

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT**

To: Reiss-Davis Graduate School

September 18 - 20, 2024

Team Roster

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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 the Institution

Reiss-Davis Graduate School (RDGS) is a private not for profit graduate school and a division of the community mental health agency, Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services (VDM). Both agencies are located at 3200 Motor Avenue in Los Angeles, California. There are no off-campus sites and the institution does not require student internships.

Since its 2013 inception with the first cohort of ten students, Reiss-Davis Graduate School has offered a professional Doctor of Psychology degree. New cohorts enroll in the fall term to begin a four-year course of study, including three years of coursework and one year of guided dissertation completion. RDGS employs 20 part-time adjunct faculty members. In addition, two full-time administrative positions include periodic teaching assignments. Each term, there are nine faculty members offering active courses, supervising dissertation completion or continuation seminars.

VDM, the parent agency, offers mental health services for children and parents, including residential treatment, adoption, foster placement, a non-public school, preventive and early intervention, and outpatient programs. Services are provided on its 17-acre facility in West Los Angeles and in two neighboring communities, West Hollywood (Vista Village, which was previously known as HomeSAFE, and Santa Monica (Family Service of Santa Monica).

RDGS' mission is "To offer mental health providers a unique doctoral education integrating psychodynamic, neurobiological, and trauma-informed perspectives and prepare them with competency in theory, skills, technique, and professionalism to more effectively serve mental health needs of children, adolescents, and their families from a position of cultural humility, equity, and inclusion to make a difference in their lives."

B. Accreditation History

Reiss-Davis Graduate School's interest in accreditation began in 2008 and an eligibility application was submitted in March 2015. Subsequent to its Seeking Accreditation Visit 2 from March 18-21, 2020, RDGS was first accredited in 2020. At that time, an Offsite Review was scheduled in fall 2025 and an Accreditation Visit in spring 2026. Also, to address concerns related to institutional research, board governance, succession planning, and enrollment and financial planning, a Special Visit was assigned and hosted in spring 2022.

Following the May 2022 Special Visit, the commission's July 2022 action letter initiated a formal Notice of Concern, requested an Interim Report to be submitted by November 1, 2022, and scheduled a Special Visit for fall 2024, to address Commission Action Letter requirements: 1. Prioritize hiring senior leadership to ensure effective attention to development of plans for a sustainable future for RDGS. (CFR 3.8); 2. Clarify, revise, and align the Vista Del Mar and RDGS board bylaws to ensure appropriate institutional decision-making authority regarding hiring and evaluating senior leadership. (CFR 3.9); 3. Aggressively focus on the stand-alone financial sustainability of RDGS by: a.) balancing annual revenue and expenses without undue

reliance on external contributions (CFR 3.4), b.) developing a three-year budget of revenue and expenses aligned with realistic and evidence-based enrollment projections (CFR 3.4), and c.) addressing projected deficits through financial contingency plans that have been approved by VDM and RDGS Boards. (CFR 3.4); 4. Create and implement an action plan to diversify revenue sources through non- tuition channels including fund-raising and government resources. (CFR 3.4); and 5. Develop and implement effective evidence-based recruitment and retention strategies including affiliation agreements and MOUs to create enrollment partnerships. (CFR 3.4).

C. Description of Team’s Review Process

In preparation for the Special Visit, the team reviewed RDGS’ Special Visit report, evidence files, and most recent Commission Action Letter. Additionally, team members held teleconference meetings with each other to gather information about institutional progress and status, to complete the Special Visit worksheet, and to develop further lines of inquiry. The team requested several additional evidence files, which were provided prior to and during the visit. Prior to the Special Visit, RDGS confirmed the distribution of an invitation for community members to contribute confidential messages to the evaluation team through an email account, which was monitored by the team before and during the visit. There were no confidential email submissions as of the last day of the Special Visit.

The review was conducted onsite according to a schedule prepared collaboratively with RDGS, which included opportunities to meet with senior leadership and staff of VDM and RDGS. The team reviewed evidence before, during, and after the visit. Virtual conferencing was held on campus during the visit for a participant otherwise unable to attend. Initial stages of report preparation preceded the onsite visit, continued during the visit, and concluded following the visit.

D. Quality and Rigor of the Report

The Reiss-Davis Graduate School (RDGS) Special Visit report, dated July 11, 2024, received collaborative writing support from both RDGS and Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services (VDM), with RDGS’ executive director and chief operating officer assuming primary writing responsibilities. Individual reports in response to the January 2023 Commission Action Letter findings were contributed by key campus personnel.

The report was well organized around Commission Action Letter findings. However, evidence attesting to remediation of discrete findings was difficult to discern. Despite a broad range of institutional efforts, the report revealed that sustainable enrollment practices and financial resource development had not yet been developed.

E. Institutional Context

RDGS is a niche graduate specialty school which is mission-driven to serve psychoanalytic training by highly trained and committed faculty and staff members. Academically, RDGS evidenced continued improvement by refining program learning outcomes

and modifying assessment practices to provide accurate student learning data at performative, formative, and summative levels. The doctoral program adheres to blended instructional credit hour standards, relying primarily upon face-to-face instruction.

RDGS holds an unusual and conflicted partnership with VDM, who maintains fiduciary and space responsibility with key decision-making powers. RDGS leadership has further been challenged by considerable turnover in leadership roles since 2020.

In response to a vacant permanent CEO role in 2021-22, the RDGS board sought support to recruit and hire an experienced administrator who continues to shepherd the institution toward resiliency. Unfortunately, enrollment challenges reveal continued declines. For example, a total of eight new students were enrolled for the current academic year.

Overall, RDGS continues to experience sustainability challenges in both fiscal and organizational areas. Further, VDM hired a legal expert in current efforts to dissolve their partnership with RDGS. Prior to visiting campus, the evaluation team requested and received an initial teach out plan to address students' degree completion needs.

SECTION II: TEAM EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

ISSUE 1: Prioritize hiring senior leadership to ensure effective attention to development of plans for a sustainable future for RDGS. (CFR 3.8)

The Reiss-Davis -Graduate School (RDGS) board took hiring a senior leader seriously (CFR 3.8). After a failed search for a permanent leader, they hired a strong and experienced administrator with excellent academic credentials as the Executive Director on a year-to-year contract basis. The new Executive Director immediately focused on building trust with the staff, collectively developing a path forward to stabilize RDGS, successfully working with the RDGS board to attain additional financial support, and meeting with the VDM leadership, to present options for the future. Despite these efforts, at the time of the team's visit, the future of RDGS was still in question.

ISSUE 2: Clarify, revise, and align the Vista Del Mar and RDGS board bylaws to ensure appropriate institutional decision-making authority regarding hiring and evaluating senior leadership. (CFR 3.9)

For context, RDGS has an unusual and challenging partnership with VDM, a large social service agency unfamiliar with higher education policies and practices. RDGS facilities are on the VDM property. VDM views RDGS as one of its programs, rather than an institution of higher education. Both VDM and RDGS are facing uncertain financial futures. VDM recently closed its nonpublic elementary and middle school for fiscal necessity. RDGS has not been a

revenue generator for VDM. This past year VDM had to subsidize RDGS, and future RDGS financial shortfalls have been projected.

Given the impending partnership dissolution between RDGS and VDM, alignment of respective Board bylaws is a moot point. However, it is important to note that the RDGS Board revised their bylaws to articulate institutional decision-making authority for the hiring and evaluation of RDGS senior leadership. The VDM Board did not revise their bylaws to align. VDM remains the power holder over RDGS.

ISSUE 3: Aggressively focus on the stand-alone financial sustainability of RDGS by:

- 1. balancing annual revenue and expenses without undue reliance on external contributions. (CFR 3.4)**
- 2. developing a three-year budget of revenue and expenses aligned with realistic and evidence-based enrollment projections. (CFR 3.4)**
- 3. addressing projected deficits through financial contingency plans that have been approved by VDM and RDGS Boards. (CFR 3.4)**

From the last Special Visit, the Commission recommended that RDGS aggressively focus on achieving stand-alone financial sustainability. This includes balancing annual revenue and expenses without undue reliance on external contributions, developing a three-year budget aligned with realistic and evidence-based enrollment projections, and addressing projected deficits through financial contingency plans approved by the VDM and RDGS Boards.

During the fall 2024 visit, the team reviewed VDM's audited financial statements, which include RDGS for the years ended June 30, 2022 and 2023, and held discussions with VDM's CEO and CFO and RDGS's Executive Director. RDGS is not a separate legal entity but part of VDM, which has faced financial challenges itself, including operating losses over the past two years. VDM anticipates significant negative financial impacts due to Proposition 1 and expects reduced reimbursement rates from the state and county by 2026. Consequently, VDM is not in a position to subsidize RDGS indefinitely, especially when they do not see alignment of the programs.

RDGS also provided four years of income statements, two actual for FY2022/2023 and 2023/2-24 and two projections for future years in FY 2024/2025 and FY 2025/2026. They revealed a heavy reliance on external contributions and some subsidies from VDM.

Grants and contribution revenue reported or projected include:

2022/2023	\$908K
2023/2024	\$593K
2024/2025	\$575K
2025/2026	\$427K

While RDGS has a dedicated board and a very generous benefactor who has expressed interest in providing continuous financial support, there is no new written renewal of such commitment. To a lesser extent, RDGS is counting on the following subsidies from VDM in the form of waived overhead:

2022/2023 \$128K

2023/2024 \$127K

2024/2025 \$135K

2025/2026 \$141K

Although a three-year budget of revenue and expenses was prepared, the tuition projection for next year was found to be unrealistic. Tuition revenue is reported or budgeted as follows: The actual in FY 2023/2024 is \$564K. The budget in FY 2024/2025 is \$644K assuming a 14% increase, which is based on 29 students enrolled with 6 new students. Per RDGS, eight new students were successfully recruited for fall 2024. The budget in FY 2025/2026 is \$816K assumes a 27% increase based on 12 new enrollees, which seems neither realistic nor evidence based. In addition, RDGS estimated in the past they would need 20 new students each year to balance the budget. However, they have not been able to achieve close to that target in the past.

In summary, RDGS has not made significant progress in developing a self-supporting sustainable financial model.

ISSUE 4: Create and implement an action plan to diversify revenue sources through non-tuition channels including fund-raising and government resources. (CFR 3.4)

The Commission recommended that RDGS create and implement an action plan to diversify revenue sources through non-tuition channels, including fund-raising and government resources.

Since 2022, RDGS has explored starting new programs, such as a master's degree and an accelerated PsyD program. More recently, efforts to secure a new home institution and to plan a teach-out plan are ongoing. These steps have not been successful to date and have not yet yielded results. The financial sustainability and future of RDGS remains uncertain without significant progress in this area.

ISSUE 5: Develop and implement effective evidence-based recruitment and retention strategies, including affiliation agreements and MOUs to create enrollment partnerships. (CFR 3.4)

The Commission recommended that RDGS develop and implement effective evidence-based recruitment and retention strategies, including affiliation agreements and MOUs to create enrollment partnerships.

RDGS developed a data-informed approach to its marketing and enrollment efforts. The findings of the “60-Day Initiative” were submitted to the graduate school’s marketing agency, which created new brand messaging and outreach efforts.

RDGS made progress in developing recruitment and retention strategies. However, there was not enough time or space to fully test out these new strategies due to the pressing financial challenges faced by both VDM and RDGS. In addition, RDGS continued to rely upon a single recruitment officer. Neither affiliation agreements nor MOUs with enrollment partnerships have materialized due to the institution’s current financial and organizational status.

RDGS made some progress in addressing the issues identified by the Commission, particularly in the areas of recruitment and retention strategies. However, significant challenges remain in achieving financial sustainability and diversifying revenue sources. The institution's future seems to depend on finding a new parent institution or successfully implementing a teach-out plan.

SECTION III: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TEAM REVIEW

Recommendations (based on 2023 WSCUC Standards of Accreditation):

The team recommends that RDGS:

1. Urgently and immediately implement plans for a sustainable financial future. (CFR 3.4)
2. Continue to prioritize securing sustainable donations to close financial gaps. (CFR 3.4)
3. Prioritize efforts to develop paths toward graduation for continuing students in the doctoral dissertation phase to improve completion rates. (CFR 2.10)
4. Develop and implement a timely, clear communication plan to articulate future plans for the campus community. (CFR 1.7)
5. Carefully reconsider recruitment and enrollment plans given challenging financial and organizational status. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5)
6. Collaborate with VDM to determine expedient paths forward. (CFR 3.5)
7. Continue progress with academic quality improvements to support program learning outcomes and student learning assessment. (CFRs 2.3, 2.9)