

# **REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM SPECIAL VISIT**

To United Arab Emirates University

February 19-20, 2025

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2023 Handbook and Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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## **SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, and Visit**

The United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) was established in 1976 by federal law as the nation's first government-sponsored university with a focus on intellect, culture, and science, and is the largest and most comprehensive university in the Country. UAEU is located in the city of Al Ain in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, about 90 miles from the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

UAEU is the largest and most comprehensive university in the UAE. As of Fall 2024, the total enrollment in degree programs and the pre-university foundation program was 18,553 students:

- 16,969 (91.5%) are undergraduate students.
- 13,476 (73%) are female.
- 609 (3.3%) are doctoral students (of whom 389, i.e., 64%, are female).
- 975 (5.3%) are master's students (of whom 722, i.e., 74%, are female).
- 2,483 (13.4%) are international students (non-Emiratis) of whom 1515, i.e., 61% are female.

UAEU has 2,641 full and part-time employees (academic and non-academic staff). Out of them, 1,973 are full-time employees, and 903 (46%) are academic staff (faculty members and instructors) from 67 nationalities. About 84% (757) of the full-time faculty have doctoral degrees while the remaining 16% (146) hold masters' degrees. Emirati faculty represent (17%) of total faculty population. Females represent 27% of the academic staff and 67% of the non-academic staff.

With more than 80 higher education institutions in the country, UAEU is now operating in a complex and competitive environment. However, unlike many private institutions, UAEU's development is tied very closely to the aspirations of the nation. The University's vision and mission reflect this connection. Over the 48 years since its inception, UAEU has evolved from an undergraduate teaching institution to a comprehensive university with much greater emphasis on a research mission.

The WSCUC Action Letter of July 11, 2022, reaffirmed UAEU's accreditation for a period of ten years. Since that time the University has gone through several dozen revised program requests, none of which required substantive change review. In its 2022 University reaffirmation review, WSCUC asked for an interim site visit to address the following four issues: (1) the effectiveness of the institution's governing board (for UAEU it is called the University Council); (2) representation of women and Emirati nationals in the faculty; (3) improvement of post-graduation employment rates; and (4) development of a detailed plan for continued growth of the institution's research profile.

## **B. Description of Team's Review Process**

The WSCUC site visit team reviewed the UAEU Special Visit report in early December 2024 and completed WSCUC worksheets in late December in preparation for a two-hour team meeting on January 7, 2025, to finalize substantive and schedule preparations for the February 19-20, 2025 site visit to the UAEU campus in Al-Ain, UAE. The UAEU Special Visit Report was very informative and contained helpful documentation and data regarding each of the four issues. The Special Visit report and related preparations were guided by a UAEU Accreditation Steering Committee, which is a standing body widely representative of the UAEU academic and administrative community.

The WSCUC Special Visit team met as a whole with the Accreditation Steering Committee, the UAEU Vice-Chancellor (i.e., the campus chief executive), the Provost, Chief Financial Officer, Chancellor (i.e., the Board Chair) and chairs of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee, Finance, Administration and Investment Committee, and Audit and Risk Committee. These meetings provided information for the team to judge the effectiveness of the governing board.

The WSCUC team met in pairs with individuals who were in a position to judge each of the other three issues that were the focus of the Special Visit. To address faculty diversification, the team met with approximately 14 deans, assistant deans, department chairs, and faculty. For the team's questions about post-graduate employment the team met with numerous individuals including students, career services staff, and local employers. To better understand UAEU research planning, the team met with

the Provost, Associate Provost for Research and about a dozen deans and faculty members from across the campus.

Finally, the WSCUC team had access to a confidential e-mail account to which all members of the UAEU community were invited to submit concerns or other information of use to the Special Visit. There were only two e-mail messages that raised concerns about research policy, neither of which were validated through the team's inquiry.

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

The UAEU report was well organized, evidence-based and easy to understand. In addition to a thorough update on university developments since the 2022 Reaffirmation visit, each of the four Special Visit issues was addressed with evidence, reflective actions, outcomes, future plans, and concluding remarks. In addition, the UAEU Special Visit report identified other changes or issues the institution is facing that allowed the team to more fully understand the context of internal and external factors impinging upon the university. As mentioned earlier, UAEU has a broadly based and active standing committee on accreditation that guided the Special Visit review and report preparation. In summary, UAEU conducted a rigorous inquiry making use of appropriate methodology, use of evidence and reflective action.

## **SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS**

### **A. Continue to take actions, based on widely recognized best practices, that are designed to improve the effectiveness of the University Council as the institution's governing board.**

The governing board for UAEU is known as the University Council. Beginning with its initial accreditation review, the review process has helped this institution to better comply with WSCUC Governing Board Policy. Considerable progress has been made, with some work yet to be done.

In June 2022, a significant advance was made when the UAE adopted what is known as Cabinet Resolution No. (55). This document substantially aligns the governance of UAE federal universities with WSCUC Governing Board Policy (CFR 3.7). Visiting team interviews with both governing board members and senior institutional leaders indicated satisfaction with efforts to forge new relationships of authority

and responsibility as specified in Cabinet Resolution No. (55).

However, the visiting team noticed that some key institutional policies that were listed as interim during their reaffirmation visit in 2022 had not yet been adopted. The team subsequently requested a list of all policies waiting for approval, and that list turned out to be quite long. On the surface, many of these policies appeared to be management responsibilities, with approval at the Vice-Chancellor level rather than the Governing Board level. Yet at the time of this special visit, the question of appropriate approval policy levels appeared to still be in question and approval processes and timelines uncertain. This situation can hamper effective institutional operations and may be contrary to WSCUC Governing Board Policy, which requires the Governing Board to delegate day-to-day management of the institution to the chief executive officer (CFR 1.4, 3.7, 3.11). Therefore, the team recommends that UAEU ensure that policies crucial for university operations have appropriate and timely approvals.

WSCUC Governing Board Policy requires that governing boards evaluate their own performance to ensure the effective and efficient execution of their responsibilities. While UAEU's governing board (University Council) undertook a self-assessment exercise several years ago, many of the resulting recommendations are of an ongoing nature and do not have a defined end-date. Accordingly, the review team recommends that the University Council continue to advance the implementation of these self-study recommendations as part of a continuous improvement process. It is also noted that the Governing Board has increased the frequency of its meetings, a step that is expected to facilitate more timely progress on both policy and self-assessment follow-ups.

**B. Affirmatively address the representation of women and Emirati nationals in the faculty as the university works to attract and retain the high-quality faculty needed to support its educational excellence goals and its aspiration to enhance its research profile.**

UAEU recognizes the “critical importance of ensuring the representation of women and Emirate nationals within its faculty, considering it vital for promoting diversity, inclusivity and equity in the academic environment” (UAEU Special Visit Report\_2024-2025, p. 18). It identifies several benefits of

a diverse faculty, including enhancing students' learning experience, driving innovative research, and providing role models for female students. The benefits of increasing the number of Emirate nationals include preserving local knowledge and strengthening ties to the community. However, at its 2022 WSCUC Reaffirmation Visit to the UAEU, the team noted that the percentage of female and Emirati faculty was lower than desired. At that time, 25% of faculty were female 39% of which were instructor positions. This was considered particularly relevant given that the majority of UAEU students are female (almost 80% female student body). The team also noted the relatively low percentage of Emirati faculty, which was important given the University's goal of developing the Emirati workforce and economy. The team's recommendation at the conclusion of the visit, as published in the Commission's action letter, was that UAEU should "affirmatively address the representation of women and Emirate nationals in the faculty as the university works to attract and retain the high-quality faculty needed to support its educational excellence goals and its aspiration to enhance its research goal...".

In UAEU's Special Visit report, the University described a number of actions it has taken to address this issue. This began early in the 2022-2023 academic year, when the Provost directed Deans to give greater attention to recruiting qualified female and Emirate faculty in all colleges. Suggested actions included emphasizing gender equity in job advertisements and expanding recruitment networks to reach a broader pool of female candidates. The results were that 61 female faculty and instructors were hired between Fall 2022 and Fall 2024. These results varied across colleges, with the highest number hired in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the lowest in the Colleges of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Information Technology and Law. The UAEU Special Visit report noted that overall representation of female faculty increased from 25.7% in AY17-18 to a high of 28.1% in AY23-24. The representation of Emirati to total female faculty also increased from 26% in AY17-18 to 32% in AY24-25. UAEU also reported significant progress in appointing women to leadership positions. It has appointed 41 women (21 Emirati) to leadership roles in a variety of academic and administrative positions. UAEU states that this progress "aligns with the University's goals of fostering an inclusive and

supportive environment, enabling female faculty to shape the institution's strategic vision and cultivate a culture of empowerment and equality across the academic community" (Special Visit report, p. 21). This result is in accordance with WSCUC CFR 1.2.

The Special Visit report showed somewhat slower progress in the representation of Emirati faculty. There has been a slight upward trend, with 16.3% in AY17-18 to a high of 17.8% in AY20-21, but with a slight degree since, from a low of 15.7% in AY22-23 and back up to 17.1% in AY24-25. As with its female faculty, the representation of Emirati faculty varies significantly across colleges, with highest representation being in the College of Law (40%), Education and Medicine and Health Sciences (27%), to lows in the Colleges of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (2%) and Business and Economics (6%). Progress in this area is expected to be addressed when the Emiratization and the Diversity and Equal Opportunities policies are approved by the UAEU Board of Trustees. These policies provide guidelines for the colleges to improve on their goals of increasing female and national faculty. One existing program that has proven successful is the Teaching Assistant program, which recruits top-performing Emirati graduates and provides structured pathways to faculty positions.

To learn more about progress as well as the barriers, the team scheduled a meeting with female and Emirati faculty and other leaders of these efforts. While at the Special Visit, two of the WSCUC team members met with a variety of female and Emirati faculty and administrators. Several had been recently promoted into their current administrative roles. The team members were impressed by their commitment to the hiring, development and promotion of women and Emirati nationals (CFR 3.3). A number of them were graduates of the Teaching Assistant program discussed above. They also discussed recent initiatives launched at the University that will help support working women and families. These include the establishment of a nursery to support working parents (a University Initiative) and the implementation of the "Back to School" policy in 2024-2025 (a Federal government initiative). This policy allows working parents to accompany their children to schools and nurseries at the beginning of a new academic year, and provides flexible working hours on other occasions if it does not disrupt the



organization's workflow. They also anticipated that further progress will be made once the Diversity and Equal Opportunity and Emiratization policies receive the Board of Trustees' approval. One of the deans in the group did voice that finding qualified applicants for faculty positions is still somewhat of a challenge.

One limitation of the meeting is that all of the UAEU attendees had been at the university for a number of years. Therefore, the team did not get a chance to meet with newly hired women and Emirati nationals to get their views on the University's recruiting, hiring and new employee development processes.

On a somewhat related topic, the team was very encouraged to learn that all of UAEU's academic programs are now gender inclusive. This is a significant change from the status at the reaffirmation visit, when only graduate programs and the bachelor of Veterinary Medicine program had been integrated.

Overall, the Special Visit review team was impressed with the University's commitment to its diversity and equity goals, and its slow but steady progress in the hiring, development and promotion of a diverse faculty. While there are still representation gaps in a number of departments, UAEU is on a positive trajectory, and further progress is anticipated once the relevant policies are approved by the Board of Trustees (see the governance section of this report for further discussion of this topic).

### **C. Strengthen efforts to improve post-graduation employment rates, which is one of UAEU's criteria for student success.**

The 2022 Team Report raised concerns about UAEU's performance in post-graduation employment, pointing to relatively low employment rates, especially in the private sector. Based on the team's observations, the 2022 WSCUC Commission Letter to UAEU requires the university to "strengthen efforts to improve post-graduation rates, which is one of UAEU's criteria for student success" (CFRs 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, and 4.2).

UAEU's Special Visit Institutional Report detailed a two-prong strategy to improve post-graduation employment rates: (1) partnering with academic programs to enhance students' career readiness and (2) strengthening relations with employers and industry leaders to increase employment opportunities. The

report also provided analysis of recent post-graduation employment rates. During the Special Visit team's visit, UAEU added data from the university's 2024 Strategic KPIs Annual Analysis Report. Meetings with employers, students participating in internship programs, Center for Career Placement and Alumni Leadership and Staff, and faculty and staff from several colleges helped the team round out its picture of the issue (CFR 2.11).

*Jahez*, a comprehensive career readiness program launched during the Covid-19 pandemic, accelerated its offerings of fundamental and advanced workshops to equip students with critical skills for finding employment and achieving long-term career success. Since 2023, the Center has offered more than 200 workshops for more than 18,000 participants. Some colleges require students to complete a series of *Jahez* workshops before embarking on their mandatory internships. Other career-readiness initiatives include expanded on-campus events providing direct access to career opportunities and networks.

In addition, UAEU has worked to improve outreach to potential employers. The Employer Engagement program has resulted in many new relationships with prospective employers. A partnership with the Emirates Talent Competitiveness Council has created greater private sector opportunities for UAEU students (CFR 2.13).

Looking to the future, the university has ambitious plans, including a digital platform to improve information available to students about placement opportunities and career development resources. Another important step will be structured alumni mentorship programs.

Since the accreditation team visit in 2022, UAEU's post-graduation rates have improved markedly, up more than 20%. This exceeds institutional targets. However, variation within the university suggests that greater attention, both at the university- and the college-level may be warranted. The College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (52.6%), College of Humanities and Social Sciences (53.7%), and College of Law (55.7%) have significantly lower employment rates than other academic units. Male graduates (81.57%) also fare much better than female graduates (63.50%) (CFR 2.9).

The team's meetings with employers, students, and university faculty and staff provided additional

insights that speak both to the success of recent initiatives and areas for continued improvement.

The meeting with employers included, among others, representatives from some of the UAE's largest and most prominent firms and globally important firms in the information and accounting sectors. Overall, employers expressed enthusiasm for what they see as an improved relationship with UAEU in recent years. "They have become a good listener," said one. Others spoke about stronger connections with deans at the university and a higher profile among students. UAEU has now become a top school for recruiting according to several employers.

There was debate among employers about the difficulty of hiring potential female employees who may be reluctant to relocate to other regions in the Emirates for family or cultural reasons. Some believed that this would continue to be an impediment. Others disagreed and even saw Al Ain and its environs as an opportunity for expanding their businesses and creating more employment options locally. Employers also recommended ways the university could better prepare students for their job searches, including better CV preparation, and more appropriate matching of CV content to specific positions.

The student meeting was well attended and included students from Architectural Engineering, Accounting, Computer Engineering, Biochemistry, Education, Law, and other fields. Almost all of the students had participated in *Jahez* workshops and found them useful, although some students believed that they had not received specific enough guidance about which workshops would be most useful to them given their programs and career goals. Students also said they appreciated the increased number of networking events available at the university.

All students were involved in internships. Several were tremendously enthusiastic about their internships and the opportunity these internships provided to enhance their job-related skills. A number of them expected their internships to lead directly to regular employment after graduation. Other students were concerned that their internship placements were not well-matched to their career goals and their academic programs. Several students wished they had more practical hands-on opportunities in their academic programs to develop skills they believed they needed for their internships.

The team also met with Career Placement staff, as well as instructors and internship specialists from several of the colleges. These staff, instructors, and specialists described goals for improving their effectiveness, including placing more students in the private sector (especially in light of Emiratization initiatives), placing more emphasis on entrepreneurship, building stronger alumni relations, including mentorship, and leveraging technology to better manage information and communications about their services and career opportunities. Doing all of this effectively, they believed, will require expanding their team.

The team observed that UAEU has made significant strides in improving post-graduation job placement and has impressive plans to enhance their reach and effectiveness (CFR 2.13). In the spirit of continuous improvement, it will be important for Career Placement staff to regularly seek feedback from employers and students to continue the progress made in recent years (CFRs 2.11, 4.2)

**D. Develop a detailed plan for continued growth of the institution's research profile that addresses areas such as graduate students and post docs, specialized research support personnel, balance between teaching and research, research partnerships, and technology transfer functions.**

UAEU has maintained its commitment to be the premier public research university in the UAE and increase its international ratings since the WSCUC affirmation visit in 2022. The university's 2023-2026 Research and Innovation Strategy provides the framework for continued growth of the institution's research profile (UAEU Special Visit Report Attachment III-5-1). UAEU has six research centers that account for the bulk of external research revenue (approximately 32 million AED). Support for research is primarily based on allocation of internal resources with a smaller amount coming from external funding. The university's priority is to publish research in high-quality SCOPUS journals and use results to achieve patents based on research findings (CFR 2.8). The UAEU Special Visit Report documented steady annual progress on these criteria, including a 50% increase in research expenditures over the past fiscal year. Building institutional stature in these ways is meant to attract high-quality research-oriented faculty as well as attention from potential external supporters and partners. The University has allocated significant funds

to hire outstanding researchers with impactful research in the areas of strategic importance including water resources, food and energy.

The university employs approximately 50 post-doctoral fellows whose presence helps grow their research profile. Since 2017, UAEU has made significant improvements in its international rankings. This progress is apparent across major global ranking systems, including the QS, Times Higher Education (THE), and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), also known as the Shanghai Rankings. In recent years, UAEU has consistently improved in each of these, not only on a global scale but also in subject and regional rankings.

Meetings with faculty, college deans, and senior leaders produced general satisfaction with the current approach for university support for research (CFR 3.2). Suggested areas for improvement include more opportunity to build collaborative and concentrated faculty efforts that might yield greater depth of analysis and impact of findings. Some faculty expressed a need for greater university support for research facilities, technical staff and graduate students. Finally, it was suggested that expanding the current UAEU site in Abu Dhabi could result in new corporate support for research. None of these suggestions appeared to be a critical barrier to achieving the University's research goals.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the WSCUC Special Visit team toured the university's College of Medicine and Health Sciences facilities, including state-of-the-art laboratories for genomics medicine and counseling, stem cell research, and spacious medical assessment practice areas (CFR 3.6). The College was recently awarded international accreditation for its two-year post graduate Doctor of Pharmacy program by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) USA, making this program the first of its kind accredited outside the USA. Leadership from the College Dean and other staff underscored the university's commitment to be at the region's forefront in medical and allied health research and practice.

Institutional leadership from the Vice-Chancellor, Provost and Associate Provost for Research, among many others, elevates the university's capabilities and contributions to UAE's knowledge economy and

national development goals.

### **SECTION III – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Special Visit Team found that UAEU has taken seriously and made noticeable progress on the four recommendations from the WSCUC re-affirmation report of 2022. The University conducted rigorous inquiry and action on each of the four Special Visit issues, making use of appropriate methodology, evidence and reflective action. UAEU takes WSCUC accreditation seriously as evidenced in their thorough Special Visit report, flexible accommodation of the Team's requests, and provision of additional information and data as needed for the Special Visit.

#### **Commendations**

The review team commends United Arab Emirates University for:

1. Demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement.
2. Progress in advancing and supporting women in leadership positions.
3. Growing and deepening employer relations and expanding student preparation for and awareness of post-graduation employment opportunities.
4. Creating a comprehensive research growth plan and for its efforts to promote and support faculty research.

#### **Recommendations**

The team recommends that United Arab Emirates University:

1. Ensure that policies crucial for university operations have appropriate and timely approvals (CFR 3.7).
2. Continue with implementation of board (Council) self-study recommendations (CFR 3.8).
3. Continue with proactive efforts to recruit women and Emirati nationals to academic and leadership positions (CFR 1.2).