

REPORT OF THE WSCUC VISITING TEAM

SPECIAL VISIT

Mt. Madonna Institute

May 4-8, 2023

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The team evaluated the institution under the WSCUC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective judgment for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission. 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. Once an institution achieves either candidacy or initial accreditation, the team report and Commission Action Letter associated with the review that resulted in the granting of either candidacy or initial accreditation and the team reports and Commission Action Letters of any subsequent reviews will be made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of the Institution and Visit

Established in 2005, Mount Madonna Institute (MMI) is a private, non-profit, independent, 501(c)3 educational institution located in Watsonville, CA. MMI is approved by the State of California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education, National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA), Yoga Alliance, and International Association of Yoga Therapists to offer professional instruction and training in the fields of ayurveda, yoga, and community studies. MMI offers certificates and graduate degrees, including a Masters of Arts degree program in Ayurveda, to prepare students for careers in the integrative health professions.

MMI is located on the 350-acre campus of Mount Madonna Center, a retreat and conference center founded in 1978. The campus is owned by the Hanuman Fellowship (HFS) and serves in the capacity of a related entity to MMI, as represented in the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Related Entity Policy, providing fiscal and inspirational support through its board of directors.

The Hanuman Fellowship is a non-profit organization founded by the students of Baba Hari Dass in 1971. His students formed Hanuman Fellowship as a vehicle for the teachings of ayurveda and yoga and for the variety of projects developed by the Fellowship members. Projects directly under the Fellowship include Mount Madonna Center, Pacific Cultural Center, Ocean View Books, and Anjanyea's World Café. The Fellowship is affiliated with Mount Madonna K-12 School, Sri Ram Foundation, and Mount Madonna Institute.

In September 2014, the State of California passed SB 1247, which states that only schools accredited by an agency recognized by the US Department of Education would be able to continue California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE) State approval for

degree programs, after July 1, 2020. MMI's desire to continue offering the Master of Arts in Ayurveda, as well as developing other mission related degree programs, initiated the accreditation process with WSCUC.

WSCUC accepted MMI's application for eligibility December 14, 2015 and MMI filed the required Letter of Intent on February 4, 2016. The supplemental application for two additional degree programs, Master of Arts in Yoga Studies and Master of Arts in Ayurveda and Yoga Therapy, was approved on December 19, 2016, though the programs have not been implemented. WSCUC scheduled the initial seeking accreditation site visit for September 2017.

The institution submitted its Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 (SAV1) Report and supporting documents to WSCUC in June 2017. An evaluation team of five members from peer institutions along with a WSCUC liaison visited MMI from September 6-9, 2017 to conduct an initial seeking accreditation visit to include all standards and criteria for review. On March 9, 2018, MMI was notified that WSCUC accepted the SAV1 report and a Seeking Accreditation Visit 2 (SAV2) was scheduled for fall 2018. The date was eventually moved to fall 2019 at the request of MMI and approved by WSCUC. The Commission letter after the SAV 1 included six commendations and a detailed list of issues in all four standards for further development. The Commission found that MMI demonstrated evidence of compliance for Standards 1 and 2 sufficient for Candidacy and that the institution did not demonstrate evidence of compliance for Standards 3 and 4 at a level sufficient for Candidacy or Initial Accreditation.

MMI submitted its Seeking Accreditation Visit 2 (SAV2) Institutional Report to WSCUC in September 2019, with a number of support documents. An evaluation team of four members from peer institutions along with two WSCUC liaisons visited MMI onsite from November 14-16, 2019 to conduct the SAV2 visit.

In the February 26, 2020 letter, the Commission granted Initial Accreditation to MMI and outlined six commendations and six recommendations aligned with eight CFRs. The Commission letter also scheduled a Special Visit (SV) in Spring 2022 to address all of the recommendations. The SV was rescheduled to Spring 2023 at the request of MMI. The Commission required that the institution respond to the following issues:

1. Continue providing professional development for faculty to promote a culture of assessment that includes use of aggregated program level data. (CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 3.3) The Commission was pleased to learn that MMI has set aside increasing professional development resources in its budgets.
2. Enhance professional development and support membership in professional organizations for administration, student support service personnel, and the board. (CFR 3.3)
3. Carefully monitor the workload and activities of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to ensure there are adequate resources to carry out responsibilities necessary for the success of the institution. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2)
4. In preparation for the possibility of offering federal financial aid, determine the cost/benefit to ensure the appropriate organizational structures are in place to comply with federal regulations. (CFRs 2.13, 3.1)
5. Obtain an audit on a schedule that will permit timely submission to the WSCUC annual report. (CFR 3.4) The Commission was pleased to learn that the audit schedule has been adjusted to allow for this year's annual report.
6. Ensure that the MMI Board continues to remain independent and in compliance with the WSCUC Governing Board Policy.

MMI submitted its SV Report to WSCUC on January 4, 2023, with supporting documents. In 2023, MMI had 53 students enrolled in several professional training certificates and eight students in the Master of Arts: Ayurveda program. The institute employed 25 part-time faculty, 20 volunteer faculty and 21 staff members.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

The Special Visit team reviewed the MMI documentation and completed a summary worksheet in preparation for the team's conference call on February 10, 2023. During that call, the team discussed the MMI report, determined writing assignments, identified additional documentation needed, and developed a tentative list of necessary meetings for the team during the onsite visit. The original onsite visit was scheduled for March 8-10, 2023. MMI requested to postpone the visit and the postponement was approved by WSCUC. Due to a schedule conflict, one team member was not able to attend the rescheduled visit and his responsibilities were reassigned. The remaining four team members participated in the remote visit, reviewed all MMI's documents, and contributed to the writing of the final report.

Team met remotely on the afternoon of May 3, 2023 to complete final virtual Special Visit coordination and planning. On May 4, May 5, and May 8 2023, the team conducted remote reviews of institutional documents and held discussions with the President/CEO, CFO, provost, support staff, and members of the board of directors. Three open sessions were conducted with staff, faculty and students. In addition, the team reviewed all submissions made to the confidential email address that MMI made available to all interested parties. The exit meeting occurred during the morning on May 8, 2023.

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

The team found the report to be thorough and responsive to the issues raised and the recommendations made during the SAV2. MMI organized the report by the recommendations in the Commission's February 2020 letter. Information about professional development activities, workshop outlines, assessment examples, enrollment information, and audit reports were easily located with well-organized appendices. The Special Visit (SV) Report also included a discussion of changes at MMI since the SAV2 and challenges that institution has navigated, including the pandemic. Information requested from the team before and during the remote visit was provided when requested.

The SV Report was prepared by MMI's WSCUC steering committee, with board members and a group of key faculty and staff providing input. The wider MMI community of board members, faculty, staff, and students interviewed were aware of the issues outlined within the report. Since the SAV2, MMI made considerable progress on several of the recommendations and all eight CFRs while navigating the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and several leadership changes. MMI provided extensive training to faculty and staff in assessment and professional skills, including remote teaching practices that leveraged the assessment process to ensure rigor. The faculty and staff interviewed noted the high level of support they received from MMI leadership as the institution had to pivot quickly to remote instruction and services. MMI community held onto their academic and spiritual foundations as they moved instruction to a new modality. MMI also continued to strengthen its governing structures and made steps toward addressing enrollment through examining their recruitment and marketing strategies. The SV Report reviewed steps toward addressing financial and planning issues that have emerged

post-pandemic. During the visit, it became clear that financial reports received before the visit were out of date and follow up documents showed that MMI leadership needed to engage in important decision-making. Discussions with administration and the board of directors showed that leadership was not currently aligned in their future academic and financial planning.

SECTION II. TEAMS’S EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Issue 1: Culture of Assessment

MMI was instructed during its last review to promote a culture of continuous improvement through course and program assessment. MMI has been fairly successful in creating the beginnings of a culture of assessment and the Special Visit team strongly encourages the institute to continue building the infrastructure for assessment (CFR 2.6). During the pandemic, all faculty were provided the opportunity to participate in assessment workshops as well as provided assistance with technical knowledge to further virtual learning (CFR 2.4). The team reviewed example assessment reports provided by the institute. MMI also developed a strong system of evaluating the effectiveness of individual classes and individual instructors. All classes are evaluated using exit surveys and student feedback. That feedback is shared with all faculty and the faculty jointly develop an improvement strategy based on this feedback (CFR 2.4). The pandemic has furthered MMI’s commitment to ensuring student success through a series of mid-assignment check-ins, student meetings, and the development of standardized study materials. The review team was impressed with the institute's ability to close the loop by using feedback from course assessment to better the next offering (CFR 2.4, 2.6). Indeed, one student commented that the current iteration of the clinical class was much better at preparing the students for outside work than the version she took and she credited that change to responsiveness to student feedback. When talking to the Provost, she also discussed “closing the

loop” as an integral part of the assessment plan. This is an extremely positive development and the institute should continue this practice.

MMI also started evaluating the success of its program. Specifically, the institute had also implemented a practice of evaluating the senior project of students in their final courses as a means of assessing the program as a whole and examples were included in the MMI’s SV Report. The institute evaluated five senior projects initially and incorporated program assessment into changes to the clinical portion of the degree. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, they did not conduct further program assessment. Program assessment is a vital component of continuous improvement and, now that the pandemic has ended, this type of assessment must be restarted (CFR 2.6).

B. Issue 2: Professional Development

The prior site visit team recommended that MMI create professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. The special visit review team found that faculty and staff are well supported with professional development opportunities and encourage continuation of these opportunities, especially as related to development of staff job related skills (CFR 3.3). Staff noted that they feel included and that their opinions are valued and examples of professional development activities were included in the institute’s SV Report. Staff also noted that they feel like their job responsibilities are well defined and that they are trained to perform those responsibilities (CFR 3.3). Staff further indicated that they are encouraged by management to engage in professional development and are welcome to audit classes to encourage that personal growth. However, it was unclear exactly how many professional development opportunities are available to staff to engage in for growth related to job expectations. While the Special Visit review team was pleased to note that staff are dedicated to MMI and are encouraged to join

classes for further understanding of the institute's educational philosophies, staff must also be adequately supported as educational professionals (CFR 3.3). Evidence of that type of professional development, although stronger than in the prior review, was still less clear and could be enhanced. Nevertheless, the staff appeared satisfied in their roles.

The faculty were equally positive about MMI's academic mission and fully supportive of that mission. The faculty indicated as well that they felt welcome, supported, and were provided opportunities for professional development. During the pandemic, the faculty were provided significant training in technology so that they could facilitate their classes better in a virtual environment (CFR 3.3). They also report being trained on program assessment and engaging in assessment and evidence of these activities was provided in the MMI SV Report. The faculty were aware of the value of assessment and used feedback to improve their classes. Two of the faculty members were involved in professional organizations appropriate to the subject material and were able to participate in professional development through these organizations. All faculty expressed that their opinions were valued and they felt heard and respected by management. The review team encourages MMI to continue providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff and to continue to build the infrastructure to support these activities (CFR 3.3).

C. Issue 3: Institutional Research

The prior site visit team also recommended that MMI monitor the workload of the director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to ensure that there are adequate resources to carry out responsibilities necessary for the continued success of the institute (CFR 4.1, 4.2). At the time of the SAV2 visit, MMI had consolidated the assessment and institutional research functions into an Office of Institutional Effectiveness, with a faculty director with only 15% release time to serve as director of the office. While the individual had training, the position

description for the director listed a great number of responsibilities and the community relied on the data for decision-making. The team was concerned that the responsibilities of the role required more than the 15% FTE time currently allocated.

Since the prior visit, MMI moved the assessment and institutional research office functions to the President's Office. The president is now the ALO and in charge of assessment, given that this is an area of expertise for him. MMI created an assessment training plan that increased assessment knowledge throughout the institution through workshop training. A part-time staff member in the President's Office was trained and hired to be the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Officer and is responsible for internal and external reporting. The IE Officer has provided enrollment tracking, job placement, and course satisfaction reports to leadership, faculty, and staff, with some of these reports included as examples in the MMI SV Report. The staff member was interviewed by a Special Visit team member and indicated that they are able to produce reports for the community with data about their small programs with little difficulty. The president, provost, faculty, staff, and board members all referred to the reports and the usefulness of the data in their decision-making. The Special Visit team is still concerned that one part-time member may not be able to continue all of the reporting duties when the program enrollments grow as planned, especially given the other responsibilities the staff member shoulders. In addition, institutional research expertise seems to be concentrated in one person. Growth may require MMI to expand needed staff support for IR and in other key areas, such as admissions, the registrar, and IT. The SV team recommends that MMI ensure through consistent data-driven planning that appropriate resources are allocated to support infrastructure serving key functions as the Master of Arts in Ayurveda and related programs grow (3.1, 3.5).

D. Issue 4: Appropriate Organizational Structures

After the prior team's visit in 2019, the Commission strongly suggested that MMI study whether it would be possible to provide students with Federal Student Aid (FSA). The institute was aware that there may be a significant gap in time between the original planning and the actual execution of the strategy. In the months of October and November 2021, the FSA electronic training was provided by the United States Department of Education. Both the interim provost and a faculty member from the Master's in Ayurveda program participated in the training. They discovered via this procedure that in order for MMI to afford the personnel necessary to operate FSA, MMI would need to significantly increase the number of students enrolled in the program. As a result of this, the administration came to the conclusion in the autumn of 2021 that the FSA should not be considered at this time since it is not financially possible. All of the students in both the present class and the one that graduated in 2020 have enrolled in one of the available payment plans in order to cover the cost of their education. MMI will continue to provide students with the option to pay their tuition in installments throughout the course of the program term through the provision of financial help in the form of payment plans (CFRs 2.13, 3.1). MMI's action appears to satisfy the recommendation by the previous review team.

E. Issue 5: Timely Audit

Prior to the SV visit, MMI had engaged with the Harrington Group to independently audit the organization. The independent auditors provided a Statement of Financial position as of September 30, 2022 and the related Statement of Activities, Functional Expenses, and Cash Flows for the year then ended. The audit was conducted in accordance with standards generally

accepted in the United States. The team's opinion is unmodified and MMI's action appears to satisfy the previous recommendations.

F. Issue 6: MMI Board Independence

MMI is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hanuman Fellowship (HFS) that was established to contain and disseminate the principles of Ayurveda by formally training and graduating exceptional practitioners. The relationship between HFS and MMI is defined in both the by-laws of MMI and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that was recently modified in February 2023 and will be reviewed and approved every three years by the HFS and MMI Boards. The purpose of the MOU is to clarify the governance and operations between HFS and MMI, including shared resources, use of facilities, and opportunities for collaboration. Hanuman Fellowship, as the sole member, retains final approval authority over MMI's annual budget and expenditures exceeding \$30,000.

The MMI board is composed of 11 individuals: nine community members and two individuals identified by MMI as interested parties (one MMI employee and one HFS board member). According to WSCUC policy, the number of interested parties does not constitute a majority nor a voting quorum. Furthermore, board members are not compensated in any way.

The team was able to speak with 10 of the board's eleven members, and they revealed that although the full board generally meets four to six times a year, recently it has been meeting monthly owing to the difficulties MMI is currently facing. Permanent board committees include the Executive, Audit, Academic Affairs, Governance & Nominations, and Finance, Budgeting & Planning. In addition to the standing board committees, three new subcommittees have recently been established to focus on fundraising, alumni involvement, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The board's most recent self-evaluation was in January 2020, and at the time of the

visit, the current self-evaluation instrument has been delivered to the board members but the process has not been completed. All members signed the updated versions of the annual conflict of interest statements.

Aligned with the WSCUC Governing Board Policy, the team observed a highly qualified board of directors with diverse areas of expertise who are thoughtful, engaged, and dedicated to altruistic service and committed to fostering effective institutional governance (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 3.9).

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS

A. Issue 7: Financial Sustainability

Despite MMI's progress in many aspects of the Special Visit, numerous financial uncertainties impact both the short and long term future of the whole institution, and the accredited master's program specifically. The team's review of audited financial statements for the most recent fiscal year indicate a precarious financial position for the institution. The Special Visit team requested a three to five-year operating budget projection during the visit, but through conversations, it was clear those originally provided in the report were out of date.

The team has significant concerns about MMI's financial stability and sustainability, given the limited evidence of financial health (CFR 3.4). On a net cash basis for operating activities, the 2021 fiscal year lost \$28,662, with another loss in 2022 totaling \$119,854. The chair of the Board finance committee acknowledged the Special Visit team's assessment that there are two-years of operating resources remaining. Stop-gap measures such as securing a line of credit and the sale of assets are being considered but not yet implemented.

Challenging operational decisions are incoming; the President and his staff are committed to pausing the masters program in order to revamp its marketing and recruitment efforts. The

operating budget and projections were revised and provided to the Special Visit team during the visit. Those projections inform a programmatic ‘pause’ of the Ayurveda masters program in the 2024 fiscal year. The program will be ‘relaunched’ in fiscal year 2025.

Implementing the pause has informed materially changed projections. In fiscal year 2024, ‘the pause’, masters program revenue is projected to decrease ~75% but stand-alone course revenues to double. On the expense side, faculty payroll is projected to decrease by ~90% in FY2024 but resume full staffing in FY2025. Faculty wages in FY2025 are expected to be lower than FY2023, even though enrollments are projected to be higher. The special visit team accepts that these projections may be possible, but they rely on favorable operating assumptions similar to the aforementioned.

As noted earlier, the team is concerned about MMI’s financial sustainability (CFR 3.4), and it recommends that MMI work with the board and others to refine its strategic plan and operating budget relating to the future of the masters and related programs, so that the financial stability and sustainability of the institution can be further evaluated moving forward.

B. Issue 8: Planning

MMI had made great progress on its strategic plan during the prior visit. Similar to other institutions of higher education, MMI needed to continue to revise the plan to address challenges it was encountering after the pandemic. During the pandemic, MMI engaged in quick short-term planning as the institution pivoted to remote teaching and provided faculty, staff, and students with needed training and support. As discussed above, MMI is currently navigating serious financial and infrastructure issues. If MMI does not grow enrollment, the programs may not be sustainable (CFR 3.4); if MMI successfully grows their programs, there may be strains on the current infrastructure (CFR 3.1, 3.5).

Meetings with multiple members of administration and the majority of the board of directors revealed that leadership has not been reviewing enrollment projection and revenue models and processing through scenarios in a data-driven manner. Discussions with administrators and board members in the academic and operational areas suggested that leadership may not be aligned on next steps yet. Initial information from a consulting firm had been gathered but not fully processed. Furthermore, it was not clear that MMI leaders were following key indicators and assessing the effectiveness of their current strategic plan (CFR 4.7).

MMI is at a crucial planning point that could highly impact its future financial sustainability. The Special Visit team recommends that MMI ensure that goals for growth are still achievable and sustainable, as measured by key indicators, and considers changes that are currently taking place and are anticipated to take place within the institution and higher education environment (CFR 4.7). In addition, MMI's plans must ensure that appropriate resources are allocated to support infrastructure serving key functions programs grow (3.1, 3.5).

SECTION IV. FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MMI approached the Special Visit thoughtfully and demonstrated commitment to the mission of their institution. The SV team was impressed with progress that MMI has made on all of the previous recommendations. New issues have emerged post pandemic that require attention while others need continued monitoring.

The team commends Mount Madonna Institute for:

1. creation of a strong community committed to the mission of MMI and the Master of Arts in Ayurveda program and their academic and spiritual foundations;

2. developing an initial program assessment plan, providing faculty with assessment workshops to implement that plan, and using results to support student success; and
3. implementing some professional development opportunities during the pandemic, including training on assessment, technology, and pedagogy for faculty and staff.

The team recommends that MMI:

1. strengthen financial forecasting and resources, continue to diversify revenue streams, and develop realistic financial and enrollment management planning processes to ensure long-term viability (CFR 3.4);
2. revise its strategic plan to ensure that goals for growth are still achievable and sustainable, as measured by key indicators, and considers changes that are currently taking place and are anticipated to take place within the institution and higher education environment (CFR 4.7);
3. ensure that appropriate resources are allocated to support infrastructure serving key functions (e.g., institutional research, admissions, instructional technology) as the Master of Arts in Ayurveda and related programs grow (3.1, 3.5);
4. continue to implement and refine the assessment of the Master of Arts in Ayurveda (CFR 2.3, 2.4, 4.3); and
5. ensure staff professional development continues and provides opportunities to further professional job related skills (CFR 3.3).