

**SAMUEL MERRITT UNIVERSITY**  
**WSCUC Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR)**  
May 31, 2018

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As a health sciences university, Samuel Merritt University (SMU) enjoys enviable enrollment growth and financial strength because demand for health care professionals is high. The healthcare professions are changing, however, and the University proposes to respond to those changes by developing more comprehensive measures of student success which reflect a broader range of student attributes, outcomes and achievements. These new measures will supplement tracking of traditional student success factors such as graduation, retention, employment rates, and national certification or licensing.

Thus, the overarching theme for the SMU's Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR) is *student success*. In support of this theme, four subordinate, interrelated themes will be examined: 1) assessment of student learning 2) co-curricular contributions to student learning, 3) increasing faculty engagement in student success, and 4) the role of interprofessional education (IPE) in preparing SMU's graduates. These subordinate themes have arisen from SMU's Academic Division strategic plan, which cites them as critical factors to ensure student success, and from student surveys, which cite them as important reasons to enroll at SMU. Enriching the University's model of and support for student success will enable SMU to continue to compete for the best student applicants, and to address the ongoing challenge of higher attrition of students from underrepresented minority populations than from other student populations.

**OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION**

SMU is a private, not-for-profit, health sciences institution with campuses in Oakland, Sacramento, and San Mateo, California. The University is regionally accredited by WSCUC (WASC Senior College and University Commission) and offers degrees in nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant, and podiatric medicine with some degrees available online. All academic programs are professionally accredited. The University is affiliated with Sutter Health (SH).

SMU educates students to become highly-skilled and compassionate healthcare professionals who positively transform the experience of care in diverse communities. Students learn to advance health equity and make a lasting impact on individual health and community well-being. SMU's philosophy of teaching and learning values the partnership between faculty and students in the learning process. The University has a strong reputation for personalized instruction by over 300 outstanding faculty. SMU graduates are expected to use sound reasoning, current best practice and evidence, and clinical experience in caring for the people they serve in diverse communities.

Student enrollment is about 2,100. The University recruits students for a diverse student body: about 46 percent of students are age 30 or over; 76 percent identify as female; 32 percent as white; 28 percent as Asian; 19 percent Hispanic; and 6 percent African American.

SMU is one of the largest sources of new registered nurses in California. The University is also the largest provider of physical and occupational therapists, physician assistants and podiatric physicians in the greater East Bay. The University's average graduation rate is 95 percent; student scores on licensure pass rates are 90 percent or above for first-time test takers in six programs. Due to the institution's reputation for academic and clinical excellence, its graduates are intensely recruited and have one of the highest rates of employment within one year of graduation.

## **PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEMES**

The University's TPR primary and subordinate themes were developed by several groups, including the Senior Academic Leadership Team (SALT, composed of deans and chairs), the Academic Vice President's Leadership Team (VPLT), the VP for Enrollment and Student Services, the Director of Institutional Research, and the WSCUC Accreditation Liaison Officer. Building blocks for the process of developing the TPR include SMU's earlier assessment framework (now the institutional effectiveness (IE) framework) and revisions to the Institutional Learning Objectives (ILOs), both of which involved broad representative groups of faculty and staff stakeholders. Upon approval, the work of implementing the TPR proposal will rest with five faculty and staff work groups, each led by a SALT member.

## **TPR PRIMARY THEME**

### **Student Success: a refreshed definition and model of student success at Samuel Merritt University**

There have been significant changes in health care and health professions education since the SMU ILOs were developed in 2009. In the intervening years the University strengthened its commitment to a more diverse and inclusive learning environment in which graduates are prepared to address the social determinants of health in our communities. Then, in 2016 a task force of faculty and staff was convened to develop a more capacious concept of student success reflecting that commitment. Finding that ILOs were outdated, the task force first undertook a major revision of those learning outcomes. In late 2017 the group began developing a definition and model of student success that will serve as the centerpiece around which faculty, staff, and students will collaboratively engage at SMU.

The University's working definition of student success is:

*Successful students at Samuel Merritt University will achieve the institutional learning outcomes and mastery of competencies required by their discipline and the broader health care environment. A successful SMU graduate demonstrates commitment to the core values of health equity and service to the community, and develops habits of thinking, skilled practice, and professional responsibility to make a lasting impact on the well-being of people and society.*

Figure 1 makes explicit SMU's adoption of the concept of transformative learning, which builds on all of the attributes each student brings to the task of becoming a health professional. The inclusive learning environment at SMU, represented by the blue circles, is responsive to the changing healthcare environment, represented by the white background

within the figure. From this model will arise metrics, which will drive SMU's continuous quality improvement (CQI) framework.

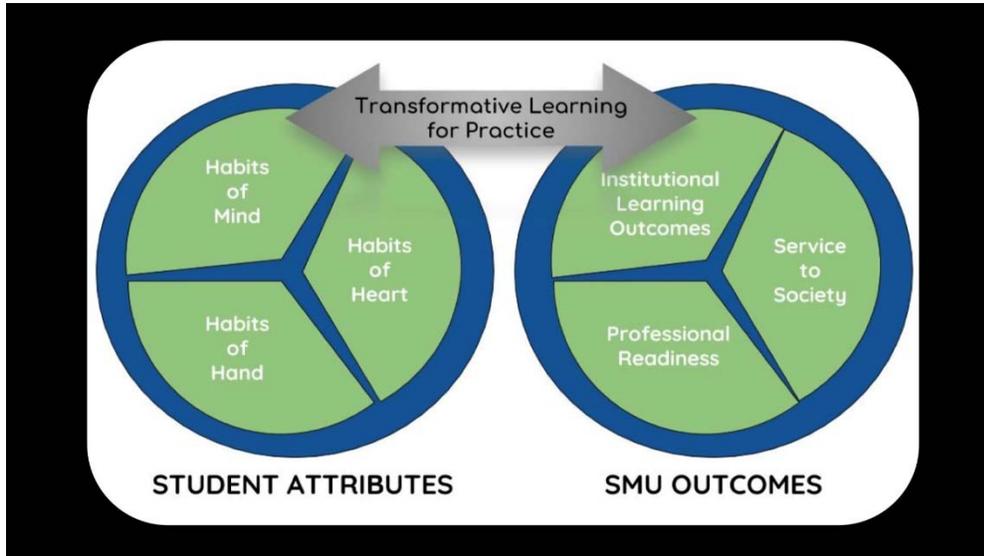


Figure 1: Student Success at Samuel Merritt University

The student success model will be finalized in the fall of 2018, followed by curricular and co-curricular mapping to the new student success model. SMU's focus on the new student success model will enable the University to assess how well the entirety of students' experiences support student success. In tandem with this student success initiative, the University will further engage faculty and staff in assessment and institutional learning from that assessment.

SMU does not anticipate capital requirements for successful completion of the project. However, changes in executive leadership at the University, including a new president by early 2019 and current work toward identifying and designing a new campus location could require revising the proposed timeline.

The outcome for this primary theme of student success is a refreshed model of student success reflecting the healthcare profession's and SMU's greater emphasis on IPE, addressing health inequities, and provider self-care, along with greater institutional knowledge of how well SMU prepares students for practice in today's healthcare environment.

The TPR primary theme of student success addresses CFRs 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; 2.2, 2.5, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13; and 4.4, 4.6, 4.7.

## **SUBORDINATE INTERRELATED THEMES**

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

The incorporation of relatively new healthcare concepts, such as addressing the social determinants of health, IPE, provider wellness and self-care into the revised model and metrics for student success will be complete by the end of 2018. SMU's IE framework will also

incorporate a more robust set of student success assessment processes and reporting systems, mechanisms for iterative feedback loops, and explicit expectations regarding action and accountability plans—in essence, a CQI system. CQI will be aided by SMU’s developing IPE curriculum, which supports shared assessment activities and responsibilities across programs.

Formative assessment of performance relative to the new ILOs will begin in the 2019-20 academic year. Although initial data on outcomes and achievements will be available in 2020 for many degree programs, complete data for all programs will first be available in 2025-26 because some programs are four years in length, and some students delay completion of their programs.

SMU’s expected outcome for this subordinate theme of the assessment of student learning is to strengthen SMU’s capacity for deeper and more meaningful analysis of student learning and preparation for practice.

The TPR subordinate interrelated theme of assessment of student learning addresses CFRs 1.2; and 2.2, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13.

### **Co-Curricular Contributions to Student Learning**

The University has begun to align co-curricular learning experiences, such as community learning events, with the revised ILOs and will further increase the contributions of co-curricular learning to creating diverse and inclusive environments, addressing the social determinants of health, learning to lead and follow within IPE collaborative health care teams, and advocating for better health policies and practices.

Developing assessment methods to capture student outcome data related to co-curricular learning and aligning co-curricular learning with SMU’s ILOs will be an ongoing process. Examining the design and development of co-curricular learning and assessing its impact on achieving institutional learning outcomes will enable SMU to deepen its understanding of the student experience and seek ways to improve it.

The University has the required technology resources, staffing and expertise, including an experienced data analyst.

The outcome for the subordinate theme of co-curricular contributions to student learning is a clear model and outcome measures for assessing how co-curricular experiences contribute to student success, with particular attention to their effect on creating an inclusive learning environment.

The TPR subordinate interrelated theme of co-curricular contributions to student learning addresses CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13; and 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7.

### **Faculty Engagement in Student Success**

Achieving the outcomes specified in SMU’s revised definition of student success will require related new capacity in course content and pedagogical methods, such as transformative learning for practice. To develop that new capacity, in 2016 SMU launched an initiative to establish a center for health professions educators at SMU, the Faculty Center (FC). The FC will serve as the hub of the University’s professional development opportunities for all

educators of health professionals, to, “prepare healthcare professionals across all practice domains as dynamic educators to teach masterfully with 21st century tools and strategies, inspiring students to be outstanding clinicians, collaborative members of the healthcare team, creative thinkers and lifelong learners.”

In September 2016, a workgroup was convened under an assistant academic vice president to bring the concept of the FC to fruition. A physical location on the SMU campus was identified, a web designer to collaborate on the Institute’s virtual location was contracted, and an exciting collaboration with IDEO-affiliated individuals was established for assistance with creating a truly innovative and impactful experience for all FC stakeholders. An official launch date in September 2018 has been established. Once the FC is fully serving SMU faculty and staff, the University plans to make FC services broadly to the public through online, brick and mortar, and hybrid offerings.

Resources for the FC have been allocated, and the rationale fully articulated in the University’s 2017-2026 strategic plan. That plan also includes metrics for assessing the development of the FC.

The outcome of the FC is to grow a SMU-hosted international community of practice for educators whose members are inspired to support each other to be master teachers, learners and scholars, and who have the knowledge and skills to educate students to address health inequities as healthcare providers.

The TPR subordinate interrelated theme of faculty engagement addresses CFRs 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10; 3.3; and 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7.

### **Interprofessional Education**

IPE occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes (WHO 2010). Since fall 2012, SMU has been steadily working towards a comprehensive, scalable and sustainable model for instituting IPE across the entire University to prepare SMU graduates for increasingly complex and collaborative healthcare professions. To accommodate differences among the University’s programs, in fall 2017, SALT established an IPE *passport* curriculum and online learning management system which will track student participation in – and competencies achieved through -- a varied menu of IPE opportunities.

In 2017, an IPE Standards Taskforce established content and process standards to be used in creating IPE experiences to populate SMU’s passport curriculum. Rubrics and tools to develop and evaluate proposed IPE learning activities are being developed, with beta-testing anticipated in the 2018-2019 academic year. Formal launch of the passport program is scheduled for 2019-2020. The number and types of students and faculty participating in IPE experiences will be tracked, and the results of the end-of-experience assessments will be disseminated.

SMU is positioned to promote effective collaborative practice and fulfill the IPE vision, which will support several aspects of the University’s new model for student success, graduating

health care providers who bring an inclusive, respectful and collaborative approach to person-centered care.

The outcome of this subordinate theme of interprofessional education is to launch and assess the IPE Passport program to support an inclusive, respectful and collaborative approach to improve the health of individuals and populations, as well as reduce health disparities.

The TPR subordinate, interrelated theme of IPE addresses CFRs 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 2.9, 2.11; and 4.5, 4.6, 4.7.

### **Collecting and Analyzing Data to Support Student Success**

SMU has a well-established Institutional Research and Evaluation office (IR) committed to data-driven decision support at all levels. IR plays a critical role in evaluating student success efforts, identifying meaningful student success metrics, designing research tools for predictive analytics and collecting longitudinal outcome data at the academic program level. IR has a rich archive of student, faculty and staff data that allow historical data trending, as well as a set of valid, reliable and comprehensive data collection protocols which yield detailed student retention, learning, graduation and advancement information.

IR has been deeply involved in developing the TPR proposal, redesigning the IE framework, and refreshing SMU's model for student success.

### **Conclusion**

As this proposal demonstrates, a large and inclusive cohort of faculty, staff and administrators is engaged in Samuel Merritt University's process for creating a model of student success that more fully reflects the complex, collaborative and rapidly-changing demands of the healthcare professions. Similarly, multiple University divisions and programs are collaborating to build capacity to support student success through assessment, co-curricular learning, faculty engagement and IPE – all in alignment with the new model.

Just as this TPR proposal builds on the IE framework the University developed for its last WSCUC reaffirmation, so too will future growth move beyond the foundation SMU has laid here. The University aims to learn more about itself as an institution and to strive for continuous improvement as result of these intentional TPR lines of inquiry.