Sofia University's Global Mental Health conference for 2024 is currently in the planning stages for next year.

In their commitment to serving Sofia, the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students commit to learning about and serving its mission, vision, and core values. Sofia community members find purpose, as a community, in providing a diverse student body, both domestic and international, accompanied by the opportunity for a transpersonal, transformative learning experience—a new way of knowing and being, both personally and professionally.

### **Academic Programs and Students**

Sofia currently offers 11-degree programs: two bachelor's completion degrees (BA in Psychology, BS in Business Administration); six master's degrees (MA in Counseling Psychology (MACP), MA in Transpersonal Psychology (MATP), MATP in China (MATPC), Masters of Business Administration (MBA), MBA in China (MBAO), Masters in Computer Science (MSCS)); and five doctorates (PhD in Transpersonal Psychology (PhD TP), PhD in Transpersonal Psychology (PhD TPC) in China, Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA), Doctorate of Business Administration in China (DBAC), and the PsyD in Clinical Psychology). Focused on flexibility and accessibility for adult, professional, and family-focused students, various delivery modalities including distance, on-site, and hybrid are used.

The two undergraduate completion programs are currently marketed for distance education and enroll students in 100% online coursework. The Chinese-language version of the MBA, the PhD TPC and DBAC are also offered 100% online with both synchronous and asynchronous classes. The MBA and MSCS are campus-based programs, combining both face-to-face and online courses each quarter. This method of delivery allows for both working professionals and international students located in the United States to enroll and attend on campus on the weekends for some classes while providing some scheduling flexibility through a limited number of asynchronous courses. Three programs, the MACP,

MATP, and PhD TP, comply with the WSCUC definition of distance education and are designated as online + low residency by the university. Students earn the bulk of their academic units through online coursework and attend face-to-face residential intensives and seminars once or twice a year. A fourth program, the PsyD, no longer accepts students. However, the Chair remains actively engaged with one final student in dissertation completion.

### **Students and Student Services**

With an average age of 38, many of Sofia's students arrive at the university with family and work obligations. Most have already achieved initial success in completing an earlier degree. Their diversity is not only reflected in age, but in race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality. The fall 2023 quarter had a total enrollment of 1057 active students. These students, whether in China or the United States, are seeking growth through academic excellence and opportunity.

With two campuses and online delivery of classes throughout the US and China, Sofia continues to implement new ways of meeting diverse students' needs. Time zones and cultural holiday for both countries are now considered when scheduling university-wide meetings, events, and calendars. Students in China enroll in courses that are offered according to a Chinese Academic Calendar that is built around the traditional Autumn and New Year's holidays. Students in the US are enrolled according to the domestic Academic Calendar to allow for time off for winter and spring holidays. All university-wide, monthly Town Halls that include opportunities to chat with the President or Provost are offered early in the morning or late in the afternoon to increase global accessibility. Orientation and Canvas training is now provided online with similar time considerations to both domestic and global students with opportunities for on-site "Meet and Greet" campus visits for California based students. When scheduled, the President and Provost attend meetings during evening hours to greet Chinese students enrolling online. Sofia has expanded its IT Help Desk (from 1.0 FTE to 2.5 FTE) and improved its services for all students. The Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) has increased its resources

since the WSCUC Reaffirmation of Accreditation and now offers CEs, podcasts, and information resources online to all faculty and students. The Career Center provides monthly professional development presentations and discussions at hours that work for both domestic and international students. Sofia's Virtual Writing lab is available for all students. To better serve Sofia's Chinese students, the library has expanded its subscriptions to include several Chinese-language textbook, journals, and dissertation collections. These efforts and more reflect Sofia University's genuine commitment to serving a diverse student body.

### **Response to Previous WSCUC Recommendations**

Sofia University embraces the idea and practice of continuous improvement and has consistently taken significant steps to better align with WSCUC's Core Commitments, Standards, and Criteria for Review. Sofia has also continued to learn from and respond to a variety of WSCUC concerns and recommendations.

After the recent WSCUC visit in 2021, the Commissioners required Sofia University to respond to the following recommendations:

- 1) Rectify the financial aid compliance and audit findings from multiple years, keeping WSCUC informed of your progress. (CFR 1.7, 1.8, 3.4)
- 2) Establish and document internal controls for all accounting functions. (CFR 1.7, 4.1)
- 3) Create a data-informed culture in which leaders have access to relevant information in order to make data-informed decisions. (CFR 4.1, 4.2)
- 4) Complete an institution-wide review of the organizational structure, qualifications, and knowledge base of faculty and staff and develop hiring practices and policies that support the future vision of the University. (CFR 1.4, 2.1, 3.1)

- 5) Undertake a mission-informed examination and further development of equity, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility that thoughtfully address student success equity gaps and policies and practices across the institution. (CFR 1.4, WSCUC Equity and Inclusion Policy)
- 6) Complete institutional planning with the strategic enrollment and marketing plan, the Academic Master Plan—including degree completion programs—and begin the next strategic planning cycle with action plans that include budgets and responsible personnel. (CFR 4.3, 4.6)
- 7) Increase regular communication between the Board of Trustees and university personnel, including both faculty and staff. (CFR 3.10)

### **Changes since the last visit**

As previously noted, since the 2022 WSCUC Reaffirmation Team visit, several significant personnel changes have occurred at Sofia. After President Cahoon’s retirement in July of 2023, Provost and Vice President of Academics Dr. Carol Humphreys was hired as President. In preparation for the leadership transition, Dr. Nami Kim was hired as an assistant to the provost in May of 2023, then appointed as Interim Provost and ALO two months later. After the CFO and VP of Administration Chris Nguyen departed the University in August 2023, Dr. Bill Chen, was appointed as Interim CFO.

[\(Attachment 02 Sofia Organizational Chart\)](#)

Since the 2022 visit, Sofia has also made changes in salaries and staffing to professionalize the university’s operations and optimize its FTEs to ensure business continuity, and to support sustainable growth in the student population. In addition, to general raises across departments and positions, Sofia created and filled several new positions to include the following:

- 1) New Student Liaison (facilitates transition from admissions to registration)
- 2) Classroom Managers (supports faculty and students on campus)

- 3) Associate Director of Academic Affairs (schedules on-site classes, manages classroom managers, the academic calendar and catalog, project manager of academic affairs operations, and supports the Provost)
- 4) Two Associate Registrars (supports Chief Registrar)
- 5) Recruitment and Outreach Coordinator
- 6) An additional 1.0 Designated School Official (DSO)
- 7) A new Marketing Director
- 8) Marketing and Alumni Coordinator

A few notable examples of Sofia's growing workforce and the elimination of one-person departments include the long-awaited expansion of Sofia's IT department which was increased from 1.0 FTE to 2.5 FTE in 2023. Additionally, Sofia's lone instructional designer now has a .5 Associate Instructional Designer helping with the growing number of courses builds and revisions, as well as to train faculty in best practices in online teaching. And, Student Services has hired a 1.0 FTE associate who manages the Career Center and supports all student activities. Finally, the Financial Aid and Accounting offices underwent changes both in hiring and restructuring to better support these crucial processes, which are the focus of this Special Visit, and are described in detail later in this report.

In academics, Sofia increased FTE for existing positions, moving some long-time adjunct faculty members to part-time faculty members. Sofia further promoted several .65 FTE faculty to full-time positions across departments as was seen in the MACP where three part-time employees are now 1.0 FTE. The growing MBA has two new, full-time faculty and has significantly expanded its adjunct pool. MSCS has also hired two new full-time faculty members. Finally, in addition to hiring new adjunct faculty, a 1.0 FTE faculty member, and a Department Chair were hired to support Sofia's new DBA.

With changes in leadership and several new hires, slight changes were made in the university organizational structure, such as moving Institutional Research under Academic Affairs and the provost. Of note, with the continued increase in student enrollment and plans for global engagement, Sofia will likely hire more personnel soon to support strategic objectives.

Other changes that have occurred at Sofia University since reaffirmation include the development of new programs such as a Dream certificate, the DBA in China, and the domestic DBA that is due to enroll students in spring, 2024. Since the WSCUC visit in 2022, Sofia's Costa Mesa campus has increasingly been used with weekend courses, psychology intensives and seminars, conferences, community events, and [commencement](#) scheduled on site. There is also a new marketing department that has increased Sofia University brand awareness and is now focused on advertising specific academic programs. Finally, with new leadership, many new policies and practices have been adopted such as workflow timelines across departments, EIDA statements, Artificial Intelligence policies, and faculty expectations for committee engagement.

In addition to personnel, program, marketing, campus, and policy changes, Sofia's international reach has moved beyond China fueled in part by the university's 2023 Global Mental Health Conference and our growing reputation in the field of Transpersonal Psychology. Sofia's leadership has recently met with members of the Korean psychology field about delivering workshops, certificates, and the online PhD TP and MATP in Korea. Though early in the process, research suggests there is a strong interest in Sofia's psychology programs in Korea. Staff are also engaged in discussions and research focused on the potential for branch campuses in Vancouver and England. It has become clear that Sofia's niche psychology programs garner significant interest abroad. Carefully meeting that interest through the delivery of workshops and courses both in-person and online is mission-aligned, reflects the university's commitment to global engagement, and adds to Sofia's financial sustainability.



## **Commitment to Improvement**

Sofia University is committed to continuous improvement and has made progress on many of the recommended areas of focus set forth by the Commission. Though many changes have occurred at Sofia University, the majority of the upcoming Special Visit will focus on financial controls, FA compliance, and institutional planning and will be addressed later in this report. The four recommendations that are not the focus of this special visit and their progress are as follows:

### **Create a data-informed culture in which leaders have access to relevant information in order to make data-informed decisions. (CFR 4.1, 4.2)**

With a relatively complicated institutional history that includes multiple leadership and ownership changes, Sofia University has long been challenged to improve data collection and data-informed decision making. In recent years with an engaged BOT, new owner, academically focused provost, and under President Allan Cahoon's effective leadership, the culture shifted, and accurate data was prioritized.

Prior to the WASC site visit, the university moved from a consulting IR director to a full-time IR director employed by Sofia University. Since her hire and over the past few years, the IR department has generated multiple reports for the university and executive leadership team. The department has also provided continued accreditation and compliance support. Despite the improved data collection and reports to government agencies, BPPE, and the Department of Education, in the last year, a need was identified to have more academic and student information available across departments. In response, the Department of Institutional Research was recently moved to report to the provost. This restructure will improve the coordination of data collection and communication of academic data to department chairs, and Academic Affairs staff so that they may also engage in course and program specific data-informed decision making.

During the next two fiscal years (2024/2025 and 2025/2026) and prior to the next WSCUC reaffirmation visit, Sofia will expand the department into the Office of IR and Assessment, increase FTE, and build a robust structure for institutional research, and student assessment and program review coordination. With this expansion, the office will better support the collection and communication of data across departments. The Office of IR and Assessment will lead the effort to create centralized repository of data and reports to provide program chairs, Academic Affairs and Student Services staff easy access to data compilations for their various initiatives such as improvement of program course planning and proactive interventions for at-risk students. The office will also be tasked to improve data collection methods in our existing IT infrastructure. The office will also train program chairs, faculty, and staff on best practices of collecting, analyzing, and meaningful interpretation of data. In collaboration with program chairs, the office will ensure that programs are on track according to our program review schedule, policies, and procedures. Lastly, the office will provide survey coordination and consolidation, and oversee the quality of survey instruments (especially across language and cultural barriers), create a balanced survey deployment schedule, lead initiatives to increase response and engagement rates from participants, and ensure that results are in the hands of relevant stakeholders for continuous improvement of curricula, teaching quality, and instructional design.

Finally, Sofia strives to be a more data-driven institution and to promote a culture of feedback. During the past two years, students, faculty, and staff have increasingly responded to questionnaires and participated in Town Halls that are predominantly question and answer sessions with the president and provost. Of note, President Humphreys has intentionally increased the Town Halls from twice per year to once per quarter to allow for more opportunities for the Sofia community to ask questions and provide feedback. These informal forum for open discussions coupled with surveys can provide valuable qualitative data to inform our future direction.

**Complete an institution-wide review of the organizational structure, qualifications, and knowledge base of faculty and staff and develop hiring practices and policies that support the future vision of the University. (CFR 1.4, 2.1, 3.1)**

Sofia University continues to develop hiring practices and policies that support its future vision and mission. In 2022, the AVP of Human Resources (HR) began a university-wide review of faculty and administrative personnel. As part of the process, personnel files were audited to ensure all staff and faculty have the adequate knowledge, experience and qualifications needed to perform in their positions. This included updating all employee files with current resumes and transcripts for the highest achieved degree. Sofia further reviewed the organizational structure of the University, identifying understaffed departments based on workload expectations. They then recommended hires to address staffing needs. In 2023, Sofia University hired several key positions in departments with high workload: Admissions, Registrar, Accounting, Financial Aid, Marketing, Facilities, Instructional Design, and IT.

In fall 2022 and spring 2023, Sofia University completed an extensive salary benchmarking analysis for staff and faculty ([Attachment 03 Faculty and Staff Salaries Report 2023](#)). Adjunct Faculty salaries were the first to be researched and increased based on similar institutions and their per-credit payments. Sofia then increased all faculty salaries in July 2023 to align with universities that offer similar programs. Simultaneously, Sofia reviewed and adjusted administrative staff salaries to remain competitive with similar organizations, improve recruitment interest, and to ensure long-term staff retention. Sofia follows all salary compliance policies for California and is compliant with state required minimums. The HR Department staff routinely attend training seminars to remain informed and compliant.

All job descriptions for administrative positions and several director, chair, and faculty positions were updated with new and relevant descriptions. The HR Department collaborates closely across

university departments in the development and revision of all job descriptions to accurately reflect the experience and qualifications needed to perform the tasks for each position.

In the Summer of 2023, the HR Department also developed and launched Stay Interviews at Sofia. Stay interviews are an informal conversation to help organizations understand why employees stay and what might cause them to leave, a way to see what is working and what may need improvement. The meetings covered three areas of inquiry: Workplace Satisfaction (questions about the employee), Job Satisfaction (questions about the job, Organizational Culture (questions about company culture and the overall work environment). The meetings occurred over three months with administrative staff and program chairs. The results were subsequently reported to the Executive Cabinet. The Stay Interview results ([Attachment 04 Stay Interviews Analysis 2023](#)), and feedback were presented during a university-wide Community of Practice Meeting, where staff and faculty were invited to participate. These Interviews elicited positive responses from both faculty and staff. Many reported the newly implemented Stay Interviews showed commitment from the Executive Team for staff retention, a focus on hiring dedicated and skilled staff, as well as an avenue to include all stakeholders in future decisions at the University. Several interviewees shared that the Stay Interviews are an avenue for discussing areas for growth such as benefits, professional development, and overall support of employees.

The HR Department developed strategic staffing and staff succession planning by department, in collaboration with departments' leadership. Future career options were explored, and individual career maps were designed to both tailor to employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests and align with the University's needs. The development of strategic staffing succession planning will help prepare staff for increased responsibilities, as the departments grow, and Sofia University expands.

Sofia University's HR Department remains committed to the continuous improvement of long-term organizational strategies, relevant hiring policies and practices, accuracy in documentation, the recruitment of high-quality staff and faculty, and the support and development of internal talent.

**Undertake a mission-informed examination and further development of equity, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility that thoughtfully address student success equity gaps and policies and practices across the institution. (CFR 1.4, WSCUC Equity and Inclusion Policy)**

Sofia University began its current work on Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Accessibility (EIDA) in January of 2022. A task force, initiated by Provost Humphreys, consisted of a diverse group of representatives that included adjunct and full-time faculty, staff, department directors and chairs, external community members, and students. Members were initially asked to examine and revise Sofia's diversity statements in the catalog, handbooks, and webpage to better reflect the university's commitment to diversity at Sofia. However, the goals of the task force quickly expanded after members began to discuss EIDA norms, current practices, personal experiences, cultural shifts, competitor's efforts, and relevant policies at Sofia and throughout academia. The committee members quickly became invested in a genuine, bottom-up approach to the topic and any policies or practices Sofia might adopt. In March, the members met with WSCUC reviewers at the site visit and were further challenged to engage in a meaningful discussion and improvements that encompassed students, staff, and faculty. The reviewer's questions triggered new avenues to explore. Not only did task force members continue to engage in various listening sessions and discussions, but they also suggested readings, discussed hiring protocols, researched other institutions and government agencies, and created a handbook and glossary ([Appendix 05 Sofia University EIDA Handbook 2022](#)). Sofia presented two EIDA panels and workshops for the Sofia community in September 2022. In June 2023, Sofia then offered EIDA presentations and training to faculty, staff, and students on-site at the Palo Alto campus focused

specifically on accessibility. Additional EIDA professional development was also offered during the 2023 fall commencement week.

Sofia University's EIDA Task Force's work culminated in a list of recommendations, a statement for the community, and a request of the BOT to draft a resolution supporting EIDA efforts. After significant discussion and feedback from the Sofia community, the Task Force created the Sofia University community-wide [EIDA statement](#) aligned with Sofia's mission, vision, and values. On December 19, 2022, the Sofia University BOT unanimously approved a BOT Resolution.

In June of 2023, the co-chairs of the EIDA Task Force formed the EIDA permanent committee and began its recruitment of members. In September 2023 at the Professional Development Day at the Costa Mesa campus, the committee co-chairs engaged the community in a SWOT analysis and began discussion of creating a climate survey to be implemented in 2024. The committee also recruited members throughout the course of the fall quarter; the committee now comprises of 24 faculty, staff, and students. Subcommittee structures will be established in early 2024 based on the SWOT and climate survey results ([Attachment 06 AMP EIDA Pillar Progress](#)). Co-chairs of the committee have also attended relevant external professional development trainings to further develop their expertise in EIDA practices in higher education.

EIDA analyses were completed on the counseling and psychology departments on the integration of EIDA into curriculum and policies. These initial evaluations resulted in important recommendations on best practices that will inform subsequent assessments of the curricula and policies and procedures of other Sofia programs. The committee will continue to provide large trainings and begin individual faculty mentoring to ensure the integration of EIDA principles across our curricula. Student success policies and procedures that address equity gaps and accessibility challenges will be reviewed and the committee will advise on the changes in policies and procedures. A website is now

being developed to share our ongoing efforts at the university. Sofia University remains committed to implementing actions and practices that support these statements and to seek feedback regarding our ongoing EIDA initiatives.

**Increase regular communication between the Board of Trustees and university personnel, including both faculty and staff. (CFR 3.10)**

Sofia has a qualified and engaged Board of Trustees (BOT). As described by its' chair, the "university has a well-defined governance structure that includes a nine-member BOT with demonstrated academic, legal, and business acumen to provide strategic oversight of the University and work closely with the President, who is the senior executive leader responsible for the day-to-day management of operations. The current Board Chair, Kathryn Laurin, is a resident of British Columbia with a 30-year career in academia, having served as a Dean, Vice-President Administration and President at both a university and community college. The remaining Board members reside across the US, many of whom hold or have held senior executive positions at prestigious institutions including Stanford University, Colorado State University and Wells Fargo Company. Areas of expertise include academic, financial, legal, information technology and human resources. In addition to the BOT, a three-member Board of Directors provides high level oversight and includes the owner/investor and personnel from Sofia, SPC with expertise in finance and academia. Regular communication between the BOT and the Board of Directors is efficiently maintained through periodic meetings and an annual retreat." Since the 2022 WSCUC site visit, there have been several opportunities for the BOT to engage and communicate with university personnel, faculty, and staff in both official and social capacities.

Before reaffirmation, the BOT instituted a policy where the Faculty Senate Chair reported to the BOT once per year. After the site visit, the Academic and Student Affairs (ASA) committee also invited the Senate Chair to deliver a similar report at the beginning of two committee meetings per year, increasing official communications with the BOT to three times per year. However, in 2023, the

President and Provost recommended that the committee invite the Faculty Senate Chair to attend and remain throughout an additional ASA meeting once per year. This request was approved and has since been implemented. These official presentations have increased the BOT members' knowledge and understanding of the faculty's activities, concerns, and perspective.

As for additional in-person opportunities for communication, in 2022 and 2023, BOT fall meetings were purposefully scheduled to align with the Costa Mesa campus during the September Intensive/Seminar/Commencement Week. Despite the international make-up of the BOT, several members were able to attend the on-site meetings. Afterwards, they hosted evening receptions and engaged socially with faculty and staff. Several trustees spent part of the next day on campus, engaging with students, faculty, and staff in class, at lunch, and during meetings. Later in the day, they actively participated in Sofia's commencement ceremonies. In March 2023, BOT members similarly attended the quarterly meeting at the Palo Alto campus hosting a lunch reception with staff and faculty. In June 2023, BOT members again held their meeting in-person on-site at the Palo Alto campus. After the meeting, they attended professional development presentations followed by a retirement party for outgoing President Allan Cahoon. In both instances, Sofia University faculty, staff, and students attended alongside the BOT members and had multiple opportunities for discussion.

At the September commencement ceremony held in Beijing China for 200+ graduates of the MBAC and the MATPC programs, one BOT member, Ms. Lei Fu, was an invited speaker and attended in-person alongside the new and former presidents, Dr. Humphreys and Dr. Cahoon respectively. The four-hour ceremony included a beautiful lunch where all attendees had the opportunity to speak casually with the leadership team. In addition to her inspirational speech, Dr. Fu handed out diplomas on stage, engaged with many students, and took pictures with students and staff that afternoon. Students commented positively about her attendance and applauded her accessibility.



As reflected in these various activities and meetings, Sofia University is committed to providing multiple opportunities throughout the year for faculty, staff, and students to engage with BOT members. Similarly, the BOT is interested in and committed to communicating with Sofia University's faculty, staff, and students.

And finally, as you will read later in Sofia's response to the recommendations of priority for the Special Visit, the university has improved financial aid compliance, internal financial controls, and institutional planning. These improvements involve additional finance department hires, new policies, and the completion of the Strategic Plan Refresh and Academic Master Plan. The Strategic Enrollment Management Plan is in-progress and due for completion in March 2024 (see Component 3).

## **Component 2: Report Preparation**

This report was prepared in collaboration with stakeholders from across the university, including leaderships, staff, faculty, and the BOT. Input and analyses were provided by key staff that are relevant to three specific foci of the Special Visit. Input was received from other key players that touch on the other four requirements set forth by the Commission to report on our progress.

Coordination of the Special Visit report preparation began with Sofia's Cabinet meeting 2023, where key members were assigned relevant sections for the main foci of the report. ([Attachment 07 Sofia University Cabinet Agenda 11.02.23](#)) Drafts of sections were assigned between Cabinet members, including the President, Interim Provost and ALO, Interim CFO, and the AVPs. For the financial aid and internal financial control sections, the Interim CFO, Dr. Bill Chen provided historical data, internal policies and procedures, and analyses with the help of his staff in the Financial Aid and Student Accounts Offices. The institutional planning section includes input from stakeholders across the university. The preparation for this report ran in parallel to the various institutional planning efforts, which allowed for synergistic processes of self-reflection and analyses. Leaders of each institutional planning committees

provided final products and process documents. Section leaders provided drafts and were compiled by the ALO. Members of the Board of Trustees were consulted for the writing of this report.

### **Component 3: Progress**

Sofia University is committed to best practices in accounting, financing, and financial aid (FA), the WSCUC standards, and compliance with federal, state, and professional regulations in higher education. The three main areas of focus for this Special Visit Report are Sofia's financial aid compliance, internal financial control, and institutional planning.

#### **Financial Aid Compliance and Internal Financial Control (CFR 1.7, 1.8, 3.4, 4.1)**

The 2022 Commission Action letter identified concerns about Sofia's federal financial aid compliance and the university's internal financial controls. As addressed in the 2023 Progress Report ([Attachment 01 Sofia University Progress Report March 2023](#)), several deliberate steps were taken to address the concerns and these efforts continue today. The following section will address the findings and additional measures taken by Sofia's leadership since the progress report.

#### **Actions and Measures Taken to Address Concerns Raised by the WSCUC**

As previously discussed in Component 1, in August of 2023, Sofia's CFO left the University and Sofia's previous CFO, Dr. Bill Chen was appointed the Interim CFO. Under the leadership of the President, the former CFO, the Interim CFO, and the University Cabinet reviewed and discussed issues raised by both the auditor and WSCUC. Sofia's finance team further investigated the cause of the identified FA and accounting challenges and proposed actions required for resolution. In response, over the past year and particularly, during the past 6 months, the university has further established a comprehensive and effective structure to monitor and improve management and control of accounting and financing. Sofia has also developed and implemented relevant policies and procedures in addition to the changes previously stated in the previous Progress Report.

## Concerns/issues on Federal Financial Aid Compliance

The FY 2021-22 audit report on FA had eight findings ([Attachment 08 Sofia University Financial Audit Report FY 21-22](#)). Four of the FY 2021-22 auditor report findings have been fully resolved based on the FY 2022-23 audit report ([Attachment 09 Sofia University Financial Audit Report FY 22-23 Draft](#)) and are as follows:

- 1) RESOLUTION OF A CREDIT BALANCE. No finding in FY 2022-23 audit; implemented a credit balance form to use in accounting and a timeline for FA awarding, disbursing, and refunds ([Attachment 10 Financial Aid Title IV Timeline](#)).
- 2) IMPROPER FEDERAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GRANT (FSEOG). No finding in the FY 2022-23 audit, reviewed all the undergraduate students in the year, monitored the FSEOG disbursements, and implemented a timeline for awarding, disbursing, and refunds.
- 3) EXCESS CASH IN THE FEDERAL DIRECT LOAN PROGRAM. No finding in FY 2022-23 audit; implemented a credit balance form to use in accounting and a timeline for awarding, disbursing, and refunds.
- 4) FEDERAL DIRECT LOAN RECONCILIATION. No finding in FY 2022-23 audit; implemented a timeline for awarding, disbursing, and refunds; and a full-time staff was hired to take over reconciliation using the cash activity report in Common Origination & Disbursement (COD) processes and is reviewing against G5.

Four remaining issues were then identified in the 2022-23 audit report. These issues were primarily related to the outsourced FA service and technical problems associated with the university's SIS, Campus Cafe. The university has since taken relevant actions and measures, and all findings should be resolved in this academic year (2023-24). The findings and actions taken to solve them are as follows:

- 1) NATIONAL STUDENT LOAN DATA SYSTEM (NSLDS) ENROLLMENT REPORTING: This is a repeat finding in the FY 2022-23 audit. However, the finding is not the same as the previous year. All submissions to NSLDS were timely and correct. This time, the auditor found that the Last Day of Attendance (LDA) was reported incorrectly. In reviewing the process, it was found the Registrar's Office had not been sending in a timely manner students' administrative withdrawal dates to the appropriate departments. This resulted in the last date of attendance not being consistently entered into Campus Café, the system of record. The Director of FA has worked with the Registrar's office to confirm that communication, review and LDA entry process will be updated in a timely manner in Campus Café moving forward. In addition, two experienced Associate Registrars (1.5 FTE) have been hired. These hires will ensure timely reports. The university is confident that this issue will be solved in the FY 2023-24 academic year.
- 2) RESOLUTION OF A C-CODE: While this finding was repeated in FY 2022-23, Sofia found this finding was an isolated issue. This finding cited in the audit was due to a C-Code that required re-affirmation of loans from the student. The 3rd party servicer approved and cleared the c-code after being asked to re-review. After hiring additional FA staff, Sofia is bringing FA in-house and will maintain control over these services. This appears to be an isolated incident that should not appear in FY 2023-24.
- 3) FEDERAL DIRECT LOAN EXIT INTERVIEW: This is a repeat finding. There is a difference between LY and TY. The university has identified the issue and will tighten our process with the Registrar to resolve the issue of the LDA being entered into Campus Café. We are focused on adhering to a calendaring system. Our process is now, as soon as the Registrar's Office sends the "intent to graduate" email to the student, FA will also need to send the exit counseling email to the student. The university is confident that this issue will not be repeated in FY 2023-24 ([Attachment 11 Withdrawal Request Form](#), [Attachment 12 Leave of Absence Form](#)).

- 4) FISCAL OPERATION REPORT AND APPLICATION TO PARTICIPATE (FISAP): This problem was associated with internal communications. The CFO sent the information to our external financial aid processing company to complete the FISAP. The documentation was not maintained, and the accounting office could not replicate the same numbers submitted to FASOL. A reconciliation occurred and now, the Director of FA has taken over FISAP. All backup documentation is filed appropriately and ready for next year's audit. The university is confident that this issue will not be repeated in FY 2023-24.

### **Concerns/issues on Internal Control of Financing/Accounting**

The FY 2021-22 audit had two findings, accounting accuracy and internal control. Based on the FY 2022-23 FS Audit Report ([Attachment 09 Sofia University Financial Audit Report FY 22-23 Draft](#)), one on the short-term program revenue recognition was fully solved. A second one on the 90/10 ratio calculation was significantly improved. The difference between Sofia's calculations and the auditor's calculations was reduced to 1.11% from the previous 19.42%. Our detailed report showed:

- 1) Short-term program revenue recognition: As a result of the audit procedures, an adjusting journal entry was made to properly reflect the receivable and the amount of recognized revenue related to the short-term study program. The auditor recommended that the university develop and implement a month-end reconciliation of the amounts billed and received related to the short-term program.

This error was not repeated in FY 2022-23, based on the latest audit report. The auditor's 2022 recommendation to conduct a monthly reconciliation system has since been implemented ([Attachment 13 Revenue Booking Reconciliation](#)). Moreover, communications have improved regarding notification of revenue invoicing ([Attachment 14 Quarterly Internal Audit Plan](#)). The university made additional hires

in the accounting department and better defined the division of duties amongst the staff, with a focus on distinct activities such as student accounts, accounts payable, and business operations.

- 2) The 90/10 report generated by the university out of its student information system, Campus Café, did not properly calculate the student-by-student 90/10 calculation for purposes of financial statement disclosure. The university's calculated 90/10 ratio was 58.49% but the auditor's recalculated 90/10 ratio was 39.07%.

Both ratios are well below the 90% as allowed by ED regulation. Since the student information system provided an incorrect report, Sofia investigated this matter by consulting with the SIS vendor as there were issues with the software ([Attachment 08 Sofia University Audited Financial Report FY 21-22](#), p. 28 under "Cause"). With assistance from the vendor, the university changed a few codes in the SIS system; as a result, the errors previously identified have been corrected. Based on FY 2022-23 FS Audit Report, this 90/10 ratio calculated based on the university's IT system was 28.84%, while the auditor's calculated ratio was 27.73%. The variance was minimized to only 1.11%. Although there was still some error in the university's IT system setups on FA students' allowable and unallowable expenses for the purpose of the 90/10 ratio, the difference between the university's calculation and the auditor's was much smaller in FY 2022-23, compared with the FY 2021-22 Audit Report where the previous difference was 19.42%.

The university took measures to deal with this repeated issue. First, the university sent staff to professional training to learn the latest regulations on allowable and unallowable payments by students in 90/10 ratio calculation. Second, the university received additional training from the IT staff at Campus Café focused on changing codes on the account system. The university continues to work on triangulating the correct value assignment and categorization to ensure correct future calculations.

Sofia university plans to conduct quarterly internal audit during 2024 to identify and solve this problem in a timely way ([Attachment 14 Quarterly Internal Audit of FA and FS](#)). In addition, the accounting office now has three full-time staff, including the experienced Director of Accounting who has been with the university for more than 6 years. The university is confident that these accounting-related issues will be solved in this 2023-24 academic year.

Sofia has taken necessary measures to solve problems identified by the auditor in financial aid compliance and accounting accuracy and efficacy. The university has further developed and implemented a comprehensive and effective structure and relevant policies and procedures to follow the best practices in accounting, financing, and financial aid compliance in higher education to comply with federal, state, and professional regulations. ([Attachment 15 Financial Aid Process Memo](#), [Attachment 16 Procedure Between FA Business Offices](#)).

### **Current Structure, Policies and Procedures, and Personnel**

The structure of the university's accounting and financial management and control are both internal and external. The university utilizes a professional auditor as the main external reviewer. The university has received valuable, expert guidance from the auditor. In addition to its annual audit, the auditor informs the university of the latest regulatory changes and organizes timely conferences to update on new policies throughout the year. For example, the auditor informed the university of the Department of Education's new regulation regarding unfulfilled rental agreements and its effects on the university's assets and liability. The university also arranged for relevant staff to attend the auditor's conferences and consult with the auditor on special issues, such as Composite Score (CS) estimates and whether the graduation fees should be included in the 90/10 calculation. The university also seeks professional advice from other CPA, legal, and finance professionals. For example, the university sought advice from a tax expert to manage tax withholdings for out-of-state employees.

The internal control involves the Board of Trustees (BOT) of Sofia University and the Board of Directors (BOD) of Sofia University, SPC. They have provided valuable guidance and advice to the university. For example, at the request of the BOT and BOD, the CFO conducted a comparison of program revenues and salary with other peer institutions, which was presented to both boards in October 2023. The BOT and BOD members shared their viewpoints on the university's strengths and weakness compared with the other peers and directions to the university's future development. Since the Interim CFO's hire, both the BOT and BOD have received and reviewed monthly Financial Statements, quarterly Balance Sheets, and the annual Financial Report. There are regular meetings between the President, CFO, BOT, and the BOD. In October 2023, the President and the CFO met with members of the BOT, BOT audit committee, and the BOD to provide the updates of the first quarter (July-September) 2023 financial conditions of the university. These two governing boards are dedicated to supporting the university's development and its financial stability and sustainability. The members of both boards are experienced leaders and professionals.

The Finance Committee and Audit Committee of the BOT supervise the university's financial and accounting management and control. The CFO reports to these two committees on the university's financial outcomes and compliance with government regulations. The Finance Committee holds quarterly meetings, each time before the BOT's relevant meeting. On December 1, 2023, the Interim CFO gave the first quarter (July-September) and October 2023 Financial report to this Committee. The Chair of the Finance Committee is a Senior Vice President of Wells Fargo Bank and an experienced executive in the finance industry. The Chair of the Audit Committee has over 20 years of work experience and insightful knowledge in the IT industry. Both Chairs have been part of Sofia's BOT for many years and are very familiar with the university.



The BOT holds quarterly meetings; during each meeting, the CFO provides updates on the university's financial report. The BOT reviews and approves the university's annual budget and special requests for additional funding, if any.

The CFO is fully responsible for developing and implementing the university's accounting, financing and financial aid policies and procedures. The CFO is particularly responsible for closely monitoring and controlling the university's financial transactions and improving financial efficiency. The current Interim CFO has worked in higher education for almost 30 years and has had extensive experience as a senior executive in universities. Dr. Chen has been a CFO for two universities, including the Interim CFO for Sofia from March 2019 to May 2020.

Sufficient and knowledgeable personnel are the key to good internal control of accounting and financing. Sofia now has experienced and knowledgeable staff in both the FA and accounting offices. The FA Office currently employs two full-time and one part-time staff, including a highly experienced Director of FA ([Attachment 17 Cabanero Resume](#)). With better staffing, FA processes have been moved back in-house to the university. The accounting office currently employs three full-time staff, including the Director of Accounting, who has been with the university for close to eight years. As a result, the accounting office is now reconciling financial statements monthly ([Attachment 18 Monthly Financial Statement and Analysis Policy](#)).

Sofia has developed and implemented improved accounting, financing, and financial aid policies and procedures. Based on the recommendations from the WSCUC visit team, the university has developed and implemented relevant policies and procedures in FA and accounting/financing as stated in our Progress Report. Recently, the university has developed and implemented two more policies: Policy on Quarterly Internal Audit and Policy on Monthly FS and Analysis.

### **Accounting, Financing, and Financial Aid Professional Training**

Professional training is crucial for the relevant staff in accounting and FA to learn about the latest developments in the industry and changes in relevant regulations. The university encourages and fully supports all staff in these two offices to participate in such training. Here is the list of some training taken in 2023:

- 1) March 13-14, 2023, NACUBO Student Financial Services Conference (Online); attended by Sofia staff working in student accounts -- Milena Karaivanova and Elizabeth Steele ([Attachment 19 Training 1 – Short-term programs](#)).
- 2) June 13, 90/10 Rule Conference (Online) organized by Sofia’s auditor McClintock; attended by Milena Karaivanova and Elizabeth Steele ([Attachment 20 Training 2 – 90/10](#)).
- 3) June 29 - July 2, NASFAA 2023 National Conference, San Diego, CA; attended by Janett Cabanero ([Attachment 21 Training 3 – NASFAA National Conference](#)).

### **Moving Financial Aid back to Sofia**

To address the problems in FA as identified by the auditor and WSCUC, the university prioritized hiring full-time staff to process FA in-house. From December 2023, the FA will be fully moved in-house. Sofia's contract with FA vendor, FASOL ends in May of 2024; however, we are now processing new and continuing students in house. Any newly admitted students for Winter are still being packaged by FASOL, but the disbursements for Winter will be conducted by Sofia FA staff. Moving FA in-house has dramatically improved communication among our internal offices, and therefore, FA disbursements and refunds can be streamlined and expedited. This practice will also avoid potential errors since now all FA-related student information is stored in the same system, and all offices will have access to check its accuracy and consistency.

### **Implementations of New Policies and Procedures**

The university has developed and fully implemented policies and procedures in the past year to ensure accuracy and efficacy of all FA processes. The corrective action plan is aligned with these processes ([Attachment 22 Corrective Action Plan on FY 2022-2023 FS Audit Findings](#)). However, FA processes rely on timely notifications of student status changes from the Registrar's Office, which shared similar staffing issues. Now that the Registrar's Office is fully staffed and trained, the Chief Registrar and the Director of FA have been regularly meeting to improve communication and notifications between these two crucial offices. The communication challenges and untimely notifications from last year resulted in another finding for NSLDS reporting and has led to moving to the National Clearinghouse for next year.

### **Future Plans and Actions**

The university will now conduct quarterly internal audit of FA and accounting moving forward ([Attachment 23 Financial Aid Quarterly Internal Audit Plan](#)). These audits will first focus on the process of FA, accuracy of students' financial records and FA's 90/10 ratio. Regular and timely self-audit can help identify potential errors to correct them. In addition, the university will be able to locate the source of errors and take immediate actions to avoid the same or similar mistakes later.

Each quarter, the Director of FA and Director of Accounting will randomly select 10 samples of student financial records for detailed examination. Each Director will write and submit a detailed report on her findings from these 10 samples. The report will include the errors, sources of the mistakes, and state proposed actions to rectify the situation and avoid similar errors. These two reports will be reviewed by the CFO and then report to the President and BOTs' Audit and Financing Committees.

Sofia will continuously review and evaluate its current policies and procedures and update them whenever necessary to account for changing regulations, as well as to fund relevant training for FA and accounting staff. The university will further review workload and staffing needs in FA and accounting

offices and consider hiring additional professional and experienced staff as necessary. The university now has 2.5 FTE IT staff on both campuses to handle daily technological operation, maintain secure online communications, and support online education. As the university enrollment grows, we will continue to improve our policies and personnel allocation to ensure sustainable and scalable operations.

### **Institutional Planning (CFR 4.3, 4.6)**

Since the 2022 reaffirmation visit, Sofia has undertaken a concerted effort in building and updating institutional plans. With lessons learned from the self-study process during the last reaffirmation cycle and feedback received from the visiting team, the university initiated the creation of the 2023 Academic Master Plan, followed by the 2024 Strategic Plan Refresh, and concurrently a revision of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan (SEMP).

### **Academic Master Plan (AMP)**

The creation of the Sofia Academic Master Plan 2023-2025 ([Attachment 24 Academic Master Plan 23-25](#)) began in the Fall of 2021, led by then Provost, Dr. Carol Humphreys. The AMP committee, comprising of diverse staff and faculty, formed in December 2021. The creation of the draft plan was a yearlong, iterative process developed by the committee and reviewed by stakeholder groups. The AMP was finalized and approved by the Sofia BOT in December 2022 and implemented in January 2023.

The AMP was again reviewed by university stakeholders in December of 2023 to report on the progress of the objectives, as well as their relevance, eleven months post-implementation. The Chairs Council, comprising the Interim Provost, program chairs, a faculty, the CITL director, and the Associate Director of Academic Affairs, as well as other Academic Affairs and Student Services staff and members of the EIDA committee provided feedback and assessment of progress for each goal ([Attachment 25 Academic Master Plan 23-25 Progress](#)).

Stakeholders assessed progress on almost all the AMP objectives as ongoing under the pillars Academic Excellence, Global College Integration and Collaboration, Efficient Academic Infrastructure and Technology, EIDA, and Focused Student Services. The second pillar, An Executive and Professional Education Center/College will likely gain more ground as we have made key hires to allow the AVP of Academic Innovation to officially begin in the position to lead and execute the objectives under this pillar. However, eleven months since implementation, it is apparent that a handful of objectives may need revision to clarify expectations and relevance as the university has grown and evolved.

The pillar, One University, Two Institutes, One College, Three Campuses will likely need to be revised to reflect our growing intent for global growth as well as the nature of a hybrid/online university that is inherently without geographic boundaries. However, one objective under the pillar one completed is our use of the Costa Mesa campus for major University events that had previously been held at off-campus locations. For the past two years, we have hosted the University commencement and in-person weekend classes for the MATP/PhD Seminars and MACP Intensives in September, as well as in-person professional development trainings for faculty and staff and an awards ceremony to celebrate faculty, staff, and alumni achievements.

The opportunity to review and assess the progress of these objectives gave stakeholders time to reflect on the university's efforts in improvement of processes, quality of the academic offerings, and whether Sofia is meeting the needs of its internationally diverse student population, as stated in the AMP. Sofia is on track to making advances to meet the objective goals, but they are still in their early stages in some areas. However, seeing the progress alone was motivating to the stakeholders and has inspired a resurgence of action. Seeing the broader picture as the various stakeholder groups reviewed the entirety of the plan allowed them to see efforts being made in areas that might not be as visible to them in their day-to-day work life.

Further alignment with Sofia's Strategic Plan Refresh and the new Strategic Enrollment Management plan will take place as the university continues to review the progress of the AMP on a quarterly basis. Progress will be documented and reported to the Cabinet, and then the BOT at quarterly meetings.

### **Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2027**

The current Strategic Plan (SP) Refresh ([Attachment 26 Sofia University Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2027 Final](#)) was built upon the Strategic Plan Update 2019-2023. Aligned with the university's Academic Master Plan, President's Goals, and current WSCUC Standards, the Strategic Plan Refresh reflects the voices of Sofia's community members and demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity. This refreshed strategic plan encompasses ongoing objectives, acknowledges the need for sustainability, addresses a changing field of higher education post-COVID, provides a framework for ethical international growth, and supports thoughtful innovation.

The strategic planning process began in Fall 2022 during Sofia's Counseling Intensive, Psychology Seminar, and Commencement week onsite at the Costa Mesa Campus. There former President Allan Cahoon led several small groups of faculty and staff in workshops asking them to reflect on their perception of Sofia's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. The resulting dialogues were insightful, and several themes began to emerge. These themes included staff and faculty retention, improving morale, IT equipment relevance, financial stability, global engagement and growth, a transpersonal foundation, and Sofia's commitment to Equity Inclusion Diversity and Accessibility efforts.

During the spring and summer of 2023, Town Hall meetings, Provost's Council, presentations, Cabinet discussions, listening sessions, and department meetings focused on these same themes. Then- Provost Humphreys led several committees with representation across departments as they developed

both program and university-wide SWOT analyses. These analyses then informed the development of the President's Goals and the following seven pillars of focus:

- I. Academic Excellence
- II. Financial Sustainability and Enrollment Management
- III. Sofia's Global Growth
- IV. Academic Infrastructure and Technology and Business Continuity
- V. Student Success and Student Services
- VI. Faculty and Staff Retention and Sustainability
- VII. Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Accessibility

The Strategic Planning Refresh Committee and other stakeholders continued the process through Fall 2023, building out objectives and timelines to support the pillars of focus. Drawing on the themes and goals from the previous planning cycle and SWOT analyses, the strategic planning process was based on five distinct phases: (1) Inclusive input; (2) Data gathering; (3) Making sense of the data; (4) Developing goals and objectives; and (5) Review, revision, review, revision, and approval. Through all five phases of strategic planning, stakeholders contributed to a comprehensive and inclusive effort.

To shepherd the completion of The Strategic Plan Refresh, leaders have been assigned for each Pillar. These leaders are creating teams to ensure and monitor the progress of the objectives. The Pillar Leadership team will report on the progress on a quarterly basis to the President and Cabinet, who will then report to the BOT at the quarterly Board meetings. Updates will include accomplishments and challenges to the plan, and updates or changes to the objectives or timelines.

### **Strategic Enrollment Management Plan**

The Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) planning began in 2021 with the formation of the SEM committee. Due to turnover in staff over the past two years, committee leadership and

membership changed, and progress of the SEM planning stalled. In the summer of 2023, with a new president and provost, there was also a renewed push to re-engage the university in the SEM. The AVP of Enrollment Management, with the newly hired Director of Marketing reformed a new committee with key participants from Admissions, Academics, Institutional Research, Student Services, International Office, and Finance. In October 2023, Sofia hired a highly experienced enrollment management consultant to advise the co-chairs in the SEM planning process. As neither the Co-chairs nor most of the committee members had engaged in a previous SEM process, President Humphreys made the decision to have the consultant provide guidance, education, feedback, and recommendations rather than create the SEM plan. It was surmised that through education and mentorship, the Sofia staff will gain expertise, learn more about the university's needs, demonstrate buy-in, be more apt to follow through on the plan, and, therefore, sustain internal progress.

Over the fall 2023 quarter, the committee met weekly to draft pillars and goals; leaders of those goals then invited additional stakeholders into the drafting process of the objectives. In December 2023, the early draft of the SEM was presented at the BOT meeting and received support. At this point, the AVP of Global Engagement joined the committee as a 3<sup>rd</sup> Co-chair. This was deemed essential due to Sofia's growing global influence and delivery of programs. The SEM goals were then amended to include global goals. Goals and objectives were reviewed again and incorporated into the draft plan by the committee. The SEM Plan draft ([Attachment 28 SEM Meeting Notes 2023-2024](#)) was submitted to the Sofia leadership in January and included in this report. The final SEM plan will be presented in at the Special Visit in March of 2024.

The three main pillars of the SEM are: Recruitment & Enrollment, Retention & Graduation, and Global Expansion ([Attachment 29 Strategic Enrollment Management Plan Draft](#)). These pillars reflect the areas Sofia has identified as the institution's opportunities for improvement and the intended direction of the institution's future and its global presence. The Recruitment & Enrollment pillar includes goals



that are intended to increase overall recruitment numbers by improving and streamlining admissions processes; increase domestic enrollment, specifically non-F1 Visa students and domestic F1 Visa transfer students that are not from China; and revising our institutional aid model. Retention and graduation pillar includes goals to build a robust assessment infrastructure to provide needed data to evaluate the needs of our students and quality of our programs; building a sound student advising model to support student success and retention; and building out our Career Services Center to assist our students transition from their studies to employment. The global expansion pillar includes goals to expand our global market reach beyond China, where we have a strong presence; to enhance and support the transition of global students; and to align and synergize global and domestic marketing and branding.

The SEM consultant also provided guidance on best practices in strategic enrollment management and marketing and recommendations for further professional development. As a result, the AVP of Enrollment Management is joining the next cohort of the AACRAO SEM Endorsement, an 18-month training program. The consultant has provided her initial feedback and recommendations ([Attachment 27 SEM Consultant Report Draft](#)) in the following areas:

- Cultivation of a data-driven culture across the institution by building data collection and extraction mechanisms that are more automated, accurate, and reliable to support strategic goals and provide benchmarks
- The need for standard enrollment reporting that are transparent, clear, and accurate
- Solution-focused, action-oriented leadership in the areas of enrollment management; provision of training and professional development for leaders in this area
- Adoption of industry standard technology to optimize enrollment processes and experiences
- Development of a strategic enrollment marketing plan upon completion of the SEM Plan

- Clarification of roles, responsibilities, and collaboration within and between Admissions, Marketing, and Global College departments

After completion of the SEM document, Sofia will continue the relationship with the consultant to follow up on Sofia's progress with the SEM plan and the area of enrollment management and marketing.

### **Alignment of the Strategic Plan Refresh, the SEM Plan, and the AMP**

Sofia's new institutional plans are well-aligned in their objectives and goals, in part due to the community's commitment to continuous improvement, WSCUC's recommendations from previous reports and visits, and the self-reflective nature of the planning process.

One example of this alignment can be seen in all three documents where global growth and integration into the whole university are goals for enrollment, academia, and the university. Of note, for at least three years, Sofia's leadership has made a concerted effort to reduce silos across the university and integrate the Global College and global engagement into its operations. As integration and collaboration increased, faculty, staff, and students began to imagine the possibilities of Sofia's global reach. To name a few examples, an international conference with over 1,000 participants was planned, meetings were more inclusive of all faculty from around the world, the Costa Mesa campus hosted cultural events, international student enrollment increased, and Chinese students attended commencement in both the US and in China. These events didn't just happen. The commitment to global growth was valued and discussed at all levels. The community members who brought this priority to the meetings for the SP Refresh, AMP, and SEMP all saw the need and the opportunity. Sofia's community members created these pillars, goals, objectives, and plans and they reflect the community.

Sofia will continue to explore new markets both organically (human connections) and systematically (market analyses) that resonate with our transpersonal and humanistic ethos. Recruitment in both the domestic and global market serves to diversify our revenue sources, which is

necessary for Sofia's sustainability and as a response to changes in geopolitical climates. These documents state goals that work in tandem to direct our global expansion and recruitment efforts, and the Academic Master Plan reinforces the quality of our academic offerings that are culturally sensitive and relevant, ensuring student success and satisfaction in these new markets. These plans show a path for Sofia's sustainable and mindful growth.

### **Planning as learning**

The last two years of strategic planning processes at Sofia have accomplished the intended goals—bringing together stakeholders to provide crucial input into university goals and objectives that are aspirational yet realistic. SWOT analyses provided the opportunity for stakeholders to examine Sofia and their various departments' opportunities and challenges in meaningful and transparent ways. Staff and faculty have seen larger university operations beyond their specific departments. These planning processes provided context in a complex, interdependent system. While these plans were being developed, leaders were also given opportunities to hear from various stakeholders as to their individual and collective needs for resources and support. Working together in these ways was an education for all. The planning process increased faculty and staff morale and created a more effective organization. Sofia University's inclusive planning processes allowed for genuine prioritization of goals and objectives, coordination between various units, increased understanding, created empathy, and facilitated conversations so that individuals did not cross purposes or have competing objectives.

These meetings included brainstorming, analysis of data, and collaborative creation of guiding documents. In them, participants found partners to develop new initiatives and ways to work synergistically for the common goal of continuous improvement at Sofia University. Faculty, staff, and students have reported feeling empowered to provide honest feedback to the leadership about the university. Cabinet members, AVPs, the BOT, Provost and President have reported feeling informed and

trusted. From all reports, planning and progress report meetings have been highly productive and engaging for its stakeholders, those who care deeply about Sofia and its mission and vision.

#### **Component 4: Conclusion**

With a successful leadership transition supported by the university community, additional key hires across departments, improved financial controls, the development of new policies, processes, and programs, and the consistent growth in enrollment, Sofia University is making substantial progress in addressing WSCUC's recommendations. In preparation for this Special Visit, Sofia University continued to thoughtfully identify its' strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Throughout this reflective exercise, Sofia's faculty, staff, and leadership have aligned their goals and expectations with WSCUC standards, the changing field of higher education, and the university's vision, mission, and values.

In the areas of Financial Aid compliance, financial controls, accounts receivable and financial sustainability, extensive work has been completed. With the August 2023 CFO transition, there have been many departmental improvements. In addition to increased enrollment and subsequent revenue, additional hires in the finance department and improved processes have helped to solidify Sofia's financial viability. The new FA Director has implemented several new procedures to improve data collection and reporting. In direct response to 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendor errors, Sofia is bringing FA and accountability for accuracy in-house. Additionally, new hires in student collections and accounts receivable have helped to build out a more effective department. The Interim CFO is now requiring monthly reconciliation, increased the department's communication with the auditor and Board of Trustees, and created new processes to improve financial data collection and projections. Sofia will continue to monitor and make improvements in these processes as we continue to grow as an organization. (CFR 1.7, 1.8, 3.4, 4.1)

The last two years have continued to highlight Sofia's need for consistent student data gathering and analysis which in turn will drive informed decision-making. In response, a change to the

organizational chart was made and the provost will now oversee Office of Institutional Research. This change will provide better oversight and prioritize accurate student and program data collection, a critical area as Sofia tracks institutional planning, learning assessment, and program review outcomes. Sofia University's departments of Institutional Research, Academic Affairs, and Student Services remain committed to collaboration. (CFR 4.1, 4.3, 4.6)

Sofia's equity, inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility initiative is a whole-university endeavor that began in January 2022 and continues today. The EIDA Task Force's listening sessions, research, and deliberations culminated into a Handbook. The Task Force garnered the support of the BOT, and after much discussion and feedback from the community, they created Sofia's EIDA statement, which is on the Sofia website. The Task Force then formed the EIDA Committee in June of 2023. Currently, the committee meets monthly and are implementing plans that are included in our institutional plans.

Sofia's guiding institutional planning document, the new Strategic Plan Refresh (2024-2027), was developed over the course of a year and included departmental representation and diverse voices from across the university. The planning process included a final review of the Strategic Plan Update 2019-2023. Not only were the committee and community members able to recognize the work that was accomplished in the previous plan, but they then set realistic and attainable yet challenging goals for future outcomes in the new plan. Committee members will now lead, review, and track its implementation and completion. (CFR 4.3, 4.8)

Similarly, the Academic Master Plan (2023-2025) was developed by Academic Affairs in collaboration with multiple university departments and their members. As Sofia's first AMP, it includes clear expectations, all originating from and embraced by Academic Affairs staff, faculty, and leadership. Of note, one-year post-implementation, many AMP objectives have already been met. Sofia will regularly review and monitor the progress of the AMP. It is especially important to ensure that the AMP goals of academic excellence and quality of student services are balanced with the goals to expand our

global reach and increase in enrollment. With growth comes responsibility to build and maintain a robust academic infrastructure and sustainable processes to proactively meet the needs of our students.

Though not yet complete, the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan is well under way and representative of another collaborative effort among Sofia staff, faculty, and leadership. With the assistance of an expert consultant, the enrollment and marketing teams are learning new ways to address both data-informed recruitment and enrollment projections. The document itself, is due to be completed in March 2024. In all three cases (SP, AMP, and SEMP), these comprehensive documents, and their inclusive processes are a strong testament to the university's commitment to genuine reflection, transparency, shared governance, and continuous improvement.

## **Transformation and Priorities**

Sofia University has survived a challenging period of instability with a new appreciation for financial controls, regular and consistent monthly reconciliations, financial aid reporting compliance, and institutional strategic planning. The Sofia community values the power of collaborative stakeholder engagement, shared governance, and WSCUC alignment. Sofia University has grown in knowledge and purpose. Sofia, with its offering of a personal and professional journey of self-transformation and academic excellence delivered through flexible and accessible models, is perfectly positioned as the world emerges back into the active workforce, and learners pivot into new opportunities.

Sofia's readiness relies on continued improvement and implementation of Sofia's Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2027. Therefore, our priorities remain aligned with the new strategic plan and its priorities:

- Financial controls, sustainability, and data -informed enrollment management
- Mission-aligned global growth
- Innovative, relevant, competitive, student-focused academic programing
- Improved infrastructure and relevant, user-friendly technology

- Improved student success and student services
- Faculty and staff retention and sustainability
- Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Accessibility
- Regulatory accreditation, compliance, and alignment with WSCUC standards

## **Reflections**

Due to the WSCUC reaffirmation self-study and site visit in 2022, the 2023 Progress Report, and the Special Visit scheduled for spring 2024, community members have grown keenly aware of Sofia's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. As we reflect on what we have learned from the process of preparing this report, we see a healthy organization in which there is a sense of hope and optimism for the future of the school and its place in the ever-evolving higher education landscape. Staff, faculty, and students provide honest feedback to leadership because they feel heard, and trust that there will be action and meaningful change. Leadership trusts in the expertise and dedication of staff and faculty to do their part to implement plans for improvement. Our Trustees are highly engaged and supportive of our efforts. It is apparent all stakeholders care deeply about Sofia and its mission and vision and share responsibility in the continuous improvement of the university to serve our student body and beyond.

We are pleased with the significant progress Sofia has made and are dedicated to the work ahead of us. Sofia has come a long way but has much more to do. Leadership, faculty, staff, students, and the BOT share a sense of optimism and clarity that this collaboration will be fruitful. Together, we are committed to Sofia University's sustainability as we meet the academic needs of today's working professionals and diverse student population.

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[Attachment 27 SEM Consultant Report Draft](#)

[Attachment 28 SEM Meeting Notes 2023-2024](#)

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