

**Peer Review Report on Academic Programs  
at the Institute of Buddhist Studies**

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## **Introduction**

This report on the academic programs of the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS) reflects the consensus judgment of the four peer reviewers. The report is based on the IBS Academic Program Review 2018 report, the IBS catalog, a draft plan for Comprehensive Program Review, two sample course syllabi, and other information available to the public on the IBS website. Dean Scott Mitchell helpfully responded to several requests for clarification on particular points.

The peer reviewers had extensive email correspondence throughout the months of June and July 2018, and a video conference call on June 25. Although it was not possible to make a site visit, all four peer reviewers have previously spent time on the IBS campus and have had prior interactions with IBS administrators, faculty, and students.

## **Institutional Context**

The IBS's Academic Program Review (APR) 2018 demonstrates both commendable insight into its institutional context as well as opportunities for further growth and development. This section will explore these opportunities as they relate to the IBS's mission and vision, its geographic location, its position within academia broadly and trends in the overall field, its position in relation to identified peer institutions and programs, how IBS conceives of and positions its individual programs (i.e. the MBS, MDiv, and certificates), and the sufficiency and expertise of its faculty. In brief, the peer reviewers find that:

1. The IBS's mission and vision statements are appropriate for an institution of higher learning, though certain aspects of each are not yet fully realized, and the relationships between mission, vision, and learning outcomes require further clarification.
2. The IBS has accurately assessed both the benefits and the challenges of its location in Berkeley, but could take this analysis further through market studies into the needs and desires of target demographics.
3. The IBS has positioned itself at a nexus of disciplines, including academic religious studies, humanities (e.g. psychology), and praxis-oriented professions, but has also neglected key insights from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist "theological" studies programs.
4. The IBS has selected appropriate peer institutions for comparison, but has not accurately assessed or characterized the nature of those institutions' comparable programs, thus neglecting important insights for marketing and program curricula.

5. The IBS's degree programs are appropriate and rigorous, but there is a lack of clarity as to the role of the Master of Buddhist Studies (MBS) as distinct from the joint-GTU MA in Buddhist Studies and the MDiv. Given the MBS's low historic enrollment, the peer reviewers question the wisdom of continuing this program. Likewise, some certificate programs should be reevaluated due to low enrollment.
6. The IBS's faculty, particularly its full-time faculty, are a key asset to the institution and should be carefully supported and retained, yet certain gaps in faculty expertise persist (i.e. Vajrayana Buddhism) and the historic conditions for advanced Buddhist studies in the U.S. may be contributing to how faculty delineate between curricula and extra-curricula (related to item 3, above).

The following paragraphs will elaborate on each of these findings in turn.

These findings do not negate the IBS's proven strengths, which the reviewers believe to be accurately assessed in the report. However, in several cases, both strengths and weaknesses need to be further analyzed for their implications, and some strengths presented as unique to IBS are, in fact, common among its peers. As such, the IBS is demonstrating best practice in its field while also neglecting opportunities to distinguish itself in marketing and recruiting and to learn from peer institutions with similar goals and practices. The paragraphs that follow will seek to highlight areas where the IBS could do further analysis or learn from others.

First, the mission and vision statement (p.10) are clear and appropriate. The mission includes a desire for "education in the full breath of the Buddhist traditions," which is not yet realized. The report acknowledges that the IBS currently lacks scholarly depth in Vajrayana Buddhism (p. 21). To what extent relationships with UC Berkeley can fulfill this need for MBS, MDiv, and Certificate students is unclear. In such instances, religious studies coursework may be insufficiently praxis-oriented to be useful to ministerial and chaplaincy students.

In later sections the report references connecting learning outcomes to the vision. However, best practice currently recommends connecting learning outcomes to the mission, as the mission is the long-term purpose of the institution and relatively stable. Whereas a vision, in contrast, defines where an institution wants to be in the short term (e.g. five, ten, or twenty years) and changes continuously. The vision should be related to learning outcomes, but the outcomes themselves should derive from the mission.

Second, Berkeley is both an exciting and challenging location for the IBS. IBS should consider cause and effect relationships between its location and the enrollment trend

favoring part-time “second-career” (and auditing) students. It is possible that only second-career students with established incomes or existing housing are able to attend the IBS’s programs due to cost of living in the Bay Area and lack of sufficient financial aid. The IBS may wish to follow up with recent inquiries and applicants who chose not to attend to clarify decision factors.

A careful analysis may reveal strict enrollment growth limitations currently masked by the intellectual benefits of the campus. Some of these limitations may be ameliorated by growth in online programs, but given that online programs will reap none of the geographic benefits, this should also be factored into the analysis. The federal financial aid that will become available to students when the IBS achieves regional accreditation may also help offset this cost and open new markets, but to what extent? The IBS is not the only seminary balancing an intellectually desirable and prestigious location against the untenable cost of rent. The APR report may not be the place for a thorough strategic analysis of such factors, but neither does it mention that such an analysis has or will take place.

Third, one of the IBS’s identified strengths is its blend of Buddhist praxis-based education and western religious studies education (p. 10), a blend which is also common among its peer institutions. There is a third field that the IBS is well placed to capitalize on: western theological studies. The IBS demonstrates its awareness of this field through its inter-religious partnerships via the GTU and citing of research from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), but does not appear to have fully digested the implications for programs and curricula. For example, student surveys reported a desire for more practical topics (p. 41), such as mandated reporter training, which the IBS has suggested it provide via extra-curricular workshops. However, in many theological schools, this content is part of the required curriculum on pastoral care, along with many other legal and ethical concerns, as well as much of what currently constitutes the non-credit mandatory workshops that accompany the Kyoshi Certificate (Catalog, p. 34).

The peer reviewers speculate that the faculty of the IBS, holding doctoral degrees largely (if not entirely) from religious studies programs, may benefit from expanding their definition of academic curricula to include these topics. This would also better align the IBS’s MDiv curriculum with its identified peers, many of which list mandatory sequenced courses in pastoral care, ethics, and spiritual formation among their program maps. In integrating practical, applied, ethical, and legal content more fully into the curriculum, the IBS may find a need to bring in additional faculty or guest speakers (either Buddhist or non-Buddhist) with expertise in these areas, lest current faculty (a core strength of

the institution) become overburdened. Also, including these topics within the curricula is more fiscally sound, as tuition revenue will compensate instructors for their efforts.

Fourth, while the IBS has selected CST, Harvard Divinity, Maitripa, Naropa, and UWest as appropriate peer institutions, the report reveals that the IBS could benefit from more detailed study of the comparable programs offered at these institutions. The report from the IBS claims unique features (p. 24) that are, in fact, available among their peers. Harvard, Naropa, and UWest likewise blend religious studies and praxis-based curricula. UWest and Naropa both also require broad intra-Buddhist study and Harvard offers, though does not require, a comparable breadth of Buddhist study. Buddhist diversity is likewise reflected in student and faculty demographics and areas of interest. While the IBS is the only institution to offer a formal certificate in Theravada studies, comparable coursework in Theravada traditions is available at UWest, Naropa, and Harvard, as well as greater depth of expertise in Vajrayana studies. Likewise, at Harvard, Naropa, UWest, and CST, intra-religious learning is required and emphasized.

The peer reviewers acknowledge the IBS's strengths in these areas, but stress that these strengths are not unique and encourage the institution to consider this for two reasons. First, the IBS must carefully consider its market position relative to its direct competitors based on accurate knowledge. Effective recruiting and marketing will be essential to meeting the ambitious enrollment goals the IBS has set for itself. Second, the IBS can learn from both the mistakes and successes of its direct competitors. In fact, through its participation in the Buddhist Ministry Working Group, it is well placed to do so. Both CST and Harvard have a depth of experience in praxis-based theological education. Naropa and UWest have depth in Buddhism from both religious studies and practice perspectives. Naropa, UWest, and Maitripa share many of the challenges unique to small Buddhist institutions, such as accreditation, integration of contemplative content, fundraising, east-west cultural differences, etc. The IBS should continue to communicate with and learn from these institutions (and vice versa).

Fifth, the peer reviewers questioned the role of the Master of Buddhist Studies program, especially given its low historic enrollment. The program is comparable in length to the joint-GTU MA in Buddhist studies, but appears more flexible in content, a flexibility that contributes to a lack of clear goals or career trajectory. Why would a student choose the MBS instead of the MA or MDiv? Given its low enrollment, the IBS may consider discontinuing this degree to save the effort of advising and assessing it. Likewise, several certificate programs with historically low enrollment should be reevaluated. How do these programs serve the mission of the IBS? Who do these programs serve? What kind of students choose them and where do they go following graduation? In relation to

the MBS program, which has no directly comparable programs at the identified peer schools (perhaps a benefit?), the reviewers are left with many questions.

Sixth and finally, the faculty are a key asset of the IBS, as identified by student surveys and the peer reviewers. The IBS must support and retain its core faculty and attract and retain gifted adjuncts. The IBS should also seek to add expertise in Vajrayana Buddhism. The peer reviewers cannot comment on faculty satisfaction, retention, etc., given that no information on these issues was included in the Academic Program Review, despite the faculty's massive impact on educational effectiveness. The reviewers only recommend that the IBS carefully consider how to ensure a balanced and sustainable faculty workload given its ambitious mission.

In service of this goal, the reviewers recommend the IBS investigate two strategies that have seen early success at other institutions: hybrid faculty/staff positions and expanded roles for adjuncts. The IBS has already identified a need for a field education placement coordinator. This could be one of several potential hybrid positions to involve both teaching and staff responsibilities. Others might include a faculty librarian, faculty assessment coordinator, or faculty recruiter. Adjuncts can, likewise, expand their contracted responsibilities to include advising and assessment, thus lightening some of this load on full-time faculty and bringing expert perspectives gained from working at other institutions to bear.

Last, some students reported concerns that coursework was "too easy" (p. 41). The peer reviewers recommend the IBS follow-up on these concerns to determine if they pertain to full-time core faculty, adjunct faculty, or both, and address the issue through a combination of faculty-to-faculty mentoring, training materials, or professional development workshops to ensure consistency in academic rigor. Graduate students, particularly second-career students, come to IBS with differing levels of preparation, which may also explain differing perceptions of the ease or difficulty of coursework. This issue should be monitored over time through regularly occurring surveys and/or focus groups. Learning outcome assessment will also, through the nature of that work, help address this issue.

### **Assessment and Educational Effectiveness**

As part of the 2016 program review, the IBS faculty developed institutional learning outcomes and program learning outcomes for the MBS and MDiv programs. The 2018 program review report acknowledges (p. 34) that both sets of outcomes need to be revised. The report also notes the need to develop benchmarks that specify desired levels of performance and to identify forms of evidence to be used in assessment. The

peer reviewers concur with these judgments and note that these tasks need to be completed before any effective assessment of academic programs can even begin.

### *Institutional learning outcomes*

The four current ILOs for IBS are, for the most part, descriptions of what students will do in the course of their studies rather than outcomes that they will carry with them after graduation. These ILOs need to be completely reworked to indicate “what the institution expects its students ... to know and be able to do upon graduation, and how graduates embody the distinct values and traditions of the institution through their dispositions and future plans.” (See 2013 WSCUC *Handbook* section III.3 on “Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees.”)

In a single-focus institution like IBS, it is to be expected that ILOs and PLOs will overlap more than they would in a multi-disciplinary university. Even so, it would be good for the ILOs to go further in expressing the institution’s aspirations for how its graduates will make a positive difference in the wider world. Specifically, what kinds of skills and knowledge are necessary for graduates to be successful Jōdo Shinshū ministers, Buddhist chaplains, and scholars? What are some of the specific challenges raised in contemporary society that these graduates will face, and how will they be prepared to meet those challenges?

### *Program learning outcomes*

As presently stated, neither set of PLOs is formulated as result-focused outcomes. Currently the PLOs for the MBS are introduced with the formula “students in the MBS program will...,” while those for the MDiv are stated as “the goals of the MDiv program are to provide students with...” Both sets of PLOs should be revised to follow an outcomes formula that states something like “after completing the program, graduates will be able to ...”

The language used for the outcomes should employ action verbs, and most of the PLOs should focus on the higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy ([https://www.apu.edu/live\\_data/files/333/blooms\\_taxonomy\\_action\\_verbs.pdf](https://www.apu.edu/live_data/files/333/blooms_taxonomy_action_verbs.pdf)), as appropriate for graduate education. Instead of using vague phrases like “demonstrate analytical skills,” it would be better to use more specific language such as “analyze Buddhist texts by placing them in historical context.”

The program review report (p. 38) indicates that IBS is considering developing PLOs for the certificate programs. Although WSCUC does not require this, it might be a good

idea, especially for the Shin Buddhist (formerly Kyoshi) certificate program which has nearly as many students (in headcount) as all the master's programs put together. To the extent that one or more PLOs for a certificate overlap with those for a degree program, this would help to provide a critical mass for data collection and analysis to be used in assessment.

### *Student learning outcomes in course syllabi*

Both of the two sample syllabi provided to the peer reviewers contain student learning outcomes, but they are not consistently formulated so as to be assessable. For example, the outcomes stated in one syllabus include “acquiring knowledge” of Buddhist traditions and “becoming familiar with” Buddhist texts, but there is no indication of how that knowledge and familiarity will be demonstrated. The outcomes in the other syllabus appear to describe in-course activities such as “develop foundational knowledge,” “engage in dialogue,” and “produce a research project” rather than clearly stating what students will be able to do after successfully completing the course. On the positive side, the second syllabus contains a detailed comprehensive rubric for evaluating final research papers.

### *Assessment plan*

As the program view report notes (p. 38), IBS is still in the initial stages of developing a comprehensive assessment plan. In addition to revising the ILOs and PLOs, attention needs to be given to refining the curriculum maps, establishing expected levels of performance, setting benchmarks for program assessment, and identifying artifacts of student work that can be evaluated by the faculty. After that, IBS can determine who will do the evaluation and assessment, and on what schedule. The draft Comprehensive Program Review (CPR) report as currently written is not sufficient to this task.

### *Curriculum maps*

The curriculum maps for the MBS and MDiv programs that are in the 2017-18 catalog are helpful in identifying which courses and other requirements (e.g., thesis or capstone project) are linked to each PLO. The “Movement Through the Program” pages that follow begin to suggest a desired sequence of courses, but not with enough detail or rationale to be very useful to students and advisors. As the draft CPR document acknowledges (p. 4), the curriculum maps need to indicate when each PLO is expected to be introduced, put into practice, and mastered.



For advising purposes, it would be desirable to have a curriculum map for each program that accounts for every requirement and shows how the curriculum is scaffolded so as to lead students to increasing degrees of mastery. This may result in a more prescribed set course progression, which would be appropriate for praxis-oriented degree programs. For assessment purposes, it may suffice to have a more selective assessment map that indicates where in the program each PLO will be assessed and which artifacts will be collected for evaluation.

### *Benchmarks and Standards of Performance*

There are in fact several different ways that the term “benchmark” is used in the literature on assessment:

1. an expected standard of performance for student achievement in relation to a specific PLO (“students will be able to translate a Japanese text with 90% accuracy”)
2. a minimum threshold on the way to mastery (“benchmark is 60% accuracy, milestones are 70% and 80%, and capstone level achievement is 90%”)
3. an institutional target to be used for program assessment (“90% of students will meet or exceed expectations on this outcome”)
4. an external standard to be used for purposes of comparison (“peer institutions report that 90% of their students achieve intermediate fluency in Japanese by the time of graduation”)

The program review report and the draft CPR frequently refer to the need to create benchmarks, apparently in the sense of #3 above (assessment targets), and the CPR identifies some benchmarks for the MBS and MDiv programs. However, none of the benchmarks in the draft plan are based on clearly articulated standards of performance. Some benchmarks are tied to grades (“90% of students pass all required courses with a B or better”) while others are based simply on completion of a task with no reference to quality (“90% of graduates complete exit interview online survey”).

As the faculty continue to develop the assessment plan, it will be essential for them to establish clear expectations about standards of performance (rubrics) for all PLOs and revise the benchmarks so that they are linked to those standards. Grades are not useful in outcomes assessment because they are not sufficiently granular in their diagnostic function; that is, they do not indicate levels of performance for specific learning outcomes. The program review report acknowledges this issue on p. 38, saying that reliance on grades for measuring outcomes “may be insufficient.” The peer reviewers strongly support this judgment.

### *Evidence*

The draft CPR document lists a number of reports that are to be compiled annually, covering topics such as admissions, enrollment numbers, grades, graduation rates, time-to-degree, placement, student self-evaluations, as well as a biennial thesis/project review. Although all of these forms of evidence are appropriate for use in assessment, the thesis/project review is the only one based on direct evidence drawn from faculty evaluation of artifacts of student work. IBS would do well to follow another direction suggested in the program review report (p. 38) by identifying artifacts of student work to be collected at various points in a student's progress. Faculty can then evaluate those artifacts in relation to the revised PLOs as part of an annual assessment process.

### *Program review*

The draft CPR document envisions a program review of all IBS academic programs at the same time, once every five years. Appropriately, the plan is for future program reviews to build on the annual assessment activities over the preceding five-year period. The CPR suggests that the Dean will compile the program review report and distribute it to the faculty and trustees in preparation for an external peer review that will include a site visit. While it may be appropriate for the Dean to take the lead in collecting data and presenting it in an accessible format, the faculty should be actively involved in the analysis of the data and in developing recommendations for action that will lead to continuous improvement. It will also be important to clarify the respective roles of the faculty and trustees in program review, with the faculty maintaining authority and responsibility for curricular matters while the trustees have authority and responsibility over budgets, personnel, and institutional mission.

### *Educational effectiveness*

As required by WSCUC, IBS has published a statement of educational effectiveness on its website. The indicators chosen for presentation of degree program effectiveness are graduation rates, time-to-degree, and placement (listed as either ministry or further study). For certificate programs, the statement provides the number of graduates, the percentage of those who received the certificate concurrently with a degree, and the two-year completion rate for recent cohorts. The data provided cover the most recent five-year period.

Although the very small numbers in each cohort make it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data presented, the categories chosen for presentation are appropriate. It is good that IBS is collecting this data on an annual basis so that as

enrollment increases the school will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of its academic programs. IBS should also be correlating demographic data with success data for future disaggregation to ensure equity and identify “at-risk” populations. Meanwhile, IBS might want to consider using the website to feature some narrative profiles of individual students and graduates in order to show their achievements and contributions to a wider public audience.

## **Courses & Curriculum**

### *MDiv Program*

For the MDiv degree, students must complete 72 units, including four required courses: 1) Buddhist Traditions of South Asia; 2) Buddhist Traditions of East Asia; 3) Introduction to Shin Buddhist Thought; and 4) Methods in the study of Buddhism. Electives include selecting one course from History, Ethics, Literature/Texts, Practice/Ritual, Ministry, or Pastoral Care, plus a required cumulative research-based thesis/project.

As mentioned above, a curriculum mapping of the MDiv Program including the frequency of classes would be desirable. Providing a clear map of when students should take courses in their academic career, plus the semesters courses are annually taught, will provide students with a clear understanding of what their MDiv degree will look like. What classes, coursework, and/or particular assignments, for example, will begin to prepare students for experiential learning and ministerial positions following graduation? The report identifies that a program coordinator will be useful for fulfilling this task, but within the report itself, identifying which courses prepare students for these roles will enhance the program’s clarity.

One of IBS’s learning objectives is for students to receive opportunities for professional development through practical education. Student responses indicate that the lack of required applied courses is a weakness of the MDiv program. While classes on pastoral care, ministry, etc. can be taken as electives, students note that more emphasis on practical applications of Buddhist principles, plus an increase in liturgy courses would be useful. Additionally, responses indicate that a required pastoral care component for those training for ministry would be helpful. IBS may want to consider altering the MDiv curriculum to require such courses. For example, Topics in Buddhist Practice, Issues in Buddhist Ministry, Buddhist Pastoral Care, and perhaps Psychological Aspects of Buddhism could be courses specifically identified as ones that meet this learning objective and prepare students for professional careers. Requiring students to take an applied course might better prepare them for ministerial positions, and applied courses currently offered at GTU member schools could be linked into the MDiv program, filling

student-identified gaps. A more prescriptive course progression reflects best practice in several of the MDiv programs of IBS's identified peers.

### *MBS Program*

For the MBS degree, students must complete 48 units, including required courses: 1) Buddhist Traditions of South Asia; 2) Buddhist Traditions of East Asia; 3) Introduction to Shin Buddhist Thought; 4) Methods in the Study of Buddhism; and 5) Texts, Terms, Translation (or optional language study). Students must also complete nine elective courses and a master's thesis.

This program too would benefit from a curriculum map, as well as a list of the regularity of course offerings. Providing information regarding language courses available to students will furthermore benefit this degree, include possible language courses students are eligible to take through UC Berkeley.

The MBS program emphasizes students coming away with a substantive knowledge of Buddhist history, thought, texts, and practices, as well as demonstrating analytical skills. The former is clearly covered by the program's survey courses, and regarding the latter, identifying the particular courses that train students in this regard would be helpful. For example, identifying specific assignments within the Methods course and/or Shin Buddhist Thought, that train students in academic research will more clearly connect course offerings with IBS's ILOs.

Regarding both programs, students request an increase in Shin Buddhist Studies courses and language opportunities. Given each program's emphasis on providing students with a broad overview of the Buddhist tradition, it would be useful to identify which courses through UC Berkeley (if available to students) could be taken to fill in curriculum gaps. For example, the program review itself identifies that Tibetan studies are lacking in the curriculum. What courses might students enroll in at UC Berkeley to meet such needs?

Students recognize that one of the strengths of the IBS is its variety of courses. And it is clear from the course catalog online that there are substantial courses meeting each of the specific program learning outcomes. What is not clear is the frequency of courses taught, their preferred sequence, and the availability of courses taught outside of IBS. Is the course Buddhist Texts: Pali I, for example, taught annually? And should a student want to fulfill a language requirement through UC Berkeley, are they able to do so?

## *Certificate Programs*

It is clear that one of the greatest strengths of the IBS is its offering of various certificate programs. However, it is unclear as to why certain programs have a higher requirement for credit completion compared than others. Identifying the reasons for this would be useful.

## *Online Courses*

It is evident that an online certificate program is a viable goal, as there are enough online courses to fulfill such a program. Technology is identified as an issue that needs to be improved, as well as the question of how courses for a certificate program might be used for continued degree programs. An online program is still in its initial phase, as IBS will want to identify whether or not in-residence students can enroll in these courses through a hybrid model, plus how annual themes will be determined. Should an online certificate program focus on the theme of ethics for example, are there enough courses in any given year to cover this topic? Furthermore, how frequently will the themes alternate? Annually? Bi-annually? IBS might want to consider creating a proposed five-year plan for the online certificate program themes based on already planned courses.

## **Enrollment**

With the opening of the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley in 2006, IBS was able to expand its programs, which also included the Buddhist chaplaincy program. Since then enrollment at IBS grew substantially, more than doubling its enrollment. From AY2013-2014 to AY 2017-2018, 98 students enrolled at IBS in the degree programs, which include the GTU MA, certificate programs, auditors and special student status. In addition, 12 exchange students from Ryukoku University, Kyoto and Dharma Drum College, Taipei, also attended IBS.

Based on self-reporting, approximately 41% were Asian, African-American or mixed ethnicity. Male students made up 53% of the student population and a large majority of students attended part-time. Although there is inconsistent information for ethnicity and age for certificate programs, the average age for the three degree programs is 40.5 years old.

The Kyoshi Certificate Program, now called Certificate in Shin Buddhist Studies, had significant growth possibly due to the ability to become a “Minister’s Assistant” in the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), which requires higher levels of education. This

program has the highest enrollment of the certificate programs. Nearly even numbers of these certificate students are Asian and White, and the majority of students are women.

Since AY2014-2015, 40 students have enrolled as auditors. This group typically includes older members of the Buddhist community or Buddhist ministers wishing to continue their education. The peer reviewers commented on the high number of student auditors and posed the question of how IBS could possibly entice more auditors in enrolling as part-time or full-time students. The reviewers' main concern was the high number of auditors, and even certificate program students, and questioned if their enrollment tuition was covering the cost of the course.

There is also a special student admission in which students enroll to transfer coursework from other institutions while awaiting admission to IBS. Information regarding special students concluded that four of the seven students who initially enrolled as special students were successfully admitted into a degree program.

IBS is anticipating a swing in enrollment similar to the shift that occurred after the 2016 program review. Following the review, some students who are on the ministerial track as MBS students shifted to the MDiv degree program. Evidence also suggests that the majority of chaplaincy students who are currently enrolled in the GTU MA would prefer to be in MDiv program at IBS if it was an accredited degree.

Generally speaking, the students at IBS are in their 40s and enrolled to expand their education for second careers or for continuing ministerial education. Part-time enrollment seems to fit the lifestyle of the students who have other professional obligations, are distance learners from Berkeley and due to the cost of living in the Bay Area. Housing and financial aid/scholarship options should also be of great consideration to attract more full-time residence in Berkeley and enrollment.

Based on the demographics of students enrolled in the MBS and MDiv degree program who are mostly men, of Asian decent, and on the ministerial track compared to students of the Kyoshi Certificate Program who are mostly women of diverse ethnicity, some questions regarding trends in employment in the BCA are present. Understanding these employment trends of ministers in the BCA could possibly attract a diverse population of students to IBS and address and support their specific needs.

IBS is also facing changes in the student information system due to the discontinuation of GTU's shared system. Additional support staff to ensure the consistency of record keeping is necessary due to the IBS's lack of consistency with this information.

## **Student Support**

To identify the factors of student success and needs, IBS has been annually distributing two surveys to alumni since 2016. Also, a survey to current students in 2016 was distributed regarding extracurricular workshops to assess what IBS can do to further support its students. At the conclusion of the 2016 and 2017 academic years, a survey was sent to all graduate and alumni from the previous five years. Questions included the greatest strength of the student's program or something that supported their studies or the completion of the program. The second question asked about the greatest weakness of the program and what IBS could do to support its students better.

Based on the responses, the greatest strength of student support referenced the faculty, staff or community. Although a strength, IBS must be cognizant of the potential burnout of its faculty and staff and must ensure that the support of these individuals is also a priority. Although the faculty was noted by the majority of students as a greatest strength, two responses mentioned better support from faculty/advisors. Language studies were also lacking and a need for more practical education, such as liturgy, pastoral care, propagation and homiletics, were also mentioned. In addition, eight responses noted the inconsistency of the educational program or lacking in some way, as three responses stated that the length of the program is too short to cover the long history of Buddhism. Two requested more classes in Shin Buddhism and one response noted grade inflation. To address the latter concern, IBS noted that clearly articulating the student learning outcomes, program outcomes and better assessment policies may address this concern. Regarding the greatest weakness, there was not one specific issue that was highly reported. However, some responses included funding in regards to more availability of scholarships and participation of federal loan participation through accreditation.

Regarding extracurricular workshops, 10 of the 26 students responded and the survey indicated that the ideal time for a workshop was split between weekends and weekday evenings. The second question asked about helpful workshops and indicated that workshops for Hongwanji rules and regulation (for ordination) and mandatory reporting for religious professionals would be most helpful. In addition, workshops for academic writing and research skills were also of interest. The peer reviewers noted that most students are distance learners and IBS should take this into account in regard to making accommodations for online webinars.

To assist with the further success of its students, IBS has noted the need for a director of field education and/or a student resources coordinator. The peer reviewers once

again question the steps IBS has taken, such as determining the job descriptions and salaries to ensure these possible employees are hired.

### *Financial Aid*

A major area of student support will potentially come from IBS's ability to grant financial aid upon its accreditation. Due to the change in GTU's shared services, IBS will require administration to ensure financial aid services are available for students.

### *Housing*

Some of the challenges of the Bay Area/Berkeley are the high cost of living and the availability of affordable housing. Based on the student surveys, financial funding was not as much of a high concern compared to other factors. However, it was noted that financial aid to cover these high costs of living is of high importance to be able to compete with other peer institutions. Luckily, IBS has a dormitory that can potentially accommodate nine students, for which rent has been kept well below market value, but additional housing options will be necessary as student enrollment continues to increase.

### *International Students*

One pool of students that the surveys lacked useful information from was the international exchange students. IBS has been hosting exchange students from Ryokoku University in Kyoto and more recently from Dharma Drum College in Taipei. Information from these students would be valuable in regards to assisting with student support and success, especially with helping them with assimilating to a new city, culture, and educational requirements.

## **Conclusions**

The Institute of Buddhist Studies has a long and successful history of training ministers for the Buddhist Churches of America and (more recently) Buddhist chaplains as well as providing graduate education for scholars and teachers of Buddhism. The recent efforts to attain accreditation by WSCUC have produced increased levels of professionalization, data-driven assessment, and institutional planning. While many essential components of its academic programs are still at the initial stage, IBS is taking appropriate steps to build a strong platform for future growth and development. It is clear that the administration and faculty are committed to continuous improvement in light of current best practices in the wider higher education community. What is needed



now is further intensive work to nurture the seeds that have been planted so that they will flourish in the coming years.

### *Commendations*

1. IBS has clearly identified its mission as a Buddhist seminary and graduate school in the context of an interreligious consortium in Berkeley, California.
2. The faculty of IBS are well qualified for their positions and are making substantial contributions to Buddhist Studies through their teaching, research, and service to the academy and to Buddhist communities.
3. IBS has been successful in developing new innovative program initiatives such as distance education, the Buddhist Chaplaincy program, and the various certificate programs.
4. The Academic Program Review report shows that IBS has taken some significant initial steps forward in regard to self-assessment, transparency, and data analysis.

### *Recommendations*

1. IBS should continue to refine its understanding of its place in Buddhist education in relation to the full range of peer institutions.
2. IBS should either clarify the distinctiveness of the MBS in relation to the GTU MA in Buddhist Studies, or consider discontinuing that degree program.
3. The assessment plan needs to be refined and further developed with particular attention to measurable and assessable outcomes (not program activities) at all levels (institutional, program, course), standards of performance (rubrics, not grades), benchmarks (annual assessment targets), and direct evidence constituted by faculty evaluation of artifacts of student work.
4. The faculty should consider identifying one or more practical ministry courses that would be required in the MDiv curriculum.
5. Curriculum maps for each degree should identify where each learning outcome will be introduced, practiced, and mastered.
6. Projected schedules of course offerings should indicate the frequency with which required and elective courses will be taught.
7. IBS should conduct a cost/benefit analysis to determine whether or not the low tuition charged to auditors is making a sufficient contribution to covering the cost of providing courses for them.
8. Active measures should be taken promptly to address the identified need for additional personnel such as a director of field education and/or a student resources coordinator.