

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.
Form 10-K
February 17, 2016
Table of Contents

UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20549

Form 10-K

(Mark One)

ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the fiscal year ended: December 31, 2015

OR

TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the transition period from [] to []

Commission file number: 001-34211

GRAND CANYON EDUCATION, INC.

(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

DELAWARE **20-3356009**
(State or other jurisdiction of **(I.R.S. Employer**
incorporation or organization) **Identification No.)**
3300 W. CAMELBACK ROAD, PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85017

(Address of principal executive offices, including zip code)

Registrant's telephone number, including area code: (602) 639-7500

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act:

| (Title of Each Class) | (Name of Each Exchange on Which Registered) |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Grand Canyon Education, Inc. | The NASDAQ Global Market |

Common stock, \$.01 par value

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(g) of the Act:

None

(Title of class)

Edgar Filing: Grand Canyon Education, Inc. - Form 10-K

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant: (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant has submitted electronically and posted on its corporate Web site, if any, every Interactive Data File required to be submitted and posted pursuant to Rule 405 of Regulation S-T (§232.405 of this chapter) during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to submit and post such files). Yes No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K.

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer, or a smaller reporting company. See the definitions of large accelerated filer, accelerated filer and smaller reporting company in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act. (Check one):

Large accelerated filer

Accelerated filer

Non-accelerated filer (Do not check if a smaller reporting company)

Smaller reporting company

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Securities Exchange Act). Yes No

The total number of shares of common stock outstanding as of February 12, 2016 was 46,486,319

As of June 30, 2015, the last business day of the registrant's most recently completed second fiscal quarter, the registrant's common stock was listed on the NASDAQ Global Market. As of June 30, 2015, the aggregate market value of the registrant's common stock held by non-affiliates was approximately \$2.0 billion.

DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

Certain portions of the registrant's Definitive Proxy Statement for its 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders (which is expected to be filed with the Commission within 120 days after the end of the registrant's 2015 fiscal year) are incorporated by reference into Part III of this Report.

Table of Contents

GRAND CANYON EDUCATION, INC.

FORM 10-K

INDEX

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| <u>PART I</u> | 4 |
| <u>Special Note Regarding Forward-Looking Statements</u> | 3 |
| <u>Item 1. Business</u> | 4 |
| <u>Item 1A. Risk Factors</u> | 26 |
| <u>Item 1B. Unresolved Staff Comments</u> | 40 |
| <u>Item 2. Properties</u> | 40 |
| <u>Item 3. Legal Proceedings</u> | 40 |
| <u>Item 4. Mine Safety Disclosures</u> | 40 |
| <u>PART II</u> | 41 |
| <u>Item 5. Market for Registrant's Common Equity, Related Stockholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities</u> | 41 |
| <u>Item 6. Selected Consolidated Financial and Other Data</u> | 44 |
| <u>Item 7. Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations</u> | 47 |
| <u>Item 7A. Quantitative and Qualitative Disclosures About Market Risk</u> | 57 |
| <u>Item 8. Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data</u> | 59 |
| <u>Item 9. Changes in and Disagreements With Accountants on Accounting and Financial Disclosure</u> | 86 |
| <u>Item 9A. Controls and Procedures</u> | 86 |
| <u>Item 9B. Other Information</u> | 88 |
| <u>PART III</u> | 88 |
| <u>Item 10. Directors, Executive Officers and Corporate Governance</u> | 88 |
| <u>Item 11. Executive Compensation</u> | 88 |
| <u>Item 12. Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management and Related Stockholder Matters</u> | 88 |
| <u>Item 13. Certain Relationships and Related Transactions, and Director Independence</u> | 88 |
| <u>Item 14. Principal Accounting Fees and Services</u> | 88 |
| <u>PART IV</u> | 89 |
| <u>Item 15. Exhibits and Consolidated Financial Statement Schedules</u> | 89 |

SIGNATURES

92

Exhibit Index

2

Table of Contents

Special Note Regarding Forward-Looking Statements

This Annual Report on Form 10-K, including Item 1, *Business*; Item 1A, *Risk Factors*; and Item 7, *Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations*, contains certain forward-looking statements, which include information relating to future events, future financial performance, strategies, expectations, competitive environment, regulation, and availability of resources. These forward-looking statements include, without limitation, statements regarding proposed new programs; statements as to whether regulatory developments or other matters may or may not have a material adverse effect on our financial position, results of operations, or liquidity; statements concerning projections, predictions, expectations, estimates, or forecasts as to our business, financial and operational results, and future economic performance; and statements of management's goals and objectives and other similar expressions concerning matters that are not historical facts. Words such as may, should, could, would, predicts, potential, continue, expects, anticipates, future, intends, plans, believes, estimates and similar words, as well as statements in future tense, identify forward-looking statements.

Forward-looking statements should not be read as a guarantee of future performance or results, and will not necessarily be accurate indications of the times at, or by, which such performance or results will be achieved. Forward-looking statements are based on information available at the time those statements are made or management's good faith belief as of that time with respect to future events, and are subject to risks and uncertainties that could cause actual performance or results to differ materially from those expressed in or suggested by the forward-looking statements. Important factors that could cause such differences include, but are not limited to:

our failure to comply with the extensive regulatory framework applicable to our industry, including Title IV of the Higher Education Act and the regulations thereunder, state laws and regulatory requirements, and accrediting commission requirements;

the ability of our students to obtain federal Title IV funds, state financial aid, and private financing;

potential damage to our reputation or other adverse effects as a result of negative publicity in the media, in the industry or in connection with governmental reports or investigations or otherwise, affecting us or other companies in the for-profit postsecondary education sector;

risks associated with changes in applicable federal and state laws and regulations and accrediting commission standards, including pending rulemaking by the Department of Education;

our ability to properly manage risks and challenges associated with strategic initiatives, including the potential conversion of our university operations to non-profit status, the expansion of our campus, potential acquisitions of, or investments in, new businesses, acquisitions of new properties, or the development of new campuses;

our ability to hire and train new, and develop and train existing employees and faculty;

the pace of growth of our enrollment;

our ability to convert prospective students to enrolled students and to retain active students;

our success in updating and expanding the content of existing programs and developing new programs in a cost-effective manner or on a timely basis;

industry competition, including competition for qualified executives and other personnel;

risks associated with the competitive environment for marketing our programs;

failure on our part to keep up with advances in technology that could enhance the online experience for our students;

the extent to which obligations under our credit agreement, including the need to comply with restrictive and financial covenants and to pay principal and interest payments, limits our ability to conduct our operations or seek new business opportunities;

our ability to manage future growth effectively;

general adverse economic conditions or other developments that affect the job prospects of our students; and

other factors discussed under the headings Risk Factors, Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations, Business, and Regulation.

Forward-looking statements speak only as of the date the statements are made. You should not put undue reliance on any forward-looking statements. We assume no obligation to update forward-looking statements to reflect actual results, changes in assumptions, or changes in other factors affecting forward-looking information, except to the extent required by applicable securities laws. If we do update one or more forward-looking statements, no inference should be drawn that we will make additional updates with respect to those or other forward-looking statements.

Table of Contents

Part I

Item 1. *Business*
Overview

We are a comprehensive regionally accredited university that offers approximately 200 graduate and undergraduate degree programs and certificates across eight colleges both online and on ground at our 200+ acre campus in Phoenix, Arizona, at leased facilities and at facilities owned by third party employers of our students. We are committed to providing an academically rigorous educational experience with a focus on professionally relevant programs that meet the objectives of our students. Our undergraduate programs are designed to be innovative and meet the future needs of employers, while providing students with the needed critical thinking and effective communication skills developed through a Christian-oriented, liberal arts foundation. We offer master and doctoral degrees in contemporary fields that are designed to provide students with the capacity for transformational leadership in their chosen industry, emphasizing the immediate relevance of theory, application, and evaluation to promote personal and organizational change. We utilize an integrated, innovative approach to marketing, recruiting, and retaining both traditional aged students attending on our campus in Phoenix, Arizona and working adult students attending on our campus or at off-site locations in cohorts (referred to by us as professional studies students) or online, which has enabled us to increase enrollment to approximately 74,500 students at December 31, 2015. At December 31, 2015, 79.6% of our students were enrolled in our online programs, and, of our working adult students (online and professional studies students), 47.8% were pursuing masters or doctoral degrees.

We define working adults as students age 25 or older who are pursuing a degree while employed. As of December 31, 2015, 87.1% of our online and professional studies students were age 25 or older. We believe that working adults are attracted to the convenience and flexibility of our online programs because they can study and interact with faculty and classmates during times that suit their schedules. We also believe that working adults, particularly those who have some college experience, represent an attractive student population because they are better able to more readily recognize the benefits of a postsecondary degree, have higher persistence and completion rates than other students, and to finance their education generally.

In 2015, we continued to increase the number of students in attendance at our expanding traditional ground campus. We attribute the significant growth in our enrollment to our increasing brand recognition and the value proposition that our ground traditional campus affords to traditional-aged students and their parents. After scholarships, our ground traditional students pay for tuition, room, board, and fees, often half to a third of what it costs to attend a private, traditional university in another state and an amount comparable to what it costs to attend a public university. We plan to increase enrollment growth for our traditional campus over the next few years, and seek to have 17,500 traditional ground students in attendance at the beginning of our 2016-2017 academic year. In November 2012, we accepted an invitation to become a member of the Division I Western Athletic Conference beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year, and in 2013 we began the four-year process to reclassify our NCAA membership from Division II to Division I. During the reclassification process we are considered a Division I university and are playing full conference schedules but are ineligible to compete for national championships which, for example, precludes us from playing in the end-of-year NCAA basketball tournament during that period of time.

We have experienced significant growth in enrollment, net revenue, and operating income over the last several years. Our enrollment at December 31, 2015 was approximately 74,500, representing an increase of approximately 9.9% over our enrollment at December 31, 2014. Our net revenue and operating income for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$778.2 million and \$210.4 million, respectively, representing increases of 12.6% and 16.3%, respectively,

over the year ended December 31, 2014. Our net revenue and operating income for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$691.1 million and \$180.8 million, respectively, representing increases of 15.5% and 26.2%, respectively, over the year ended December 31, 2013. We seek to achieve continued growth in a manner that reinforces our reputation for providing academically rigorous, professionally relevant educational programs that advance the educations and careers of our students.

We have been regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and its predecessor since 1968, and we were reaccredited in 2007 for the maximum term of ten years. We are regulated by the Department of Education as a result of our participation in the federal student financial aid programs authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act (hereafter, Title IV), and, at the state level, we are licensed to operate and offer our programs by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education (AZPPSE), the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and Arizona State Board of Education for Institutional Recommendation Programs and the Arizona Board of Nursing. In addition, we have specialized accreditations for certain programs from the National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC), the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), and the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). In addition, we are a candidate for accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). We believe that our institution-wide state authorization and regional accreditation, together with these specialized accreditations, reflect the quality of our programs, enhance their marketability to students, and improve the employability of our graduates.

Table of Contents

History

Grand Canyon College was founded in Prescott, Arizona in 1949 as a traditional, private, non-profit college and moved to its existing campus in Phoenix, Arizona in 1951. Established as a Baptist-affiliated institution with a strong emphasis on religious studies, the school initially focused on offering bachelor's degree programs in education. Over the years, the school expanded its curricula to include programs in the sciences, nursing, business, music, and arts. The college obtained regional accreditation in 1968 from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the predecessor to the Higher Learning Commission, and began offering nursing programs and master's degree programs in education and business in the 1980s. In 1989, it achieved university status and became Grand Canyon University. The university introduced its first distance learning programs in 1997, and launched its first online programs in 2003 in business and education. In early 2000, it discontinued its Baptist affiliation and became an interdenominational Christian university.

In late 2003, the school's Board of Trustees initiated a process to evaluate alternatives as a result of the school's poor financial condition and, in February 2004, a group of investors acquired the assets of the school and converted the school into a for-profit institution.

Our Approach to Academic Quality

Some of the key elements that we focus on to promote a high level of academic quality include:

Academically rigorous, professionally relevant curricula. We prepare learners to become global citizens, critical thinkers, effective communicators and responsible leaders by providing an academically challenging, values-based curriculum from the context of our Christian heritage. We create academically rigorous curricula that are designed to enable all students to gain the foundational knowledge, professional competencies, and demonstrable skills required to be successful in their chosen fields. Our curriculum is designed and delivered by faculty and industry-specific subject-matter experts who are committed to high quality, rigorous education and professional preparedness. We design our curricula to address specific objectives that pre-career and working-adult students need and are seeking. Through this combination, we believe that we produce graduates that can compete with integrity and become leaders in their chosen fields.

Qualified faculty. We demonstrate our commitment to high quality education by hiring qualified faculty with relevant practical experience. Substantially all of our current faculty members hold at least a master's degree in their respective fields and approximately 46% of our faculty members of record are doctorate prepared. Further, the University has implemented a full time faculty model for online course instruction. In 2015, almost all of the online first year courses were taught by an online, full time faculty member. We believe the presence of a full time faculty member in the classroom for the first year students results in increased student retention. We invest in the professional development of our faculty members by providing online and ground pedagogical training along with hosting events that encourage the development and sharing of best practices. Additionally, we also monitor and evaluate teaching effectiveness through assessment content reviews, peer reviews, and student evaluations.

Centralized program design and curriculum development. We employ a college driven highly collaboratively designed curriculum development process to ensure a consistent learning experience. We continuously review our programs at least every 3 years in an effort to ensure that they remain consistent, up-to-date, relevant, and effective in producing the desired learning outcomes. We also annually review programmatic assessment results, mission based competency results, graduation rates, retention rates and constituency surveys to identify opportunities for course modifications and upgrades.

Effective student services. We establish teams comprised of admissions and student services advisor personnel that act as the primary support contact point for each of our students, beginning at the application stage and continuing through graduation. We also continually focus on improving the technology used to support student learning, including delivering a new online learning platform and further improving student services through the implementation of online interfaces. As a result, many of our support services, including academic, administrative, financial, library, and career services, are accessible online, generally allowing users to access these services at a time and in a manner that is convenient to them.

Continual academic oversight. We have centralized the support functions of assessment for all of our programs through our Office of Assessment. While each of our colleges continuously evaluates the desired learning outcomes for each of their programs, the Office of Assessment provides data collection and analysis support. We continuously assess outcomes data to determine whether our students graduate with the knowledge, competencies, and skills that are necessary to succeed in the workplace. The Office of Assessment also initiates and manages periodic examinations of the mission-based competencies in our curricula by full-time and adjunct reviewers to evaluate and verify mission-based competency attainment. Based on these processes and student feedback from both programmatic and mission-based assessment, we determine whether to modify or discontinue programs that do not meet our standards or market needs, or to create new programs.

Table of Contents

We also offer the following features in an effort to enrich the academic experience of current and prospective students:

Flexibility in program delivery. We seek to meet market demands by providing students with the flexibility to take courses exclusively online or to combine online coursework with various campus and onsite options. For example, based on market demand, particularly in connection with our nursing programs, we have established satellite locations at multiple hospitals that allow nursing students to take clinical courses onsite while completing other course work online. We have established similar onsite arrangements with other major employers, including schools and school districts through which students can pursue student teaching opportunities. This flexibility raises our profile among employers, encourages students to take and complete courses, and eliminates inconveniences that tend to lessen student persistence.

Small class size. At December 31, 2015, 93.4% of our online and professional studies classes had 25 or fewer students. Our average, class size on our ground traditional campus is 25 students. These class sizes provide each student with the opportunity to interact directly with course faculty and to receive individualized feedback and attention while also affording our faculty with the opportunity to engage proactively with a manageable number of students. We believe this interaction enhances the academic quality of our programs by promoting opportunities for students to participate actively and thus build the requisite knowledge, competencies, and skills.

Accreditation and Program Approvals

We believe that the quality of our academic programs is evidenced by our university, college-, and program-specific accreditations and approvals. Grand Canyon University has been continuously accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and its predecessor since 1968, most recently obtaining reaccreditation in 2007 for the ten-year period through 2017. We are licensed in Arizona by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education. In addition, we have obtained the following specialized accreditations and approvals for our core program offerings:

Specialized Accreditations and Program

| College | Approvals | Current Period |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| <i>College of Nursing and Health Care Professions</i> | The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education accredits our Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing degree programs. | 2006 2016 (B.S.) |
| | | 2011 2021 (M.S.) |
| | The Arizona State Board of Nursing approves our Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing degree programs. | 2006 2016 (B.S.) |
| | | 2011 2021 (M.S.) |
| <i>College of Education</i> | The Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education accredits our Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training. | 2008 2018 |
| | | 2014 2016 (teacher) |

The Arizona Department of Education and Arizona State Board of Education approves our College of Education to offer Institutional Recommendations for the certification of elementary, secondary, and special education teachers (B.A./B.S./M.Ed.) and school principals (M.Ed.).

2014 2018 (principal)

Our College of Education is a candidate for accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), www.ncate.org. Candidacy status means that the College of Education has met preconditions for accreditation but is not accredited. NCATE has merged with another accrediting body and is now the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), www.caepnet.org. We have maintained our NCATE candidacy status and are proceeding through the CAEP accreditation process. This candidacy covers our initial teacher preparation programs and advanced educator preparation programs.

2011 2016

Table of Contents**Specialized Accreditations and Program**

| College | Approvals | Current Period |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| <i>Colangelo College of Business</i> | The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs accredits our Executive Master of Business Administration degree program, Master of Business Administration degree program, and our Bachelor of Science degree programs in Accounting, Business Administration, Marketing, Finance and Economics, Entrepreneurial Studies, and Sports Management. | 2007 2017 |
| <i>College of Fine Arts and Production</i> | The Arizona Department of Education and Arizona State Board of Education approves the College of Fine Arts and Production to offer programs leading to initial teacher licensure in the area of arts education for the elementary and secondary levels. | 2014 2016 |

Our regional accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, and our specialized accreditations and approvals for our core programs, reflect the quality of, and standards we set for, our programs, enhance their marketability, and improve the employability of our graduates.

Curricula

We offer the degrees of Doctor of Education, Doctor of Business Administration, Doctor of Nursing Practice, Doctor of Philosophy, Education Specialist, Master of Divinity, Master of Arts, Master of Education, Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration, Master of Public Health, Master of Science, Bachelor of Arts, and Bachelor of Science and a variety of programs leading to each of these degrees. Many of our degree programs also offer a selection of emphases. We also offer certificate programs, which consist of a series of courses focused on a particular area of study, for both the post-baccalaureate and post-graduate students who seek to enhance their skills and knowledge or achieve additional licensure.

We offer approximately 200 graduate and undergraduate degree programs and certificates through our eight distinct colleges:

the College of Nursing and Health Care Professions, which, as a result of, among other things, the strong pass rates of our Bachelor of Science in Nursing (pre-licensure) students on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), has a strong reputation within the Arizona nursing community and is the largest nursing program in Arizona when considering total college enrollment (bachelor and masters students);

the College of Doctoral Studies, which utilizes innovative technology, collaboration, and learning communities to develop expert practitioners and researchers who can become leaders in the disciplines and communities they serve;

Edgar Filing: Grand Canyon Education, Inc. - Form 10-K

the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, which develops and provides many of the general education course requirements in our other colleges and also serves as one of the vehicles through which we offer programs in additional targeted disciplines;

the College of Science, Engineering, and Technology, which with science, engineering, technology, and mathematics professions in extremely high demand, driving our economy, continuously evolving, and redefining modern day life is focused on preparing exceptionally competent graduates to enter the dynamic and highly competitive workforce of the 21st century;

the College of Education, which has greater than a 60-year history as one of Arizona's leading teacher's colleges and consistently graduates teachers who meet or exceed state averages on the Arizona Educator Proficiency Assessment exams;

the Colangelo College of Business, which has a well-known brand among our target student population, an advisory board that includes nationally recognized business leaders, and a reputation for offering professionally relevant degree programs;

the College of Fine Arts and Production, which continues the long and highly regarded tradition that the University has in the Fine Arts; and

the College of Theology, which serves as one of the many vehicles through which the University affirms its Christian heritage.

Table of Contents

Under the overall leadership of our senior academic affairs personnel and the deans of the individual colleges, each of the colleges organizes its academic programs through various departments and schools.

We have established relationships with community colleges, health-care systems, school districts, and other employers through which we offer programs to provide flexibility and convenience to students and their employers. For example, for our nursing programs, we offer clinical courses onsite at hospitals and other health-care centers with which we have partnerships, and also arrange to allow these students to complete their clinical work onsite.

We currently offer our ground-based programs to traditional students through three 15-week semesters in a calendar year and to online students in five, seven, eight or sixteen week courses throughout the calendar year. Traditional students generally enroll in three or four courses per semester while online students typically concentrate on one course at a time. We require our online students to be actively engaged in their online student classroom at least three or four times each week, depending on the content and degree level of the class, in order to maintain an active dialogue with their professors and classmates. Our online programs provide a digital record of student interactions for the course instructor to assess students' levels of engagement and demonstration of required competencies.

New Program Development

To aid us in the identification of potentially new degree programs or emphasis areas, we investigate market demand and review proposals developed by faculty, staff, students, alumni, college specific advisory boards comprised of leaders in their field or other partners. We then perform an analysis of the consistency of the proposed program or emphasis with our mission, long-term demand, and development costs. If, following this analysis, the University Development Committee decides to proceed with a new program, our college faculty and administrators approve subject-matter experts with whom our Curriculum Design and Development Team members, including instructional designers, curriculum developers, librarians, and editors, work to design the program competencies so that it is consistent with our academically rigorous, professionally oriented program standards. The program is then reviewed by the dean of the applicable college, the Program Standards and Evaluation Faculty Committee, the Academic Affairs Committee, and finally, our Provost and Chief Academic Officer. Upon accreditation and regulatory approval, the subject matter experts develop course syllabi, and our Marketing Department creates a marketing plan to publicize the new program. Our average program development process is six months from proposal to course introduction. The development process is typically longer if we are expanding into a new field or offering a new level of degree.

Assessment

Our Office of Assessment serves as our central resource for measuring learning outcomes and student satisfaction and driving systematically engineered and data-driven continuous-improvement cycles for updating our curricula. Among other things, the assessment team reviews student course satisfaction surveys; analyzes archived student assignments to assess whether a given program is developing students' foundational knowledge, professional competencies, and college skills to achieve the expected learning outcomes; and provides feedback as to program effectiveness. Based on this data and the conclusions of the assessment team, we modify programs as necessary to meet our student satisfaction and educational development standards.

Faculty

Our faculty includes full-time faculty, as well as adjunct faculty with relevant practical experience whom we employ to teach on a course-by-course basis for a specified fee. Our current faculty members hold at least a master's degree in their respective fields and approximately 46% of our teaching faculty of record hold doctorate degrees.

We believe that the quality of our faculty is critical to our success, particularly because faculty members have more interaction with our students than any other university employee. Accordingly, we regularly review the performance of our faculty, including, but not limited to, engaging our full-time faculty and other specialists to conduct peer reviews of our adjunct faculty, monitoring the amount of contact and the quality of feedback that faculty have with students in our online programs, reviewing student feedback, conducting content reviews and evaluating the learning outcomes achieved by students. If we determine that a faculty member is not performing at the level that we require, we work with the faculty member to improve performance, including, among other things, assigning him or her a mentor or through other means. If the faculty member's performance does not improve, we terminate the faculty member's contract and employment.

Table of Contents

Student Support Services

Encouraging students that enter Grand Canyon University to complete their degree programs is critical to our success. We focus on developing and providing resources that simplify the student enrollment process, acclimate students to our programs and our online environment, support the student educational experience, and track student performance toward degree completion. Many of our support services, including academic, administrative, and library services, are accessible online and are available to our online and ground students, allowing users to access these services at a time and in a manner that is generally convenient to them. The student support services we provide include:

Academic services. We provide students with a variety of services designed to support their academic studies. Our Learning Lounge offers research services, writing services, and other tutoring services. Learning sessions are offered on a one-on-one basis and group sessions.

Administrative services. We provide students with the ability to access a variety of administrative services both telephonically and via the Internet. For example, students can apply for financial aid, pay their tuition, order their transcripts online, and apply for graduation. We believe this online accessibility provides the convenience and self-service capabilities that our students value. Our student services advisors provide personalized online and telephonic support to our students.

Library services. We provide a mix of online and ground resources, services, and instruction to support the educational and research endeavors of all students, faculty, and staff, including ground and online libraries and a qualified library staff that is available to help faculty and students with research, teaching, and library resource instruction. Collectively, our library services meet, or exceed, the requirements set by relevant accrediting bodies for us to offer undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs.

Career services. For those students seeking to change careers or explore new career opportunities, we offer career services support, including resume review and evaluation, career planning workshops, and access to career services specialists for advice and support. Other resources that we offer include a Job Readiness Program, which advises students on matters such as people skills, resumes and cover letters, mock interviews, and business etiquette; a job board, which advertises employment postings and career exploration opportunities; career counseling appointments and consultations; and career fairs.

Technology support services. We provide online technical support 18 hours per day during the week and 17 hours per day on weekends to help our students remedy technology-related issues. We also provide online tutorials and Frequently Asked Questions for students who are new to online coursework.

Marketing, Recruitment, Admissions and Retention

Marketing. We engage in a range of marketing activities designed to position us as a provider of academically rigorous, professionally relevant educational programs, build strong brand recognition in our core disciplines, differentiate us from other educational providers, raise awareness among prospective students, generate enrollment inquiries, and stimulate student and alumni referrals. We target our online programs to working adults focused on program quality, convenience, and career advancement goals. We target our ground programs to traditional college students, working adults seeking a high quality education in a traditional college setting, and working adults seeking to take classes with a cohort onsite at our leased facilities or at their employer's facility. In marketing our programs to prospective students, we emphasize the value of the educational experience and the academic rigor and professional relevancy of the programs, as well as the cost of the program. We believe this approach reinforces the qualities that we want associated with our brand and also attracts students who tend to be more persistent in starting and finishing their

programs.

Recruitment. Once a prospective student has indicated an interest in enrolling in one of our programs, our lead management system identifies and directs an admissions advisor to initiate immediate communication. The admissions advisor serves as the primary, direct contact for the prospective student and the advisor's goal is to help that individual gain sufficient knowledge and understanding of our programs so that he or she can assess whether there is a good match between our offerings and the prospective student's goals. Upon the prospective student's submission of an application, the admissions advisor, together with our student services personnel, works with the applicant to gain acceptance, arrange financial aid, if needed, register for courses, and prepare for matriculation.

Admissions. Admission to Grand Canyon University is available to qualified students who are at least 16 years of age. Undergraduate applicants may qualify in various ways, including by having a high school diploma, certain minimum grade point average levels, certain minimum composite scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test or on the ACT test, or certain minimum scores on the General Education Development (GED) tests. Some of our programs require a higher grade point average and/or other criteria to qualify for admission. Applicants to our graduate programs must generally have an undergraduate degree from an accredited college, university, or program with a grade point average of 2.8 or greater, or a graduate degree from an accredited college, university, or program. In addition, some students who do not meet the qualifications for admission may be accepted with specification. A student being considered for such admission may be asked to submit additional information such as personal references and an essay addressing academic history. Students may also need to schedule an interview to help clarify academic goals and help us make an informed decision.

Table of Contents

Retention. A key component in retaining our students is providing an outstanding learning experience. We feel that our team-based, proactive approach to recruitment and enhanced student services results in increased retention due to our systematic approach to contacting students at key milestones during their enrollment, providing encouragement and highlighting their achievements. Our student services advisors proactively assist each student with the student's selection of an appropriate payment option, and monitor the student's progress and account balance to ensure a smooth financial aid experience and to help ensure our students are well prepared for the financial obligations they incur. These advisors also assist students with their academic schedules and regularly monitor triggering events, such as the failure to participate in the classroom or failure to matriculate in a timely manner, which signal that a student may be at-risk for dropping out. Upon identifying an at-risk student, these advisors proactively interact with the student to resolve any issues and encourage the student to continue with his or her program. We have found that personally involving our employees in the student educational process, and proactively seeking to resolve issues before they become larger problems, can significantly increase retention rates among students. These frequent interactions between student services advisors and students are a key component to our retention strategy.

Enrollment

At December 31, 2015, we had 74,506 students enrolled in our courses, of which 59,311, or 79.6%, were enrolled in our online programs, and 15,195, or 20.4%, were enrolled in our ground programs. Of our students in online programs, which were geographically distributed throughout all 50 states of the United States, and Canada, and in professional studies programs, 87.1% were age 25 or older. Of our traditional on-campus students, 93.8% were under age 25 and, although we draw students from throughout the United States, a majority were from Arizona.

The following is a summary of our student enrollment at December 31, 2015 and 2014 by degree type and by instructional delivery method:

| | December 31, 2015 ⁽¹⁾ | | December 31, 2014 ⁽¹⁾ | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| | # of Students | % of Total | # of Students | % of Total |
| Graduate degree ⁽²⁾ | 29,237 | 39.2% | 26,319 | 38.8% |
| Undergraduate degree | 45,269 | 60.8% | 41,487 | 61.2% |
| Total | 74,506 | 100.0% | 67,806 | 100.0% |

| | December 31, 2015 ⁽¹⁾ | | December 31, 2014 ⁽¹⁾ | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| | # of Students | % of Total | # of Students | % of Total |
| Online ⁽³⁾ | 59,311 | 79.6% | 55,060 | 81.2% |
| Ground ⁽⁴⁾ | 15,195 | 20.4% | 12,746 | 18.8% |
| Total | 74,506 | 100.0% | 67,806 | 100.0% |

⁽¹⁾ Enrollment at December 31, 2015 and 2014 represents individual students who attended a course during the last two months of the calendar quarter. Includes 679 and 585 students pursuing non-degree certificates at December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.

- (2) Includes 6,302 and 5,570 students pursuing doctoral degrees at December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.
- (3) As of December 31, 2015 and 2014, 47.8% and 46.0%, respectively, of our working adult students (online and professional studies students) were pursuing graduate or doctoral degrees.
- (4) Includes our traditional on-campus students, as well as our professional studies students.

Tuition and Fees

For the 2014-15 academic year (the academic year begins in May), our prices per credit hour range from \$350 to \$465 for undergraduate online and professional studies courses, \$325 to \$600 for graduate online courses, \$630 for doctoral online programs, and \$688 for undergraduate courses for ground students. For our active duty military and active reserve online and professional studies students, our prices per credit hour are \$250 for undergraduate, \$400 for graduate courses and \$599 for doctoral courses. The overall price of each course varies based upon the number of credit hours per course (with most courses representing four credit hours), the degree level of the program, and the discipline. In addition, we charge a fixed \$8,250 block tuition for undergraduate ground students taking between 12 and 18 credit hours per semester, with an additional \$688 per credit hour for credits in excess of 18. A traditional undergraduate degree typically requires a minimum of 120 credit hours. The minimum number of credit hours required for a master's degree and overall cost for such a degree varies by program, although such programs typically require approximately 36 credit hours. The doctoral program requires approximately 60 credit hours. A tuition increase of approximately 1% was implemented for the majority of online programs in September 2015. The University has not raised tuition for its traditional ground programs in seven years.

Table of Contents

Based on current tuition rates, tuition for a full program would generally equate to between \$15,450 and \$37,000 for an online master's program, between \$42,600 and \$56,400 for a full four-year online bachelor's program, \$38,400 for a full doctoral program, and approximately \$66,000 for a full four-year bachelor's program taken on our ground campus. The tuition amounts referred to above assume no reductions for transfer credits or scholarships, which many of our students utilize to reduce their total program costs. For example, the average student on our ground traditional campus will pay approximately \$8,300 in tuition in the 2015-16 school year after scholarships. Thus, based on the number of transfer credits and the scholarships they receive it is likely that a student will pay less than \$34,000 in tuition for a bachelor's degree on our ground campus. For the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, our revenue was reduced by approximately \$163.9 million, \$140.0 million and \$111.8 million, respectively, as a result of scholarships that we offered to our students. The increase in scholarships reflects our increasing use of academic scholarships, to attract high performing students to our ground traditional campus.

We have established a refund policy for tuition and fees based upon individual course start dates. Under our policy, for courses offered through a working adult modality, generally if a student drops or withdraws from a course before the course begins, 100% of the charges for tuition and fees are refunded. If a student drops or withdraws from a course during the first week of the course, 75% of the charges for tuition are refunded. If a student drops or withdraws from a course during or after the second week of a course, tuition charges and fees are not refunded. Most fees, including materials fees, are non-refundable for non-traditional students after the start of a course. We will refund tuition and fees according to the above policy unless a student attending courses online is a resident of a state that requires us to comply with different, state specific guidelines. For traditional students attending 15-week courses, generally if a student withdraws before the course begins, 100% of the charges for tuition and fees are refunded. If a student withdraws during the first week of the course, 90% of the charges for tuition are refunded and instructional fees and ground campus-related fees are refunded. If a student drops or withdraws from a course during the second week of a course, 75% of the tuition charges are refunded but most fees are non-refundable. If a student drops during the third week of a course, 50% of the tuition charges are refunded and during or after the fourth week, there are no refunds for tuition charges. Fees charged by us include graduation fees as well as fees for access to certain educational resources such as online materials. This tuition and fees refund policy is different from, and applies in addition to, the return of Title IV funds policy we are required to follow as a condition of our participation in the Title IV programs.

Sources of Student Financing

Our students finance their education through a combination of methods, as follows:

Title IV programs. The federal government provides for grants and loans to students under the Title IV programs, and students can use those funds at any institution that has been certified as eligible by the Department of Education. Student financial aid under the Title IV programs is primarily awarded on the basis of a student's financial need, which is generally defined as the difference between the cost of attending the institution and the amount the student and the student's family can reasonably contribute to that cost. All students receiving Title IV program funds must maintain satisfactory academic progress toward completion of their program of study. In addition, each school must ensure that Title IV program funds are properly accounted for and disbursed in the correct amounts to eligible students.

During fiscal 2015 and 2014, we derived approximately 74.8% and 76.5%, respectively, of our net revenues (calculated on a cash basis in accordance with Department of Education standards currently in effect) from tuition financed under the Title IV programs. The primary Title IV programs that our students receive funding from are the Federal Direct Loan program or FDL Program, and the Federal Pell Grant, or Pell, Program.

Student loans administered through the FDL Program are currently the most significant source of U.S. federal student aid. There are two types of federal student loans: subsidized loans, which are based on the U.S. federal statutory

calculation of student need, and unsubsidized loans, which are not need-based. Neither type of student loan is based on creditworthiness although annual and aggregate loan limits apply based on a student's grade level. Students are not responsible for interest on subsidized loans while the student is enrolled in school. However, the interest subsidy was temporarily eliminated for those students who received a direct Stafford loan with a first disbursement made on or after July 1, 2012 and before July 1, 2014. The interest subsidy for subsidized loans was reinstated for direct Stafford loans with a first disbursement after July 1, 2014. Students are responsible for the interest on unsubsidized loans while enrolled in school, but have the option to defer payment while enrolled. Repayment on federal student loans begins six months after the date the student ceases to be enrolled. The loans are repayable over the course of 10 years and, in some cases, longer. Both graduate and undergraduate students are eligible for loans. During 2015, federal student loans (both subsidized and unsubsidized) represented approximately 82.8% of the gross Title IV funds that we received.

Table of Contents

Grants under the Pell Program (Pell Grants) are awarded based on need and only to undergraduate students who have not earned a bachelor's or professional degree. Unlike loans, Pell Grants are not repayable. During fiscal year 2015, Pell Grants represented approximately 13.7% of the gross Title IV funds that we received. For the 2014-2015 award year, the maximum amount available under Pell Grants was \$5,730 and the maximum income that makes an applicant for Title IV Program funds eligible for an automatic zero Expected Family Contribution was \$24,000. For the 2015-16 award year, the maximum amount available under Pell Grants was increased to \$5,775 and the maximum income that makes an applicant for Title IV Program funds eligible for an automatic zero Expected Family Contribution remained at \$24,000.

Our students also receive funding under other Title IV programs, including the Federal Perkins Loan Program, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant Program, the Federal Work-Study Program, and the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grant Program.

Other financial aid programs. In addition to the Title IV programs listed above, eligible students may participate in several other financial aid programs or receive support from other governmental sources. These include veterans educational benefits administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and state financial aid programs. During fiscal 2015 and 2014, we derived an immaterial amount of our net revenue from tuition financed by such programs.

Private loans. Some of our students also use private loan programs to help finance their education. Students can apply to a number of different lenders for private loans at current market interest rates. Private loans are intended to fund a portion of students' cost of education not covered by the Title IV programs and other financial aid. During fiscal 2015 and 2014, payments derived from private loans constituted less than 1% of our net revenues for each year, respectively.

Other sources. We derived the remainder of our net revenue from tuition that is self-funded or attributable to employer tuition reimbursements.

Technology Systems and Management

We believe that we have established secure, reliable and scalable technology systems that provide a high quality educational environment and that give us the capability to substantially grow our online and traditional programs and enrollment.

Online course delivery and management. In 2010, we entered into an agreement with an affiliated entity to develop a new learning management system for our use. Through this agreement, we prepaid perpetual license fees, acquired source code rights for the software developed, and prepaid maintenance and service fees, for an aggregate amount of \$4.9 million. Through our modular implementation of this platform, called LoudCloud, we have a platform that can scale to support our growing student population. The platform provides in depth analytics that allows us to closely monitor student success and the quality of our instructional resources. All ground and online students receive online course delivery and resources through this learning management platform.

Internal administration. We utilize a commercial customer relations management software package to distribute, manage, track, and report on all interactions with prospective student leads as well as all active and inactive students. This software is scalable to capacity levels well in excess of current requirements. We also utilize a commercial software package to track Title IV funds, student records, grades, accounts receivable, accounts payable and general ledger.

Infrastructure. We operate two data centers, one at our campus and one at another Phoenix-area location. All of our servers are networked and we have redundant data backup. We manage our technology environment internally. Our wide area network uses fully redundant technology to ensure maximum uptime, bandwidth capacity and network performance while allowing the flexibility needed to bring on additional data centers and remote sites as needed. Student access is load balanced for maximum performance. Real-time monitoring provides current system status across server, network, and storage components.

Ground Campus

We own our ground campus, which is located on 200+ acres in the center of the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area, near downtown Phoenix. Our on-campus facilities currently consist of classroom buildings, lecture halls, a 300-seat theater, a newly renovated library, a media arts complex that provides communications students with audio and video equipment, a 55,000 square foot recreation center for both student-athletes and on-campus students, a 140,000 square foot/ 7,500 seat basketball and entertainment arena, a gymnasium, an activity center that contains a food court, a bowling alley and other student services, a student union which was recently remodeled and expanded, residence halls, apartments, campus pools, athletic facilities and parking garages. Additionally, we have several office buildings used for administration. In order to accommodate the continued growth of our traditional ground population, we completed four additional residence halls, an additional classroom building for our College of Science, Engineering and Technology and a third parking structure prior to the 2015/2016 school year and has recently started construction on three apartment style residence halls, a 170,000 square foot classroom building for its College of Science, Engineering and Technology, a student service center and a fourth parking structure.

Table of Contents

We have 22 intercollegiate athletic teams that currently compete in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Our athletic facilities include the University Arena (a 7,500 seat venue for all men's and women's basketball games plus select other GCU athletic competitions, concerts, speakers and other events), and a competition/practice gymnasium, which accommodates basketball, volleyball, and wrestling competitive events. In addition, the University's 55,000 square foot student recreation center has state of the art training facilities for our 400 student-athletes plus practice space and locker rooms for men's and women's basketball and wrestling. Our baseball, softball and track and field programs utilize on-campus practice and competition sites. An on-campus soccer facility which includes classrooms and team locker facilities in addition to 3,000 permanent seats and grassed berm seating to accommodate another 3,000 fans will be completed in Spring 2016. In January 2016 the Grand Canyon University Championship golf course opened to the public. The men's and women's golf teams have dedicated practice facilities, a team room and coaches offices at the course. Tennis, cross-country and swimming programs utilize off-campus sites for practice and competition. The University won the 2012-13 and 2011-12 Learfield Sports Directors Cup as the top overall NCAA Division II intercollegiate athletic program based on the combined success in all of the sports in which we competed. We advanced 16 of 22 programs into NCAA Championship competition and gained top 10 finishes in nine separate sports. In November 2012, we accepted an invitation to be a member of the NCAA Division I Western Athletic Conference beginning with the 2013-14 academic year and in September 2013 we began playing full Division I schedules. In June 2015, the University completed requirements for year 2 of the four year reclassification period and were passed on to year three in the membership process. In the first two years of membership in the Western Athletic Conference the Women's Indoor Track and Field, Softball, Baseball and Women's Tennis teams won regular season conference titles. GCU televises home athletic events in multiple sports highlighted by the men's basketball games that have averaged approximately 5,500 fans per night with most games played when the students are not on semester break at or near capacity.

We believe our ground-based programs and traditional campus not only offer our ground students, faculty, and staff an opportunity to participate in a traditional college experience, but also provide our online students, faculty, and staff with a sense of connection to a traditional university. Additionally, our full-time ground faculty play an important role in integrating online faculty into our academic programs and ensuring the overall consistency and quality of the ground and online student experience. We believe the mix of our online program with our traditional ground-based program with a greater than 60-year history and heritage differentiates us from other for-profit postsecondary education providers.

We intend to continue to expand the size and enhance the profile and reputation of our ground campus by, among other things, adding faculty, excelling in the performance areas such as athletics, debate, theatre, music and dance, expanding upon our campus infrastructure and technological capabilities, and potentially adding additional locations in the Southwest United States. These activities will require significant capital expenditures.

Employees

As of December 31, 2015, we employed over 3,650 full-time faculty, and staff and administrative personnel in university services, academic advising and academic support, enrollment services, university administration, financial aid, information technology, human resources, corporate accounting, finance, and other administrative functions. None of our employees is a party to any collective bargaining or similar agreement with us. We consider our relationships with our employees to be good.

Competition

There are more than 4,000 U.S. colleges and universities serving traditional and adult students. Competition is highly fragmented and varies by geography, program offerings, modality, ownership, quality level, and selectivity of

admissions. No one institution has a significant share of the total postsecondary market.

Our ground program competes with Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona, the in-state public universities, as well as two-year colleges within the state community college system. Our ground program also competes with geographically proximate universities with similar religious heritages, including Azusa Pacific University, Baylor University, and Pepperdine University. Our online programs compete with local, traditional universities geographically located near each of our prospective students, and with other for-profit postsecondary schools that offer online degrees, particularly those schools that offer online graduate programs within our core disciplines.

Non-profit institutions receive substantial government subsidies, and have access to government and foundation grants, tax-deductible contributions and other financial resources generally not available to for-profit schools. Accordingly, non-profit institutions may have instructional and support resources that are superior to those in the for-profit sector. In addition, some of our competitors, including both traditional colleges and universities and other for-profit schools, have substantially greater name recognition and financial resources than we have, which may enable them to compete more effectively for potential students. We also expect to face increased competition as a result of new entrants to the online education market, including established colleges and universities that had not previously offered online education programs.

Table of Contents

We believe that the competitive factors in the postsecondary education market include:

availability of professionally relevant and accredited program offerings;

the types of degrees offered and the marketability of those degrees;

reputation, regulatory approvals, and compliance history of the school;

convenient, flexible and dependable access to programs and classes;

qualified and experienced faculty;

quality of the ground campus facilities;

level of student support services;

cost of the program;

marketing and selling effectiveness; and

the time necessary to earn a degree.

Proprietary Rights

We own or are licensed to use various intellectual property rights, including copyrights, trademarks, service marks, trade secrets and domain names. We license the right to utilize the name of Jerry Colangelo in connection with our Colangelo School of Sports Business that we operate within the business school, and we have spent significant resources in related branding efforts. While such intellectual property rights are important to us, we do not believe that the loss of any individual property right or group of related rights would have a material adverse effect on our overall business.

Available Information

Our Internet address is www.gcu.edu. We make available free of charge on our website our Annual Report on Form 10-K, Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q, Current Reports on Form 8-K, Forms 3, 4, and 5 filed on behalf of directors and executive officers, and all amendments to those reports filed or furnished pursuant to Section 13(a) or 15(d) of the Exchange Act, as soon as reasonably practicable after such reports are electronically filed with, or furnished to, the Securities and Exchange Commission (hereafter, the SEC). In addition, our earnings conference calls are web cast live

via our website. In addition to visiting our website, you may read and copy any document we file with the SEC at the SEC's Public Reference Room at 100 F. Street NE, Washington, D.C. 20549 or at www.sec.gov. Please call the SEC at 1-800-SEC-0330 for information on the Public Reference Room.

REGULATION

We are subject to extensive regulation by state education agencies, accrediting commissions, and the federal government through the Department of Education under the Higher Education Act. The regulations, standards, and policies of these agencies cover the vast majority of our operations, including our educational programs, facilities, instructional and administrative staff, administrative procedures, marketing, recruiting, financial operations, athletics and financial condition.

As an institution of higher education that grants degrees and certificates, we are required to be authorized by appropriate state education authorities. These state education authorities also exercise regulatory oversight of our institution. In addition, in order to participate in the federal student financial aid programs, we must be accredited by an accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education. Accreditation is a non-governmental process through which an institution submits to qualitative review by an organization of peer institutions, based on the standards of the accrediting commission and the stated aims and purposes of the institution. The Higher Education Act requires accrediting commissions recognized by the Department of Education to review and monitor many aspects of an institution's operations and to take appropriate action if the institution fails to meet the accrediting commission's standards.

Table of Contents

Our operations are also subject to regulation by the Department of Education due to our participation in the federal student financial aid programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Those Title IV programs include educational loans with below-market interest rates that are issued by the federal government under the Federal Direct Loan program (the FDL Program), as well as grant programs for students with demonstrated financial need. To participate in the Title IV programs, a school must receive and maintain authorization by the appropriate state education agency or agencies, be accredited by an accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education, and be certified as an eligible institution by the Department of Education.

Our business activities are planned and implemented to comply with the standards of these regulatory agencies. We employ a Vice President of Student Financial Aid Compliance who is knowledgeable about regulatory matters relevant to student financial aid programs and our Chief Financial Officer, Chief Risk Officer, Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs and General Counsel also provide oversight designed to ensure that we meet the requirements of our regulated operating environment.

State Education Licensure and Regulation

We are authorized to offer our educational programs by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education, the regulatory agency governing private postsecondary educational institutions in the State of Arizona, where we are located. We do not presently have campuses in any states other than Arizona, although we do have one location in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We are required by the Higher Education Act to maintain authorization from the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education in order to participate in the Title IV programs. This authorization is very important to us and our business. To maintain our state authorization, we must continuously meet standards relating to, among other things, educational programs, facilities, instructional and administrative staff, marketing and recruitment, financial operations, addition of new locations and educational programs, and various operational and administrative procedures. Our failure to comply with the requirements of the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education could result in us losing our authorization to offer our educational programs, which would cause us to lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs and could force us to cease operations. Alternatively, the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education could restrict our ability to offer certain degree and non-degree programs.

We are an approved institutional participant in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is an agreement among member states, districts and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs. It is intended to make it easier for students to take online courses offered by postsecondary institutions based in another state. SARA is overseen by a national Council (NC-SARA) and administered by four regional education compacts, for which Arizona is a W-SARA member. There is a yearly renewal for participating in NC-SARA and AZ-SARA and institutions must agree to meet certain requirements to participate.

Some states that do not participate in SARA impose regulatory requirements on out-of-state educational institutions operating within their boundaries, such as those having a physical facility or conducting certain academic activities within the state. We currently enroll students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Although we are currently licensed, authorized, in-process, or exempt in all non-SARA jurisdictions in which we operate, if we fail to comply with state licensing or authorization requirements for a state, or fail to obtain licenses or authorizations when required, we could lose our state license or authorization by that state or be subject to other sanctions, including restrictions on our activities in, and fines and penalties imposed by, that state, as well as fines, penalties, and sanctions imposed by the Department of Education. While we do not believe that any of the states in which we are currently licensed or authorized, other than Arizona, are individually material to our operations, the loss of licensure or authorization in any state could prohibit us from recruiting prospective students or offering services to current students in that state, which

could significantly reduce our enrollments.

Individual state laws establish standards in areas such as instruction, qualifications of faculty, administrative procedures, marketing, recruiting, financial operations, and other operational matters, some of which are different than the standards prescribed by the Department of Education or the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education. Laws in some states limit schools' ability to offer educational programs and award degrees to residents of those states. Some states also prescribe financial regulations that are different from those of the Department of Education, and many require the posting of surety bonds. In non-SARA states, regulatory requirements for online education vary among the states, are not well developed in many states, are imprecise or unclear in some states, and can change frequently. Laws, regulations, or interpretations related to doing business over the Internet could also increase our cost of doing business and affect our ability to recruit students in particular states, which could, in turn, negatively affect enrollments and revenues and have a material adverse effect on our business.

Table of Contents

State Professional Licensure

Many states have specific requirements that an individual must satisfy in order to be licensed as a professional in specified fields, including fields such as education and healthcare, and counseling. These requirements vary by state and by field. A student's success in obtaining licensure following graduation typically depends on several factors, including the background and qualifications of the individual graduate, as well as the following factors, among others:

whether the institution and the program were approved by the state in which the graduate seeks licensure, or by a professional association;

whether the program from which the student graduated meets all requirements for professional licensure in that state;

whether the institution and the program are accredited and, if so, by what accrediting commissions; and

whether the institution's degrees are recognized by other states in which a student may seek to work. Many states also require that graduates pass a state test or examination as a prerequisite to becoming certified in certain fields, such as teaching and nursing. Many states will certify individuals if they have already been certified in another state.

Our College of Education is approved by the Arizona State Department of Education to offer Institutional Recommendations (credentials) for the certification of elementary, secondary, and special education teachers and school administrators. Our College of Nursing and Health Care Professions is approved by the Arizona State Board of Nursing for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing and advanced practice Master of Science in Nursing degrees. Our College of Humanities and Social Sciences is approved by the National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC). Due to varying requirements for professional licensure and certification in states other than Arizona, we inform students of the risks associated with obtaining professional licensure or certification and that it is each student's responsibility to determine what state, local or professional licensure and certification requirements are necessary in his or her individual state.

In addition, the Department of Education convened a negotiated rulemaking to discuss, among other issues, teacher training requirements under the Higher Education Act generally and in connection with institutional applicability for the TEACH Grant. In April 2012, the negotiating committee ceased its work without reaching consensus. On December 3, 2014, the Department of Education published proposed new federal standards in the Federal Register related to teacher training programs and new standards applicable to the TEACH Grant. The comment period for that proposed regulation ended on February 2, 2015. As with other Department of Education proposals, the Department of Education may change the proposed rule for a number of reasons, including in light of comments received. We are still evaluating the proposed rule and will follow this issue.

Accreditation

We have been continuously accredited since 1968 by the Higher Learning Commission and its predecessor, each a regional accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education. Our accreditation was reaffirmed in 2007 for a ten-year period, and the next scheduled comprehensive evaluation will be conducted in 2016-2017. Accreditation is a private, non-governmental process for evaluating the quality of educational institutions and their programs in areas including student performance, governance, integrity, educational quality, faculty, physical resources, administrative capability and resources, and financial stability. To be recognized by the Department of Education, accrediting commissions must adopt specific standards for their review of educational institutions, conduct peer-review evaluations of institutions, and publicly designate those institutions that meet their criteria. An accredited school is subject to periodic review by its accrediting commissions to determine whether it continues to meet the performance, integrity and quality required for accreditation.

There are six regional accrediting commissions recognized by the Department of Education, each with a specified geographic scope of coverage, which together cover the entire United States. Most traditional, public and private non-profit, degree-granting colleges and universities are accredited by one of these six regional accrediting commissions. The Higher Learning Commission, which accredits Grand Canyon University, is the same regional accrediting commission that accredits such universities as the University of Arizona, Arizona State University, and other degree-granting public, private non-profit, and proprietary colleges and universities in the states of Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission is important to us for several reasons, including the fact that it enables our students to receive Title IV financial aid. Other colleges and universities depend, in part, on an institution's accreditation in evaluating transfers of credit and applications to graduate schools. Employers rely on the accredited status of institutions when evaluating candidates' credentials, and students and corporate and government sponsors under tuition reimbursement programs look to accreditation for assurance that an institution maintains quality educational standards. If we fail to satisfy the standards of the Higher Learning Commission, we could lose our accreditation by that agency, which would cause us to lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs.

Table of Contents

In addition to institutional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, there are numerous specialized accrediting commissions that accredit specific programs or schools within their jurisdiction, many of which are in healthcare and professional fields. Accreditation of specific programs by one of these specialized accrediting commissions signifies that those programs have met the additional standards of those agencies. In addition to being institutionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, we also have the following specialized accreditations:

The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs accredits our Master of Business Administration degree program and emphases and our Bachelor of Science degree programs in Accounting, Business Administration, Business Administration with emphasis in Business Intelligence, Marketing, Sports Management and Entrepreneurship;

The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education accredits our Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing degree programs;

The Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education accredits our Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training; and

The National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission accredits our Master of Science in Addiction Counseling Program.

If we fail to satisfy the standards of any of these specialized accrediting commissions, we could lose the specialized accreditation for the affected programs, which could result in materially reduced student enrollments in those programs and prevent our students from seeking and obtaining appropriate licensure in their fields.

Regulation of Federal Student Financial Aid Programs

To be eligible to participate in the Title IV programs, an institution must comply with specific requirements contained in the Higher Education Act and the regulations issued thereunder by the Department of Education. An institution must, among other things, be licensed or authorized to offer its educational programs by the state in which it is physically located (in our case, Arizona) and maintain institutional accreditation by an accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education (in our case, the Higher Learning Commission).

The substantial amount of federal funds disbursed to schools through the Title IV programs, the large number of students and institutions participating in these programs, and allegations of fraud and abuse by certain for-profit educational institutions have caused Congress to require the Department of Education to exercise considerable regulatory oversight over for-profit educational institutions. As a result, our institution is subject to extensive oversight and review. Because the Department of Education periodically revises its regulations and changes its interpretations of existing laws and regulations, we cannot predict with certainty how the Title IV program requirements will be applied in all circumstances.

Significant regulations and other factors relating to the Title IV programs that could adversely affect us include the following:

Congressional action. Congress must reauthorize the Higher Education Act on a periodic basis, usually every five to six years, and the most recent reauthorization occurred in August 2008. The reauthorized Higher Education Act reauthorized all of the Title IV programs in which we participate, but made numerous revisions to the requirements governing the Title IV programs, including provisions relating to student loan default rates and the formula for determining the maximum amount of revenue that institutions are permitted to derive from the Title IV programs. In addition, members of Congress periodically introduce legislation that would impact Title IV programs and our industry generally. Because a significant percentage of our revenue is derived from the Title IV programs, any action by Congress that significantly reduces Title IV program funding or our ability or the ability of our students to participate in the Title IV programs could increase our costs of compliance, reduce the ability of some students to finance their education at our institution, require us to seek to arrange for other sources of financial aid for our students and materially decrease our student enrollment.

Regulatory changes. Since October 2010, the Department of Education promulgated new rules related to Title IV program integrity issues. The most significant of these rules for our business are the following:

Modification of the standards relating to the prohibition on payment of incentive compensation to employees involved in student recruitment and enrollment;

Implementation of standards for state authorization of institutions of higher education; and

Table of Contents

Expansion of the definition of misrepresentation, relating to the Department of Education's authority to suspend or terminate an institution's participation in Title IV programs if the institution engages in substantial misrepresentation about the nature of its educational program, its financial charges, or the employability of its graduates, and expansion of the sanctions that the Department of Education may impose for engaging in a substantial misrepresentation.

Although most of the rules were effective in July 2011, parts of the rules, including those related to state authorization of online programs and parts of the rule on misrepresentation, were vacated as a result of a June 2012 decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

On October 20, 2014, the Department of Education published the final rules related to the implementation of the Section 304 of the Violence Against Women Act of 2013. These rules, which add additional compliance requirements related to the Clery Act, address issues related to campus crime, sexual assault, and various administrative requirements in support of maintaining a campus free of sexual discrimination. Although these requirements have added modest costs associated with compliance, management does not believe these costs have had a material effect on our business.

On October 31, 2014, the Department of Education published the final gainful employment rule. This was a follow up to a 2011 effort by the Department to adopt a definition of what it means to provide a program leading to gainful employment in a recognized profession, which was largely overturned by a 2012 district court decision. For more information see *Gainful Employment Rule* below.

On June 2, 2015, the Department of Education released a memorandum regarding enforcement of the prohibition on the payment of incentive compensation by postsecondary institutions to any person or entity engaged in any student recruiting or admissions activities or in making decisions regarding the award of student financial assistance based directly or indirectly upon success in securing enrollments or financial aid. Institutions agree to comply with the incentive compensation rules as a condition of their participation in the Title IV financial aid programs. The memorandum indicated that the Department of Education will revert to its pre-2002 approach to measuring damages for noncompliance with the prohibition against incentive compensation. That approach holds institutions liable to the Department of Education for up to the entire amount of federal student aid provided to students who were recruited in violation of the incentive compensation prohibition. As a result, should an institution be found to have violated the incentive compensation prohibition, it may be required to return all federal student aid received for students who were recruited in violation of the prohibition.

On September 12, 2015, the Department released its consumer data tool *The New Scorecard*. This data set was released in lieu of the previously contemplated college ranking system. The impact of this new consumer data tool cannot be predicted. However, if information in the data set is used to compare schools with materially different demographics and missions without appropriate qualifications, it could cast a negative light on the proprietary sector generally, and our reputation and enrollment could be adversely affected.

On October 27, 2015, the Department of Education announced the publication of final regulations to amend its cash management regulations, which we refer to as the Cash Management Regulations. The Cash Management Regulations go into effect on July 1, 2016. Among other topics, the Cash Management Regulations address arrangements between postsecondary institutions and financial account providers to disburse Title IV program credit balances to students, including through the use of debit or prepaid cards. The Cash Management Regulations require institutions to establish a process to facilitate student choice in how students receive Title IV program federal student financial aid credit balances; limit the personally identifiable information about students that may be shared with financial account providers; and require institutions to obtain student consent before opening an account in the student's name. Under the Cash Management Regulations, an institution that has entered into an arrangement with a financial account provider

must mitigate certain fees incurred by Title IV aid recipients, and certain types of fees are prohibited. The Cash Management Regulations require that contracts governing arrangements with financial account providers be publicly disclosed and evaluated in light of the best financial interests of students. The Cash Management Regulations also make other changes to requirements for the institutional administration of Title IV programs, including by clarifying how previously passed coursework is treated for Title IV eligibility purposes, altering the requirements for converting clock hours to credit hours, and updating other provisions in the Department of Education's cash management regulations. For example, the Cash Management Regulations establish a requirement that institutions participating in the Title IV programs under the reimbursement or heightened cash monitoring payment methods must pay any credit balance due to a student before seeking reimbursement or a request for funds, respectively. The Cash Management Regulations also specify the circumstances under which an institution may include the cost of books and supplies as part of institutional tuition and fees charged to a student, such as if the institution has made arrangements with publishers to obtain books at below-market rates or if books or electronic course materials are not available elsewhere. We are currently assessing the impact of these regulations and are unable to predict the impact that compliance with the Cash Management Regulations might have on our operations and operating results, although we do not anticipate the impact to be material.

Table of Contents

Eligibility and certification procedures. Each institution must apply periodically to the Department of Education for continued certification to participate in the Title IV programs. Such recertification generally is required every six years, but may be required earlier, including when an institution undergoes a change in control. An institution may also come under the Department of Education's review when it expands its activities in certain ways, such as opening an additional location, adding a new educational program or modifying the academic credentials it offers. The Department of Education may place an institution on provisional certification status if it finds that the institution does not fully satisfy all of the eligibility and certification standards and in certain other circumstances, such as when an institution is certified for the first time or undergoes a change in control. During the period of provisional certification, the institution must comply with any additional conditions included in the school's program participation agreement with the Department of Education. In addition, the Department of Education may more closely review an institution that is provisionally certified if it applies for recertification or approval to open a new location, add an educational program, acquire another school, or make any other significant change. If the Department of Education determines that a provisionally certified institution is unable to meet its responsibilities under its program participation agreement, it may seek to revoke the institution's certification to participate in the Title IV programs without advance notice or opportunity for the institution to challenge the action. Students attending provisionally certified institutions remain eligible to receive Title IV program funds.

On October 28, 2013, the University received a new program participation agreement with full certification from the Department of Education, which gives the University the ability to participate in the Title IV programs through September 30, 2017.

Administrative capability. Department of Education regulations specify extensive criteria by which an institution must establish that it has the requisite administrative capability to participate in the Title IV programs. To meet the administrative capability standards, an institution must, among other things:

comply with all applicable Title IV program requirements;

have an adequate number of qualified personnel to administer the Title IV programs;

have acceptable standards for measuring the satisfactory academic progress of its students;

not have student loan cohort default rates above specified levels;

have various procedures in place for awarding, disbursing and safeguarding Title IV funds and for maintaining required records;

administer the Title IV programs with adequate checks and balances in its system of internal controls;

not be, and not have any principal or affiliate who is, debarred or suspended from federal contracting or engaging in activity that is cause for debarment or suspension;

provide financial aid counseling to its students;

refer to the Department of Education's Office of Inspector General any credible information indicating that any student, parent, employee, third-party servicer or other agent of the institution has engaged in any fraud or other illegal conduct involving the Title IV programs;

submit all required reports and consolidated financial statements in a timely manner; and

not otherwise appear to lack administrative capability.

If an institution fails to satisfy any of these criteria, the Department of Education may:

require the institution to repay Title IV funds its students previously received;

transfer the institution from the advance method of payment of Title IV funds to heightened cash monitoring status or the reimbursement system of payment;

place the institution on provisional certification status; or

commence a proceeding to impose a fine or to limit, suspend or terminate the institution's participation in the Title IV programs.

If we are found not to have satisfied the Department of Education's administrative capability requirements, our students could lose, or be limited in their access to, Title IV program funding.

Table of Contents

Financial responsibility. The Higher Education Act and Department of Education regulations establish extensive standards of financial responsibility that institutions such as Grand Canyon University must satisfy in order to participate in the Title IV programs. The Department of Education evaluates institutions for compliance with these standards on an annual basis based on the institution's annual audited consolidated financial statements, as well as when the institution applies to the Department of Education to have its eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs recertified. The most significant financial responsibility standard is the institution's composite score, which is derived from a formula established by the Department of Education based on three financial ratios:

equity ratio, which measures the institution's capital resources, financial viability and ability to borrow;

primary reserve ratio, which measures the institution's ability to support current operations from expendable resources; and

net income ratio, which measures the institution's ability to operate at a profit or within its means.

The Department of Education assigns a strength factor to the results of each of these ratios on a scale from negative 1.0 to positive 3.0, with negative 1.0 reflecting financial weakness and positive 3.0 reflecting financial strength. The Department of Education then assigns a weighting percentage to each ratio and adds the weighted scores for the three ratios together to produce a composite score for the institution. The composite score for an institution's most recent fiscal year must be at least 1.5 for the institution to be deemed financially responsible without the need for further Department of Education oversight. Our composite scores for our fiscal years ended December 31, 2014, 2013 and 2012 were 3.0, 3.0 and 2.9, respectively, and, therefore, we are considered financially responsible for purposes of these regulations. We have not yet submitted our consolidated financial statements to the Department of Education for our 2015 fiscal year, but have calculated that our composite score for the 2015 fiscal year will be 2.6. We have modeled our composite score for future years using, among other estimates, our estimated ground campus capital expenditures and believe that our composite score will remain at a financially responsible level for the foreseeable future.

In addition to having an acceptable composite score, an institution must, among other things, provide the administrative resources necessary to comply with Title IV program requirements, meet all of its financial obligations, including required refunds to students and any Title IV liabilities and debts, be current in its debt payments, and not receive an adverse, qualified, or disclaimed opinion by its accountants in its audited consolidated financial statements. If the Department of Education were to determine that we did not meet the financial responsibility standards due to a failure to meet the composite score or other factors, we would expect to be able to establish financial responsibility on an alternative basis permitted by the Department of Education, which could include, in the Department of Education's discretion, posting a letter of credit, accepting provisional certification, complying with additional Department of Education monitoring requirements, agreeing to receive Title IV program funds under an arrangement other than the Department of Education's standard advance funding arrangement, such as the reimbursement system of payment or heightened cash monitoring, and complying with or accepting other limitations on our ability to increase the number of programs we offer or the number of students we enroll.

The requirement to post a letter of credit or other sanctions imposed by the Department of Education could increase our cost of regulatory compliance and adversely affect our cash flows. If we are unable to meet the minimum composite score or comply with the other standards of financial responsibility, and could not post a required letter of credit or comply with the alternative bases for establishing financial responsibility, our students could lose their access

to Title IV program funding.

Return of Title IV funds for students who withdraw. When a student who has received Title IV program funds withdraws from school, the institution must determine the amount of Title IV program funds the student has earned and then must return the unearned Title IV program funds (a return to Title IV) to the appropriate lender or the Department of Education in a timely manner, which is generally no later than 45 days after the date the institution determined that the student withdrew. If such payments are not timely made, the institution will be required to submit a letter of credit to the Department of Education equal to 25% of the Title IV funds that the institution should have returned for withdrawn students in its most recently completed fiscal year. Under Department of Education regulations, the letter of credit requirement is triggered by late returns of Title IV program funds for 5% or more of the withdrawn students (and involving more than two student refunds) in the audit sample in the institution's annual Title IV compliance audit for either of the institution's two most recent fiscal years or in a Department of Education program review. We did not exceed this 5% threshold in our annual Title IV compliance audits for 2014 (the most recent year for which we have completed a Title IV compliance audit), 2013 or 2012.

The 90/10 Rule. A requirement of the Higher Education Act, commonly referred to as the 90/10 Rule, that is applicable only to for-profit, postsecondary educational institutions like us, provides that an institution loses its eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs if the institution derives more than 90% of its revenue for each of two consecutive fiscal years from Title IV program funds. For purposes of the 90/10 Rule, revenue is calculated under a complex regulatory formula that requires cash basis accounting and other adjustments to the calculation of an institution's revenue under generally accepted accounting principles that appears in its consolidated financial statements. Under the 90/10 Rule, an institution becomes ineligible to participate in the Title IV programs as of the first day of the fiscal year following the second consecutive fiscal year in which it exceeds the 90% threshold, and its period of ineligibility extends for at least two consecutive fiscal years. If an institution exceeds the 90% threshold for two consecutive fiscal years and it and its students have received Title IV funds during the subsequent period of ineligibility, the institution will be required to return those Title IV funds to the applicable lender or the Department of Education. If an institution's rate exceeds 90% for any single fiscal year, it will be placed on provisional certification for at least two fiscal years.

Table of Contents

Using the Department of Education's cash-basis, regulatory formula under the 90/10 Rule as currently in effect, for our 2015, 2014, and 2013 fiscal years, we derived approximately 74.8%, 76.5%, and 78.5%, respectively, of our 90/10 Rule revenue from Title IV program funds.

As a result of the continuing increase in the number of students attending our ground campus, who typically finance a greater percentage of their educational costs with non-Title IV sources of funds, we expect the percentage of our revenue that we receive from Title IV programs to remain stable or to continue to decrease in the future, although this may be impacted by recent changes in federal law that increased Title IV grant and loan limits, as well as the ongoing economic environment, which has adversely affected the employment circumstances of our students and their parents and increased their reliance on Title IV programs. If we were to exceed the 90% threshold for two consecutive years such that we lost our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs, or if Congress passed legislation changing how certain funds are counted under this rule, revising the percentage of income that proprietary schools must derive from non-federal sources, or both, it would have a material adverse effect on our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations.

Student loan defaults. Under the Higher Education Act, an educational institution may lose its eligibility to participate in some or all of the Title IV programs if defaults by its students on the repayment of their federal student loans exceed certain levels. For each federal fiscal year, the Department of Education calculates a rate of student defaults for each institution (known as a cohort default rate). The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2008 extended the measurement period for cohort default rates so that the rate is calculated by determining the rate at which borrowers who became subject to their repayment obligation in one federal fiscal year default in that same year or by the end of the second year following federal fiscal year (the three-year method).

The Department of Education applies legal thresholds to measure an institution's compliance. If the Department of Education notifies an institution that its cohort default rates exceeded 30%, for each of its three most recent federal fiscal years, the institution's participation in the FDL Program and the Pell grant program would end 30 days after that notification, unless the institution appeals that determination in a timely manner on specified grounds and according to specified procedures. In addition, an institution's participation in the FDL Program would end 30 days after notification by the Department of Education that its most recent cohort default rate, is greater than 40%, unless the institution timely appeals that determination on specified grounds and according to specified procedures. An institution whose participation ends under either of these provisions may not participate in the relevant programs for the remainder of the fiscal year in which the institution receives the notification or for the next two fiscal years. If an institution's cohort default rate for any single federal fiscal year equals or exceeds 30%, the Department of Education may place the institution on provisional certification status.

Our cohort default rates on federal student loans for the 2012, 2011 and 2010 federal fiscal years, were 10.3%, 15.7% and 19.0%, respectively.

Incentive compensation rule. An institution that participates in the Title IV programs may not provide any commission, bonus, or other incentive payment based directly or indirectly on success in securing enrollments or financial aid to any person or entity engaged in any student recruitment, admissions, or financial aid awarding activity. Prior to July 1, 2011, Department of Education regulations included 12 "safe harbors" that described payments and arrangements that did not violate the incentive compensation rule. Under new rules effective July 1, 2011, the 12 safe harbors were eliminated. The restrictions of the incentive compensation rule, which extend to any third-party companies that an educational institution contracts with for student recruitment, admissions, or financial aid awarding services, increase the uncertainty about what constitutes incentive compensation and which employees are covered by the regulation. This makes the development of effective and compliant performance metrics more difficult to establish. As such, these changes limit our ability to compensate our employees based on their performance of their

job responsibilities, which could make it more difficult to attract and retain highly-qualified employees.

Compliance reviews. We are subject to announced and unannounced compliance reviews and audits by various external agencies, including the Department of Education, its Office of Inspector General, state licensing agencies, the applicable state approving agencies for financial assistance to veterans, and accrediting commissions. As part of the Department of Education's ongoing monitoring of institutions' administration of the Title IV programs, the Higher Education Act also requires institutions to annually submit to the Department of Education a Title IV compliance audit conducted by an independent certified public accountant in accordance with applicable federal and Department of Education audit standards. In addition, to enable the Department of Education to make a determination of an institution's financial responsibility, each institution must annually submit audited financial statements prepared in accordance with Department of Education regulations.

Table of Contents

In connection with its administration of the Title IV federal student financial aid programs, the Department of Education periodically conducts program reviews at selected schools that receive Title IV funds. In July 2010, the Department of Education initiated a program review of Grand Canyon University covering the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 award years. On September 27, 2013, the University and the Department of Education entered into an agreement that fully resolved the findings in the preliminary program review report and closed the program review. A second program review, focused on the University's administration of the Title IV programs in which it participates, its administration of the Clery Act and related regulations, and its compliance with the requirements of the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 award years, was initiated in April 2014. The final program review determination letter received in June 2014 set forth three findings, each of which involved individual student-specific information gathering and/or reporting errors and all of which the University promptly corrected to the Department of Education's satisfaction. Accordingly, the final program review determination letter concluded that the University had taken all corrective actions necessary to resolve the findings and that the program review had been closed with no further action required. See Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations.

Privacy of student records. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, or FERPA, and the Department of Education's FERPA regulations, require educational institutions to protect the privacy of students' educational records by limiting an institution's disclosure of a student's personally identifiable information without the student's prior written consent. FERPA also requires institutions to allow students to review and request changes to their educational records maintained by the institution, to notify students at least annually of this inspection right, and to maintain records in each student's file listing requests for access to and disclosures of personally identifiable information and the interest of such party in that information. If an institution fails to comply with FERPA, the Department of Education may require corrective actions by the institution or may terminate an institution's receipt of further federal funds. In addition, educational institutions are obligated to safeguard student information pursuant to the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, or GLBA, a federal law designed to protect consumers' personal financial information held by financial institutions and other entities that provide financial services to consumers. GLBA and the applicable GLBA regulations require an institution to, among other things, develop and maintain a comprehensive, written information security program designed to protect against the unauthorized disclosure of personally identifiable financial information of students, parents, or other individuals with whom such institution has a customer relationship. If an institution fails to comply with the applicable GLBA requirements, it may be required to take corrective actions, be subject to monitoring and oversight by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and be subject to fines or penalties imposed by the FTC. For-profit educational institutions are also subject to the general deceptive practices jurisdiction of the FTC with respect to their collection, use, and disclosure of student information. The institution must also comply with the FTC Red Flags Rule, a section of the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, that requires the establishment of guidelines and policies regarding identity theft related to student credit accounts.

Potential effect of regulatory violations. If we fail to comply with the regulatory standards governing the Title IV programs, the Department of Education could impose one or more sanctions, including transferring us to the reimbursement or cash monitoring system of payment, requiring us to repay Title IV program funds, requiring us to post a letter of credit in favor of the Department of Education as a condition for continued Title IV certification, taking emergency action against us, initiating proceedings to impose a fine or to limit, suspend, or terminate our participation in the Title IV programs, or referring the matter for civil or criminal prosecution. If such sanctions or proceedings were imposed against us and resulted in a substantial curtailment or termination of our participation in the Title IV programs, our enrollments, revenues, and results of operations would be materially and adversely affected.

If we lost our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs, or if the amount of available Title IV program funds was reduced, we would seek to arrange or provide alternative sources of revenue or financial aid for students. We believe that one or more private organizations would be willing to provide financial assistance to our students, but

there is no assurance that this would be the case. The interest rate and other terms of such financial aid would likely not be as favorable as those for Title IV program funds, and we might be required to guarantee all or part of such alternative assistance or might incur other additional costs in connection with securing such alternative assistance. It is unlikely that we would be able to arrange alternative funding on any terms to replace all the Title IV funding our students receive. Accordingly, our loss of eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs, or a reduction in the amount of available Title IV program funding for our students, would have a material adverse effect on our results of operations, even if we could arrange or provide alternative sources of revenue or student financial aid.

In addition to the actions that may be brought against us as a result of our participation in the Title IV programs, we are also subject to complaints and lawsuits relating to regulatory compliance brought not only by our regulatory agencies, but also by other government agencies and third parties, such as present or former students or employees and other members of the public.

State authorization. States have the authority to assert jurisdiction, to the extent they so choose, over educational institutions that offer online degree programs in a state but that otherwise have no physical location or other presence in that state. On November 20, 2013, the Department of Education announced its intent to establish a negotiated rulemaking committee to address state authorization of distance and correspondence learning programs. While these negotiated rulemaking sessions were held, the committee failed to reach consensus on all topics by the May 2014 conclusion of those sessions. The Department of Education has not yet published a notice of proposed rulemaking, so we do not yet know whether or how any such proposed rules would impact the University or when such rules may be published. The regulations proposed by the Department of Education prior to the May 2014 negotiating session, however, would impose significant new regulatory burdens on postsecondary institutions that provide distance education, regardless of educational sector.

Table of Contents

We are an approved institutional participant in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is an agreement among member states, districts and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs. It is intended to make it easier for students to take online courses offered by postsecondary institutions based in another state. SARA is overseen by a national Council (NC-SARA) and administered by four regional education compacts, for which Arizona is a W-SARA member. There is a yearly renewal for participating in NC-SARA and AZ-SARA, and institutions must agree to meet certain requirements to participate.

In addition to Arizona, we have determined that our activities in some non-SARA states constitute a presence requiring licensure or authorization under the requirements of the state post-secondary education agency in those states, which we have obtained, while in other states we have determined that we are exempt under applicable state law from licensure or authorization requirements. In other states, we have obtained approvals to operate as we have determined necessary in connection with our marketing and recruiting activities. Although we have a process for evaluating the compliance of our online educational programs with state requirements regarding distance and correspondence learning, and have experienced no significant restrictions on our educational activities to date as a result of such requirements, state regulatory requirements for online education vary among the states, are not well developed in many states, are imprecise or unclear in some states and are subject to change. If we fail to comply with licensing or authorization requirements for a non-SARA state, or fail to obtain licenses or authorizations when required, we could lose our licensure or authorization from that state or be subject to other sanctions, including restrictions on our activities in that state, and fines and penalties, including Department of Education sanctions. The loss of licensure or authorization in a state other than Arizona could prohibit us from recruiting prospective students or offering educational services to current students in that state, which could significantly reduce our enrollments.

Approval of new programs. Department of Education rules effective July 1, 2011 imposed various requirements on an institution's ability to add new academic programs without prior approval of the Department of Education. While the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia subsequently invalidated this requirement, we believe there remains some uncertainty regarding new program approval, which could adversely affect our ability to respond to emerging employment trends and add programs that are responsive to those trends, which in turn could decrease our attractiveness to certain students. In addition, a lack of certainty could increase the risk of future federal False Claims Act qui tam lawsuits in which private plaintiffs assert that students improperly received Title IV aid while attending a program that has not been approved.

Gainful employment rules. Under the Higher Education Act, proprietary schools are eligible to participate in Title IV programs in respect of educational programs that lead to gainful employment in a recognized occupation, with the limited exception of qualified programs leading to a bachelor's degree in liberal arts. Historically, this concept has not been defined in detail. In October 2014, the Department of Education published final regulations, effective July 1, 2015, on the metrics for determining whether an academic program prepares students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation. This rule establishes requirements related to the debt to earnings ratio of graduates of our programs, and sets additional disclosure requirements for students. Under the final regulations, which apply on a program-by-program basis, students enrolled in a program will be eligible for Title IV student financial aid only if that program satisfies at least one of two tests relating to student debt service-to-earnings ratios. The two tests specify minimum debt service-to-earnings ratios calculated on the basis of the earnings of program graduates. One test measures student loan debt service as a percentage of total earnings, and the other test measures student loan debt service as a percentage of discretionary earnings. The first year a program fails to meet at least one of the minimum ratios for the year, the institution will be required to provide a warning notice to prospective and enrolled students advising that the program has not met the minimum debt measurements and describes any actions planned to improve the program's performance under the Debt Measurements. Programs that fail to meet at least one of the minimum ratios for two consecutive years or for two out of three of the most recent years for which Debt Measures were

calculated, will be required to provide additional warning notices to students before enrollment. If the program does not meet any of the Debt Measures for three out of four years, it will lose its Title IV eligibility.

Under the final regulations, schools are also required to certify to the Department the following for each Title IV eligible program:

The program is included in the schools' accreditation;

The program is programmatically accredited, if required by a federal government entity, or by a government entity in any state in which the school is located or is required to obtain state approval;

The program satisfies any applicable state licensing and certification requirements for the occupations for which the program prepares students to enter; and

The program is not substantially similar to a program offered by the school that became ineligible due to the student debt service-to-earnings ratios.

Table of Contents

We believe we have successfully submitted the certifications required for all pre-existing programs prior to the December 31, 2015 deadline for doing so. In addition, in July and September 2015 we successfully submitted the data required of the University under the gainful employment rule. We believe we have materially complied with the reporting requirements and have not otherwise been notified by the Department.

The Department of Education has indicated that the official 2014 gainful employment debt service-to-earnings ratios will most likely be issued in the winter of 2016. The expected timing of the issuance of the 2015 ratios has not yet been announced. We believe it is likely that some of University's programs will be impacted by the regulations.

The Department of Education has not yet announced the protocol for calculating and disseminating the debt service-to-earnings ratios. Because the ratios will be issued by the Department of Education after the measuring period, we may not know of a program's failure to meet the tests until after the measuring period, and students enrolled in such a program could lose their access to federal financial aid before completing the program.

This is a complicated rule and, although management will work to achieve compliance with this new rule, the continuing eligibility of our educational programs for Title IV funding is at risk due to factors measured by this rule and beyond our control, such as changes in the actual or deemed income level of our graduates, changes in student borrowing levels, increases in interest rates, changes in the federal poverty income level relevant for calculating discretionary income, and other factors. The exposure to these external factors could reduce our ability to confidently offer or continue certain types of programs for which there is market demand, and therefore would impact our ability to maintain or grow our business. *Substantial misrepresentation.* The Higher Education Act prohibits an institution that participates in Title IV programs from engaging in substantial misrepresentation of the nature of its educational program, its financial charges, or the employability of its graduates. The Department of Education has defined a misrepresentation as any statement made by the institution or a third party that provides educational programs, marketing, advertising, recruiting, or admissions services to the institution that is false, erroneous or has the likelihood or tendency to deceive. A substantial misrepresentation is any misrepresentation on which the person to whom it was made could reasonably be expected to rely, or has reasonably relied, to that person's detriment. Considering the breadth of the definition of substantial misrepresentation, it is possible that despite our efforts to prevent such misrepresentations, our employees or service providers may make statements that could be construed as substantial misrepresentations. As a result, we may face complaints from students and prospective students over statements made by us and our agents throughout the enrollment, admissions and financial aid process, as well as throughout attendance at the University, which would expose us to increased risk of enforcement action and applicable sanctions or other penalties and increased risk of private qui tam actions under the Federal False Claims Act. Under the new rules, if the Department of Education determines that an institution has engaged in substantial misrepresentation, the Department of Education may revoke an institution's program participation agreement, impose limitations on the institution's participation in Title IV programs, deny applications from the institution for approval of new programs or locations or other matters, or initiate proceedings to fine the institution or limit, suspend, or terminate its eligibility to participate in Title IV programs. If the Department of Education determines that statements made by us or on our behalf are in violation of the regulations, we could be subject to sanctions and other liability, which could have a material adverse effect on our business.

Regulatory Standards that May Restrict Institutional Expansion or Other Changes

Many actions that we may wish to take in connection with expanding our operations or other changes are subject to review or approval by the applicable regulatory agencies. In addition to those matters described in detail below, most state education agencies impose regulatory requirements on educational institutions operating within their boundaries. See State Educational Licensure and Authorization.

Adding teaching locations, implementing new educational programs, and increasing enrollment. The requirements and standards of state education agencies, accrediting commissions, and the Department of Education limit our ability in certain instances to establish additional teaching locations, implement new educational programs, or increase enrollment in certain programs. Many states require review and approval before institutions can add new locations or programs, and Arizona also limits the number of pre-licensure nursing students we may enroll (which represents a small portion of our overall nursing program). The Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education, the Higher Learning Commission, and other state education agencies and specialized accrediting commissions that authorize or accredit us and our programs generally require institutions to notify them in advance of adding new locations or implementing new programs, and upon notification may undertake a review of the quality of the facility or the program and the financial, academic, and other qualifications of the institution.

Table of Contents

With respect to the Department of Education, if an institution participating in the Title IV programs plans to add a new location or educational program, the institution must generally apply to the Department of Education to have the additional location or educational program designated as within the scope of the institution's Title IV eligibility. However, a degree-granting institution, like Grand Canyon University, that is fully certified to participate in the Title IV programs is not required to obtain the Department of Education's approval of additional programs that lead to a bachelor's, professional, or graduate degree at the same degree level as programs previously approved by the Department of Education, and, similarly, is not required to obtain advance approval for new programs that prepare students for gainful employment in the same or a related recognized occupation as an educational program that has previously been designated by the Department of Education as an eligible program at that institution if it meets certain minimum-length requirements.

Acquiring other schools. While we have not acquired any other schools in the past, we may seek to do so in the future. The Department of Education and virtually all state education agencies and accrediting commissions require a company to seek their approval if it wishes to acquire another school. In our case, we would need to obtain the approval of the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education or other state education agency that licenses the school being acquired, the Higher Learning Commission, any other accrediting commission that accredits the school being acquired, and the Department of Education. The level of review varies by individual state and accrediting commission, with some requiring approval of such an acquisition before it occurs and others only considering approval after the acquisition has occurred. The Higher Learning Commission would require us to obtain its advance approval of such an acquisition. The approval of the applicable state education agencies and accrediting commissions is a necessary prerequisite to the Department of Education certifying the acquired school to participate in the Title IV programs under our ownership. The restrictions imposed by any of the applicable regulatory agencies could delay or prevent our acquisition of other schools in some circumstances.

Title IV program participation. Each institution must apply to the Department of Education for continued certification to participate in the Title IV programs at least every six years, or when it undergoes a change in control, and an institution may come under the Department of Education's review when it expands its activities in certain ways, such as opening an additional location, adding an educational program, or modifying the academic credentials that it offers.

The Department of Education may place an institution on provisional certification status if it finds that the institution does not fully satisfy all of the eligibility and certification standards. In addition, if a company acquires a school from another entity, or if a school undertakes another transaction that constitutes a change in control under Department of Education regulations, the school will automatically be placed on provisional certification when the Department of Education approves the transaction. During the period of provisional certification, the institution must comply with any additional conditions or restrictions included in its program participation agreement with the Department of Education. If the Department of Education finds that a provisionally certified institution is unable to meet its responsibilities under its program participation agreement, it may seek to revoke the institution's certification to participate in the Title IV programs without advance notice or advance opportunity for the institution to challenge that action. In addition, the Department of Education may more closely review an institution that is provisionally certified if it applies for recertification or approval to open a new location, add an educational program, acquire another school, or make any other significant change. Students attending provisionally certified institutions remain eligible to receive Title IV program funds.

On October 28, 2013, the University received a new program participation agreement with full certification from the Department of Education, which gives the University the ability to participate in the Title IV programs through September 30, 2017.

Change in ownership resulting in a change in control. The Department of Education, as well as many accrediting commissions and states, require institutions of higher education to report or obtain approval of certain changes in control and changes in other aspects of institutional organization or control. With respect to publicly traded corporations, like us, Department of Education regulations provide that a change in control occurs if, among other things, the corporation has a stockholder that owns, or has voting control over, at least 25% of the total outstanding voting stock of the corporation and is the largest stockholder of the corporation (defined in the regulations as a controlling shareholder), and that controlling shareholder ceases to own, or have voting control over, at least 25% of such stock or ceases to be the largest stockholder. Under Department of Education regulations, an institution that undergoes a change in control as defined by the Department of Education loses its eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs and must apply to the Department of Education in order to reestablish such eligibility.

The Higher Learning Commission provides that an institution must obtain its approval in advance of a change in ownership, corporate control or structure in order for the institution to retain its accredited status. In June 2009, the Higher Learning Commission adopted new policies and standards for the review of transactions that may constitute such a change in control. One standard provides that a transaction may be considered a change in control if an individual, entity or group increases or decreases its control of shares to greater than or less than 25% of the total outstanding shares of the stock of a parent corporation that owns or controls the accredited institution. In addition, in the event of a change in control, the Higher Learning Commission requires the institution to obtain its approval in advance of the change, and in certain circumstances that process may require several weeks or several months or more to complete. In addition, following a change in control, the Higher Learning Commission will conduct an onsite evaluation within six months in order to continue the institution's accreditation.

Table of Contents

Many states include the sale of a controlling interest of common stock in the definition of a change in control requiring approval, but their thresholds for determining a change in control vary widely. The standards of the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education provide that an institution that is owned by a publicly traded company whose control is vested in the voting members of the board of directors, such as Grand Canyon Education, undergoes a change in control if 50% or more of the voting members of the board of directors change within a 12-month period or the chief executive officer of the corporation changes. A change in control under the definition of one of the other state agencies that regulate us might require us to obtain approval of a change in control in order to maintain our authorization to operate in that state, and in some cases such states could require us to obtain advance approval of the change in control. If we were to undergo a change in control under the standards of the Arizona State Board of Private Postsecondary Education at any time in the future, we would be required to file an application with the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education in order to obtain approval for such change in control. We cannot predict whether the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education would impose any limitations or conditions on us, or identify any compliance issues related to us in the context of the change in control process, that could result in our loss of authorization in Arizona. Any such loss would result in our loss of eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs which would cause a significant decline in our student enrollment.

Item 1A. Risk Factors

You should carefully consider the risks and uncertainties described below and all other information contained in this Annual Report on Form 10-K. In order to help assess the major risks in our business, we have identified many, but not all, of these risks. Due to the scope of our operations, a wide range of factors could materially affect future developments and performance.

If any of the following risks, or risks that we do not anticipate, are realized, our business, financial condition, cash flow or results of operations could be materially and adversely affected, and as a result, the trading price of our common stock could be materially and adversely impacted. These risk factors should be read in conjunction with other information set forth in this Annual Report, including Item 7, *Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations*, and Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*, including the related Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements.

Risks Related to the Extensive Regulation of Our Industry

Our failure to comply with the extensive regulatory requirements governing our school could result in financial penalties, restrictions on our operations or growth, or loss of external financial aid funding for our students.

To participate in the Title IV programs, a school must be authorized by the appropriate state education agency or agencies, be accredited by an accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education, and be certified as an eligible institution by the Department of Education. In addition, our operations and programs are regulated by other state education agencies and additional accrediting commissions. As a result of these requirements, we are subject to extensive regulation by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education and education agencies of other states, the Higher Learning Commission, which is our primary accrediting commission, specialized accrediting commissions, and the Department of Education. These regulatory requirements cover the vast majority of our operations, including our educational programs, instructional and administrative staff, administrative procedures, marketing, recruiting, financial operations, and financial condition. These regulatory requirements also affect our ability to open additional schools and locations, add new educational programs, change existing educational programs, and change our corporate or ownership structure. The agencies that regulate our operations periodically revise their requirements and modify their interpretations of existing requirements. Regulatory requirements are not always

precise and clear, and regulatory agencies may sometimes disagree with the way we have interpreted or applied these requirements. Any misinterpretation by us of regulatory requirements could materially adversely affect us. If we fail to comply with any of these regulatory requirements, we could suffer financial penalties, limitations on our operations, loss of accreditation, termination of or limitations on our ability to grant degrees and certificates, or limitations on or termination of our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs, each of which could materially adversely affect us. In addition, if we are charged with regulatory violations, our reputation could be damaged, which could have a negative impact on our stock price and our enrollments. We cannot predict with certainty how all of these regulatory requirements will be applied, or whether we will be able to comply with all of the applicable requirements in the future.

Table of Contents

If the Department of Education does not recertify us to continue participating in the Title IV programs, our students would lose their access to Title IV program funds, or we could be recertified but required to accept significant limitations as a condition of our continued participation in the Title IV programs.

Department of Education certification to participate in the Title IV programs lasts a maximum of six years, and institutions are thus required to seek recertification from the Department of Education on a regular basis in order to continue their participation in the Title IV programs. An institution must also apply for recertification by the Department of Education if it undergoes a change in control, as defined by Department of Education regulations, and may be subject to similar review if it expands its operations or educational programs in certain ways.

On October 28, 2013, the University received a new program participation agreement with full certification from the Department of Education, which gives the University the ability to participate in the Title IV programs through September 30, 2017. See Item 1, *Business Regulation Regulation of Federal Student Financial Aid Programs Eligibility and certification procedures*. There can be no assurance that the Department of Education will recertify us at that time or that it will not impose conditions or other restrictions on us as a condition of approving our application with respect to any future recertification. See Item 1A, *Risk Factors If any of the education regulatory agencies that regulate us do not approve or delay their approval of any transaction involving us that constitutes a change in control, our ability to operate or participate in the Title IV programs may be impaired*. If the Department of Education does not renew or withdraws our certification to participate in the Title IV programs at any time, our students would no longer be able to receive Title IV program funds. Alternatively, the Department of Education could renew our certification, but restrict or delay our students' receipt of Title IV funds, limit the number of students to whom we could disburse such funds, or place other restrictions on us, or it could delay our recertification after our program participation agreement expires on September 30, 2017, in which case our certification would continue on a month-to-month basis. Any of these outcomes could have a material adverse effect on our enrollments and us.

Rulemaking by the U.S. Department of Education could materially and adversely affect our business.

Over the past few years, the U.S. Department of Education has regularly promulgated new regulations that impact our business. See Item 1. *Business Regulation*.

These regulations have increased our operating costs and in some cases required us to change the manner in which we operate our business. In addition, because certain of these regulations have been vacated or blocked as a result of litigation challenging the regulations, there remains substantial uncertainty regarding their present or future effectiveness or enforcement. New or amended regulations in the future, particularly regulations focused on the proprietary sector, could further negatively impact our business.

Increased disclosure and recordkeeping requirements could result in lower enrollment or growth rates in a manner that materially and adversely affects our business.

Department of Education rules require that, for each program leading to gainful employment in a recognized occupation, institutions must provide prospective students with information concerning the occupation that the program prepares students to enter, the program's on-time graduation rate, and the tuition and fees it charges a student for completing the program within normal time, as well as the costs of books, supplies, room, and board, and the median loan debt incurred by students who completed the program. Institutions must also provide the Department of Education with information that will allow determination of student debt levels and incomes after program completion. These reporting and disclosure requirements have caused increased administrative burden and costs and may have a negative effect on our growth and enrollments.

A reduction in funding or new restrictions on eligibility for the Federal Pell Grant Program, or the elimination of subsidized Stafford loans, could make college less affordable for certain students at our institution, which could negatively impact our enrollments, revenue and results of operations.

The U.S. Congress must periodically reauthorize the Higher Education Act and annually determine the funding level for each Title IV program. In 2008, the Higher Education Act was reauthorized through September 30, 2013 by the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Changes to the Higher Education Act, including changes in eligibility and funding for Title IV programs, are likely to occur in subsequent reauthorizations, but we cannot predict the scope or substance of any such changes.

In recent years, there has been increased focus by Congress on the role that proprietary educational institutions play in higher education. See Item 1. Business Regulation Regulation of Federal Student Financial Aid Congressional action. To the extent that any laws or regulations are adopted, or other administrative actions are taken, that limit our participation in Title IV programs or the amount of student financial aid for which the students at our institutions are eligible, our enrollments, revenues and results of operation could be materially and adversely affected.

The continued scrutiny in Congress of the proprietary education sector and the federal budget deficit increases the likelihood of legislation that will adversely impact our business. Any action by Congress that significantly reduces Title IV program funding, whether through across-the-board funding reductions, sequestration or otherwise, or materially impacts the eligibility of our institutions or students to participate in Title IV programs would have a material adverse effect on our enrollment, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows. Congressional action could also require us to modify our practices in ways that could increase our administrative costs and reduce our operating income, which could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

Table of Contents

If Congress significantly reduced the amount of available Title IV program funding, we would attempt to arrange for alternative sources of financial aid for our students, which may include lending funds directly to our students, but private sources may not be able to provide as much funding to our students on as favorable terms as is currently provided by Title IV. In addition, private organizations could require us to guarantee all or part of this assistance and we might incur other additional costs. For these reasons, private, alternative sources of student financial aid would only partly offset, if at all, the impact on our business of reduced Title IV program funding.

If we do not meet specific financial responsibility standards established by the Department of Education, we may be required to post a letter of credit or accept other limitations in order to continue participating in the Title IV programs, or we could lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs.

To participate in the Title IV programs, an institution must either satisfy specific quantitative standards of financial responsibility prescribed by the Department of Education, or post a letter of credit in favor of the Department of Education and possibly accept operating restrictions as well. These financial responsibility tests are applied to each institution on an annual basis based on the institution's audited consolidated financial statements, and may be applied at other times, such as if the institution undergoes a change in control. These tests may also be applied to an institution's parent company or other related entity. The operating restrictions that may be placed on an institution that does not meet the quantitative standards of financial responsibility include being transferred from the advance payment method of receiving Title IV program funds to either the reimbursement or the heightened cash monitoring system, which could result in a significant delay in the institution's receipt of those funds. If, in the future, we fail to satisfy the Department of Education's financial responsibility standards, we could experience increased regulatory compliance costs or delays in our receipt of Title IV program funds because we could be required to post a letter of credit or be subjected to operating restrictions, or both. Our failure to secure a letter of credit in these circumstances could cause us to lose our ability to participate in the Title IV programs, which would materially adversely affect us.

If we do not comply with the Department of Education's administrative capability standards, we could suffer financial penalties, be required to accept other limitations in order to continue participating in the Title IV programs, or lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs.

To continue participating in the Title IV programs, an institution must demonstrate to the Department of Education that the institution is capable of adequately administering the Title IV programs under specific standards prescribed by the Department of Education. These administrative capability criteria require, among other things, the institution to have an adequate number of qualified personnel to administer the Title IV programs, have adequate procedures for disbursing and safeguarding Title IV funds and for maintaining records, submit all required reports and consolidated financial statements in a timely manner, and not have significant problems that affect the institution's ability to administer the Title IV programs. If we fail to satisfy any of these criteria, the Department of Education may assess financial penalties against us, restrict the manner in which we receive Title IV funds, require us to post a letter of credit, place us on provisional certification status, or limit or terminate our participation in the Title IV programs, any of which could materially adversely affect us.

We would lose our ability to participate in the Title IV programs if we fail to maintain our institutional accreditation, and our student enrollments could decline if we fail to maintain any of our accreditations or approvals.

An institution must be accredited by an accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education in order to participate in the Title IV programs. We have institutional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, which is an accrediting commission recognized by the Department of Education. To remain accredited, we must continuously meet accreditation standards relating to, among other things, performance, institutional control,

institutional integrity, educational quality, faculty, administrative capability, resources, and financial stability. We were reaccredited by the Higher Learning Commission in 2007, and the next scheduled comprehensive evaluation will be conducted in 2016-2017. If we fail to satisfy any of the Higher Learning Commission's standards, we could lose our accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, which would cause us to lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs, could cause a significant decline in our total student enrollments, and could have a material adverse effect on us. In addition, many of our individual educational programs are also accredited by specialized accrediting commissions or approved by specialized state agencies. If we fail to satisfy the standards of any of those specialized accrediting commissions or state agencies, we could lose the specialized accreditation or approval for the affected programs, which could result in materially reduced student enrollments in those programs and have a material adverse effect on us.

Table of Contents

A finding that we violated the Department of Education's substantial misrepresentation regulation could materially and adversely affect our business.

The Higher Education Act prohibits an institution that participates in Title IV programs from engaging in substantial misrepresentation of the nature of its educational program, its financial charges, or the employability of its graduates. Under these rules, a misrepresentation is any statement made by the institution or a third party that provides educational programs, marketing, advertising, recruiting, or admissions services to the institution that is false, erroneous or has the likelihood or tendency to deceive or confuse. A substantial misrepresentation is any misrepresentation on which the person to whom it was made could reasonably be expected to rely, or has reasonably relied, to that person's detriment. Considering the breadth of the definition of substantial misrepresentation, it is possible that despite our efforts to prevent such misrepresentations, our employees or service providers may make statements that could be construed as substantial misrepresentations. As a result, we may face complaints from students and prospective students over statements made by us and our agents throughout the enrollment, admissions and financial aid process, as well as throughout attendance at the University, which would expose us to increased risk of enforcement action and applicable sanctions or other penalties and increased risk of private qui tam actions under the Federal False Claims Act. Under the new rules, if the Department of Education determines that an institution has engaged in substantial misrepresentation, the Department of Education may revoke an institution's program participation agreement, impose limitations on the institution's participation in Title IV programs, deny applications from the institution for approval of new programs or locations or other matters, or initiate proceedings to fine the institution or limit, suspend, or terminate its eligibility to participate in Title IV programs. If the Department of Education determines that statements made by us or on our behalf are in violation of the regulations, we could be subject to sanctions and other liability, which could have a material adverse effect on our business.

If we do not maintain our state authorization in Arizona, we may not operate or participate in the Title IV programs.

A school that grants degrees or certificates must be authorized by the relevant education agency of the state in which it is located. We are located in the state of Arizona and are authorized by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education. State authorization is also required for our students to be eligible to receive funding under the Title IV programs. To maintain our state authorization, we must continuously meet standards relating to, among other things, educational programs, facilities, instructional and administrative staff, marketing and recruitment, financial operations, addition of new locations and educational programs, and various operational and administrative procedures. If we fail to satisfy any of these standards, we could lose our authorization by the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education to offer our educational programs, which would also cause us to lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs and have a material adverse effect on us.

If any of the education regulatory agencies that regulate us do not approve or delay their approval of any transaction involving us that constitutes a change in control, our ability to operate or participate in the Title IV programs may be impaired.

If we experience a change in control under the standards of the Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission, the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education, or any other applicable state education agency or accrediting commission, we must notify and/or seek the approval of each such agency. These agencies do not have uniform criteria for what constitutes a change in control. Transactions or events that typically constitute a change in control include significant acquisitions or dispositions of the voting stock of an institution or its parent company and significant changes in the composition of the board of directors of an institution or its parent company. With respect to publicly traded corporations, like us, they also may include cases where a corporation has a stockholder that owns, or has voting control over, at least 25% of the total outstanding voting stock of the corporation

and is the largest stockholder of the corporation (defined in the regulations as a controlling shareholder), and that controlling shareholder ceases to own, or have voting control over, at least 25% of such stock or ceases to be the largest stockholder, or other transactions or events may be beyond our control. Our failure to obtain, or a delay in receiving, approval of any change in control from the Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission, or the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education could impair our ability to operate or participate in the Title IV programs, which could have a material adverse effect on our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations. Our failure to obtain, or a delay in receiving, approval of any change in control from any other state in which we are currently licensed or authorized, or from any of our specialized accrediting commissions, could require us to suspend our activities in that state or suspend offering the applicable programs until we receive the required approval, or could otherwise impair our operations. The potential adverse effects of a change in control could influence future decisions by us and our stockholders regarding the sale, purchase, transfer, issuance, or redemption of our stock, which could discourage bids for your shares of our stock and could have an adverse effect on the market price of your shares.

Our failure to comply with the regulatory requirements of states other than Arizona could result in actions taken by those states or the Department of Education that could have a material adverse effect on our enrollments.

Almost every state imposes regulatory requirements on educational institutions that have physical facilities located within the state's boundaries. Individual state laws establish standards in areas such as educational programs, facilities, instructional and administrative staff, marketing and recruitment, financial operations, addition of new locations and educational programs, and various operational and administrative procedures, some of which are different than the standards prescribed by the Department of Education or the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education. Several states have sought to assert jurisdiction over educational institutions offering online degree programs that have no physical location in the state but that have some activity in the state, such as enrolling or offering educational services to students who reside in the state, employing faculty who reside in the state, or advertising to or recruiting prospective students in the state. See Item 1. *Business Regulation Regulation of Federal Student Financial Aid Programs State authorization*. State regulatory requirements for online education vary among the states, are not well developed in many states, are imprecise or unclear in some states, and can change frequently. Laws, regulations, or interpretations related to doing business over the Internet could also increase our cost of doing business and affect our ability to recruit students in particular states, which could, in turn, negatively affect enrollments and revenues and have a material adverse effect on our business.

Table of Contents

We are an approved institutional participant in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is an agreement among member states, districts and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs. It is intended to make it easier for students to take online courses offered by postsecondary institutions based in another state. SARA is overseen by a national Council (NC-SARA) and administered by four regional education compacts, for which Arizona is a W-SARA member. There is a yearly renewal for participating in NC-SARA and AZ-SARA, and institutions must agree to meet certain requirements to participate.

Some states that do not participate in SARA impose regulatory requirements on out-of-state educational institutions operating within their boundaries, such as those having a physical facility or conducting certain academic activities within the state. We currently enroll students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Although we are currently licensed or authorized, in-process, or exempt in all non-SARA jurisdictions in which we operate, if we fail to comply with state licensing or authorization requirements for a state, or fail to obtain licenses or authorizations when required, we could lose our state licensure or authorization by that state or be subject to other sanctions, including restrictions on our activities in, and fines and penalties imposed by, that state, as well as fines, penalties, and sanctions imposed by the Department of Education. The loss of licensure or authorization in a state other than Arizona could prohibit us from recruiting prospective students or offering educational services to current students in that state, which could significantly reduce our enrollments.

State laws and regulations are not always precise or clear, and regulatory agencies may sometimes disagree with the way we have interpreted or applied these requirements. Any misinterpretation by us of these regulatory requirements or adverse changes in regulations or interpretations thereof by regulators could materially adversely affect us.

The inability of our graduates to obtain a professional license or certification in their chosen field of study could reduce our enrollments and revenues, and potentially lead to student claims against us that could be costly to us.

Many of our students, particularly those in our education and healthcare programs, seek a professional license or certification in their chosen fields following graduation. A student's ability to obtain a professional license or certification depends on several factors, including whether the institution and the student's program were accredited by a particular accrediting commission or approved by a professional association or by the state in which the student seeks employment. Additional factors are outside the control of the institution, such as the individual student's own background and qualifications. If one or more states refuse to recognize a significant number of our students for professional licensing or certification based on factors relating to our institution or programs, the potential growth of those programs would be negatively impacted and we could be exposed to claims or litigation by students or graduates based on their inability to obtain their desired professional license or certification, each of which could materially adversely affect us.

Government agencies, regulatory agencies, and third parties may conduct compliance reviews, bring claims, or initiate litigation against us based on alleged violations of the extensive regulatory requirements applicable to us, which could cause us to pay monetary damages, be sanctioned or limited in our operations, and expend significant resources to defend against those claims.

Because we operate in a highly regulated industry, we are subject to program reviews, audits, investigations, claims of non-compliance, and lawsuits by government agencies, regulatory agencies, students, employees, stockholders, and other third parties alleging non-compliance with applicable legal requirements, many of which are imprecise and subject to interpretation. If the result of any such proceeding is unfavorable to us, we may lose or have limitations imposed on our state licensing, accreditation, or Title IV program participation; be required to pay monetary damages (including triple damages in certain whistleblower suits); or be subject to fines, injunctions, or other penalties, any of

which could have a material adverse effect on our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations. Claims and lawsuits brought against us, even if they are without merit, may also result in adverse publicity, damage our reputation, negatively affect the market price of our stock, adversely affect our student enrollments, and reduce the willingness of third parties to do business with us. Even if we adequately address the issues raised by any such proceeding and successfully defend against it, we may have to devote significant financial and management resources to address these issues, which could harm our business.

Table of Contents

A decline in the overall growth of enrollment in postsecondary institutions, or in the number of students seeking degrees online or in our core disciplines, could cause us to experience lower enrollment, which could negatively impact our future growth.

Based on industry analyses, we believe that enrollment growth in degree-granting, postsecondary institutions is slowing and that the number of high school graduates that are eligible to enroll in degree-granting, postsecondary institutions is expected to decrease over the next few years. In order to maintain current growth rates, we will need to attract a larger percentage of students in existing markets and expand our markets by creating new academic programs. In addition, if job growth in the fields related to our core disciplines is weaker than expected, as a result of any regional or national economic downturn or otherwise, fewer students may seek the types of degrees that we offer. Our failure to attract new students, or the decisions by prospective students to seek degrees in other disciplines, would have an adverse impact on our future growth.

Proposed legislation, additional rulemaking or additional examinations from U.S. Congress may impact general public perception of the industry in a negative manner resulting in a material and adverse impact on our business.

Criticisms of the overall student lending and postsecondary education sectors may impact general public perceptions of educational institutions, including us, in a negative manner. Adverse media coverage regarding other educational institutions or regarding us directly could damage our reputation. The environment surrounding access to and the costs of student loans remains in a state of flux. The uncertainty surrounding these issues, and any resolution of these issues that increases loan costs or reduces students' access to Title IV loans or to student extended payment plans such as the ones we make available to our students, could reduce student demand for our programs, adversely impact our revenues and operating profit or result in increased regulatory scrutiny.

Our reputation and our stock price may be negatively affected by adverse publicity or by the actions of other postsecondary educational institutions.

In addition to the Congressional and regulatory activities focused on for-profit educational institutions beginning in 2010 and since, in recent years, regulatory proceedings and litigation have been commenced against various postsecondary educational institutions relating to, among other things, deceptive trade practices, false claims against the government, and non-compliance with Department of Education requirements, state education laws, and state consumer protection laws. These proceedings have been brought by the Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, the SEC, and state governmental agencies, among others. These allegations have attracted adverse media coverage and have been the subject of legislative hearings and regulatory actions at both the federal and state levels, focusing not only on the individual schools but in some cases on the for-profit postsecondary education sector as a whole. Adverse media coverage regarding other for-profit education companies or other educational institutions could damage our reputation, result in lower enrollments, revenues, and operating profit, and have a negative impact on our stock price. Such coverage could also result in increased scrutiny and regulation by the Department of Education, Congress, accrediting commissions, state legislatures, state attorneys general, or other governmental authorities of all educational institutions, including us.

If the percentage of our revenue that is derived from the Title IV programs is too high, we may lose our eligibility to participate in those programs.

A requirement of the Higher Education Act, commonly referred to as the 90/10 Rule, that is applicable only to for-profit, postsecondary educational institutions like us provides that an institution loses its eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs if the institution derives more than 90% of its revenue for each of two consecutive fiscal years from Title IV program funds. For purposes of the 90/10 Rule, revenue is calculated under a complex regulatory

formula that requires cash basis accounting and other adjustments to the calculation of an institution's revenue under generally accepted accounting principles that appears in its consolidated financial statements. Under the 90/10 Rule, an institution becomes ineligible to participate in the Title IV programs as of the first day of the fiscal year following the second consecutive fiscal year in which it exceeds the 90% threshold, and its period of ineligibility extends for at least two consecutive fiscal years. If an institution exceeds the 90% threshold for two consecutive fiscal years and it and its students have received Title IV funds during the subsequent period of ineligibility, the institution will be required to return those Title IV funds to the applicable lender or the Department of Education. If an institution's rate exceeds 90% for any single fiscal year, it will be placed on provisional certification for at least two fiscal years.

Using the Department of Education's cash-basis, regulatory formula under the 90/10 Rule as currently in effect, for our 2015, 2014, and 2013 fiscal years, we derived approximately 74.8%, 76.5%, and 78.5%, respectively, of our 90/10 Rule revenue from Title IV program funds.

As a result of the continuing increase in the number of students attending our ground campus, who typically finance a greater percentage of their educational costs with non-Title IV sources of funds, we expect the percentage of our revenue that we receive from Title IV programs to remain stable or decrease in the future, although this may be impacted by recent changes in federal law that increased Title IV grant and loan limits, as well as the ongoing economic environment, which has adversely affected the employment circumstances of our students and their parents and increased their reliance on Title IV programs. If we were to exceed the 90% threshold for two consecutive years such that we lost our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs, or if Congress passed legislation changing how certain funds are counted under this rule, revising the percentage of income that proprietary schools must derive from non-federal sources, or both, it would have a material adverse effect on our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations.

Table of Contents

We may lose our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs if our student loan default rates are too high.

An institution may lose its eligibility to participate in some or all of the Title IV programs if, for three consecutive years, 30% or more of its students who were required to begin repayment on their student loans in one year default on their payment by the end of the second year. In addition, an institution may lose its eligibility to participate in some or all of the Title IV programs if the default rate of its students exceeds 40% for any single year. While our cohort default rates have historically been significantly below these levels, we cannot assure you that this will continue to be the case. For example, we believe our cohort default rates for the 2010 and 2011 federal fiscal year increased (although both remain below the Department of Education's thresholds) due primarily to the impact of current economic conditions on our students and former students and our transition to a borrower-based, non-term financial aid system in the Fall of 2010. Our cohort default rates for the 2012, 2011 and 2010 federal fiscal years were 10.3%, 15.7% and 19.0%, respectively. Increases in interest rates or declines in income or job losses for our students could contribute to higher default rates on student loans. Exceeding the student loan default rate thresholds and losing our eligibility to participate in the Title IV programs would have a material adverse effect on our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations. Any future changes in the formula for calculating student loan default rates, economic conditions, or other factors that cause our default rates to increase, could place us in danger of losing our eligibility to participate in some or all of the Title IV programs and materially adversely affect us.

We are subject to sanctions if we fail to correctly calculate and timely return Title IV program funds for students who withdraw before completing their educational program.

A school participating in the Title IV programs must calculate the amount of unearned Title IV program funds that it has disbursed to students who withdraw from their educational programs before completing such programs and must return those unearned funds to the appropriate lender or the Department of Education in a timely manner, generally within 45 days of the date the school determines that the student has withdrawn. If the unearned funds are not properly calculated and timely returned for a sufficient percentage of students, we may have to post a letter of credit in favor of the Department of Education equal to 25% of the Title IV program funds that should have been returned for such students in the prior fiscal year, we may be liable for repayment of Title IV program funds and related interest and we could be fined or otherwise sanctioned by the Department of Education, which could increase our cost of regulatory compliance and materially adversely affect us. Further, a failure to comply with these regulatory requirements could result in termination of our ability to participate in the Title IV programs, which would materially affect us.

We cannot offer new programs, expand our operations into certain states, or acquire additional schools if such actions are not timely approved by the applicable regulatory agencies, and we may have to repay Title IV funds disbursed to students enrolled in any such programs, schools, or states if we do not obtain prior approval.

Our expansion efforts include offering new educational programs. In addition, we may increase our operations in additional states and seek to acquire existing schools from other companies. If we are unable to obtain the necessary approvals for such new programs, operations, or acquisitions from the Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission, the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education, or any other applicable state education agency or accrediting commission, or if we are unable to obtain such approvals in a timely manner, our ability to consummate the planned actions and provide Title IV funds to any affected students would be impaired, which could have a material adverse effect on our expansion plans. In addition, if we were to determine erroneously that a new program did not need approval or that we had all required approvals, we could be liable for repayment of the Title IV program funds provided to students in that program or at that location.

Government regulations relating to the Internet could increase our cost of doing business, affect our ability to grow or otherwise have a material adverse effect on our business.

The popularity and use of the Internet and other online services has led and may lead to the adoption of new laws and regulatory practices in the United States or foreign countries and to new interpretations of existing laws and regulations. These new laws and interpretations may relate to issues such as online privacy, copyrights, trademarks and service marks, sales taxes, fair business practices, and the requirement that online education institutions qualify to do business as foreign corporations or be licensed in one or more jurisdictions where they have no physical location or other presence. New laws and regulations or interpretations thereof related to doing business over the Internet could increase our costs and adversely affect our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations.

Table of Contents

Risks Related to Our Business

Our success depends, in part, on the effectiveness of our marketing and advertising programs in recruiting new students.

Building awareness of Grand Canyon University and the programs we offer is critical to our ability to attract prospective students. It is also critical to our success that we convert prospective students to enrolled students in a cost-effective manner and that these enrolled students remain active in our programs. Some of the factors that could prevent us from successfully recruiting, enrolling, and retaining students in our programs include:

the reduced availability of, or higher interest rates and other costs associated with, Title IV loan funds or other sources of financial aid;

the emergence of more successful competitors;

factors related to our marketing, including the costs and effectiveness of Internet advertising and broad-based branding campaigns and recruiting efforts;

performance problems with our online systems;

failure to maintain institutional and specialized accreditations;

the requirements of the education agencies that regulate us which restrict schools' initiation of new programs and modification of existing programs;

the requirements of the education agencies that regulate us which restrict the ways schools can compensate their recruitment personnel;

increased regulation of online education, including in states in which we do not have a physical presence;

restrictions that may be imposed on graduates of online programs that seek certification or licensure in certain states;

student dissatisfaction with our services and programs;

damage to our reputation or other adverse effects as a result of negative publicity in the media, in industry or governmental reports, or otherwise, affecting us or other companies in the for-profit postsecondary education sector;

price reductions by competitors that we are unwilling or unable to match;

a decline in the acceptance of online education;

an adverse economic or other development that affects job prospects in our core disciplines; and

a decrease in the perceived or actual economic benefits that students derive from our programs.

If we are unable to continue to develop awareness of Grand Canyon University and the programs we offer, and to recruit, enroll, and retain students, our enrollments would suffer and our ability to increase revenues and maintain profitability would be significantly impaired.

We are subject to rules and regulations as a result of our membership with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and any violations of such rules or regulations could adversely affect our reputation and operations.

Strict observance of rules and regulations contribute to the success of our athletic program. It is the responsibility of the University administration and the Athletic Department to adhere to all regulations created for the governance of intercollegiate athletics as set forth by the Western Athletic Conference (WAC), NCAA, and Grand Canyon University. The move from Division II to Division I was effective July 1, 2013 and demonstrated our commitment to athletic excellence and has enhanced our visibility. Any violations of such rules and regulations could adversely affect our reputation and operations.

Our business may be adversely affected by economic conditions in the U.S. or abroad.

The U.S. and many other industrialized countries are experiencing challenging economic circumstances, including high unemployment, uncertainty about financial markets and, in many cases, economic malaise or recession. We believe the economic circumstances in the U.S., in particular the continued high unemployment rate, has contributed to a portion of our increased enrollment growth as an increasing number of working adults seek to continue to advance their education to improve job security or new employment prospects. This effect cannot be quantified. However, to the extent that the economic circumstances and high unemployment have increased demands for our programs, an improving economy and increased employment may negate this effect and reduce such demand as fewer students seek to advance their education in favor of participating in the workforce. This decline could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows. Alternatively, a worsening of economic and employment conditions may reduce the ability of employers to sponsor educational opportunities for their employees, which could adversely impact our enrollment. In addition, continued deterioration in our economy and employment opportunities could adversely affect the ability of our former students to repay student loans, which could increase our bad debt expense and our student loan cohort default rate, which would require increased focus and attention to manage these defaults, which could have a material adverse effect on our business.

Table of Contents

If students fail to pay their outstanding balances owed to us, our business may be harmed.

From time to time, students, including former students, may carry balances on portions of their education expense not covered by financial aid programs. These balances are unsecured and not guaranteed. We have historically been successful in collecting our accounts receivable, including those due from former students as a result of the return to Title IV requirement, because the amount owed by a particular student that is in excess of the amount of financial aid that the student earned and that we are entitled to retain is often quite small. Due primarily to the ongoing economic conditions, we believe that the level of motivation that former students have to pay off their balances due to us, based on such factors as being able to receive transcripts or protecting their credit, has lessened over time. If the United States continues to experience reduced economic activity and high unemployment, it could continue to have an adverse effect on the ability or willingness of our former students to repay amounts due to us. As a result, losses related to unpaid student balances in excess of our allowance for doubtful accounts, or the failure of students to repay their debt obligations, could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and results of operations.

We operate in a highly competitive industry, and competitors with greater resources could harm our business.

The postsecondary education market is highly fragmented and competitive. We compete for students primarily with traditional public and four-year degree-granting regionally accredited colleges and universities and other proprietary degree-granting regionally accredited schools. An increasing number of traditional colleges and universities and community colleges are offering distance learning and other online education programs, including programs that are geared toward the needs of working adult students. This trend has been accelerated by private companies that provide and/or manage online learning platforms for traditional colleges and universities. As the proportion of traditional colleges and universities providing alternative learning modalities increases, we will face increasing competition for students from such institutions, including those with well-established reputations for excellence. In addition, it is likely that we will begin to face competition from various emerging nontraditional, credit-bearing and noncredit-bearing education programs, provided by both proprietary and not-for-profit providers, including massive open online courses (MOOCs) offered worldwide without charge by traditional educational institutions and other direct-to-consumer education services. Each of these competitors may develop platforms or other technologies, including technologies that allow for greater levels of interactivity between faculty and students and that are superior to the platform and technology we use, and these differences may affect our ability to recruit and retain students. Public institutions receive substantial government subsidies, and public and private non-profit institutions have access to government and foundation grants, tax-deductible contributions, and other financial resources generally not available to for-profit schools. Accordingly, public and private non-profit institutions may have instructional and support resources superior to those in the for-profit sector, and public institutions may be able to offer substantially lower tuition prices. Some of our competitors in both the public and private sectors also have substantially greater financial and other resources than we do. We may not be able to compete successfully against current or future competitors, including with respect to our ability to acquire or compete with technologies being developed by our competitors, and may face competitive pressures that could adversely affect our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations. These competitive factors could cause our enrollments, revenues, and profitability to significantly decrease and could render our online delivery format less competitive or obsolete.

If we do not maintain existing, and develop additional, relationships with employers, our future growth may be impaired.

We currently have relationships with large school districts and healthcare systems, primarily in Arizona, and also have relationships with national and international employers, to provide their employees with the opportunity to obtain degrees through us while continuing their employment. These relationships are an important part of our strategy as

they provide us with a steady source of potential working adult students for particular programs and also serve to increase our reputation among high-profile employers. As a result of economic conditions, a number of employers we work with have reduced the extent to which they reimburse their employees for participating in our programs. If we are unable to develop new relationships, or if our existing relationships deteriorate or end as a result of current or future economic conditions affecting employers or otherwise, our efforts to seek these sources of potential working adult students will be impaired, and this could materially and adversely affect our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations.

Table of Contents

Our failure to effectively manage our growth could harm our business.

Our business continues to experience rapid growth. Growth and expansion of our operations place a significant strain on our resources and increase demands on our executive management team, management information and reporting systems, financial management controls and personnel, and regulatory compliance systems and personnel. We may not be able to maintain or accelerate our current growth rate, effectively manage our expanding operations, or achieve planned growth on a timely or profitable basis. If we are unable to manage our growth effectively, we may experience operating inefficiencies and our earnings may be materially adversely affected.

Our success depends upon our ability to recruit and retain key personnel.

Our success to date has largely depended on, and will continue to depend on, the skills, efforts, and motivation of our executive officers, who generally have significant experience with our University and within the education industry. Our success also largely depends on our ability to attract and retain highly qualified faculty, school administrators, and additional corporate management personnel. We may have difficulties in locating and hiring qualified personnel and in retaining such personnel once hired. In addition, because we operate in a highly competitive industry, our hiring of qualified executives or other personnel may cause us or such persons to be subject to lawsuits alleging misappropriation of trade secrets, improper solicitation of employees, or other claims. Other than non-compete agreements of limited duration that we have with certain executive officers, we have not historically sought non-compete agreements with key personnel and they may leave and subsequently compete against us. The loss of the services of any of our key personnel, many of whom are not party to employment agreements with us, or our failure to attract and retain other qualified and experienced personnel on acceptable terms, could cause our business to suffer.

The protection of our operations through exclusive proprietary rights and intellectual property is limited, and from time to time we encounter disputes relating to our use of intellectual property of third parties, any of which could harm our operations and prospects.

In the ordinary course of our business we develop intellectual property of many kinds that is or will be the subject of copyright, trademark, service mark, patent, trade secret, or other protections. This intellectual property includes but is not limited to courseware materials and business know-how and internal processes and procedures developed to respond to the requirements of operating our business and to comply with the rules and regulations of various education regulatory agencies. We rely on a combination of copyrights, trademarks, service marks, trade secrets, domain names, and agreements to protect our intellectual property. We rely on service mark and trademark protection in the United States to protect our rights to the mark Grand Canyon University, as well as distinctive logos and other marks associated with our services. We rely on agreements under which we obtain rights to use course content developed by faculty members and other third party content experts, as well as license agreements pursuant to which we license the right to brand certain of our program offerings. We cannot assure you that the measures that we take will be adequate or that we have secured, or will be able to secure, appropriate protections for all of our proprietary rights in the United States or select foreign jurisdictions, or that third parties will not infringe upon or violate our proprietary rights. Unauthorized third parties may attempt to duplicate or copy the proprietary aspects of our curricula, online resource material, and other content, and offer competing programs to ours.

In particular, we license the right to utilize the name of Jerry Colangelo in connection with our business school and our Colangelo School of Sports Business that we operate within our business school, and we have spent significant resources in related branding efforts. Nevertheless, these license agreements may terminate or expire, or otherwise may not necessarily be extended in the future. In addition, third parties may attempt to develop competing programs or copy aspects of our curriculum, online resource material, quality management, and other proprietary content. The termination of this license agreement, or attempts to compete with or duplicate our programs, if successful, could

adversely affect our business. Protecting these types of intellectual property rights can be difficult, particularly as it relates to the development by our competitors of competing courses and programs.

We may from time to time encounter disputes over rights and obligations concerning intellectual property, and we may not prevail in these disputes. In certain instances, we may not have obtained sufficient rights in the content of a course. Third parties may raise a claim against us alleging an infringement or violation of the intellectual property of that third party. Some third-party intellectual property rights may be extremely broad, and it may not be possible for us to conduct our operations in such a way as to avoid those intellectual property rights. Any such intellectual property claim could subject us to costly litigation and impose a significant strain on our financial resources and management personnel regardless of whether such claim has merit, and we may be required to alter the content of our classes or pay monetary damages, which may be significant.

Table of Contents

Our credit agreement may restrict our operations and our ability to complete certain transactions.

Our credit agreement, which we entered into in December 2012, imposes certain operating restrictions on us, including limitations on our ability to incur additional debt or make certain investments, and requires us to maintain compliance with certain applicable regulatory standards. In addition, the credit agreement requires us to maintain a maximum leverage ratio, a minimum fixed charge coverage ratio and a minimum tangible net worth, in each case as such terms are defined in the credit agreement. We cannot assure you that these covenants will not adversely affect our ability to finance our future operations or capital needs or to pursue available business opportunities. A breach of any of these covenants or our inability to maintain the required financial ratios could result in a default in respect of the related indebtedness. If a default occurs, the affected lenders could elect to declare the indebtedness, together with accrued interest and other fees, to be immediately due and payable.

Our failure to comply with environmental laws and regulations governing our activities could result in financial penalties and other costs.

We use hazardous materials at our ground campus and generate small quantities of waste, such as used oil, antifreeze, paint, car batteries, and laboratory materials. As a result, we are subject to a variety of environmental laws and regulations governing, among other things, the use, storage, and disposal of solid and hazardous substances and waste, and the clean-up of contamination at our facilities or off-site locations to which we send or have sent waste for disposal. In the event we do not maintain compliance with any of these laws and regulations, or are responsible for a spill or release of hazardous materials, we could incur significant costs for clean-up, damages, and fines, or penalties which could adversely impact our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations.

The actions, errors, or instances of regulatory noncompliance of third party vendors upon which our institutions rely may negatively impact our business.

We engage third party vendors to provide, among other services, marketing and recruiting activities. Although we require that the work done by such third parties maintains quality assurance and compliance with applicable regulations, we may be ultimately responsible for any errors on instances of regulatory noncompliance, some of which could adversely impact our reputation, business, prospects, financial condition, cash flows, and results of operations.

Our failure to keep pace with changing market needs and technology could harm our ability to attract students.

Our success depends to a large extent on the willingness of employers to employ, promote, or increase the pay of our graduates. Increasingly, employers demand that their new employees possess appropriate technical and analytical skills and also appropriate interpersonal skills, such as communication, and teamwork skills. These skills can evolve rapidly in a changing economic and technological environment. Accordingly, it is important that our educational programs evolve in response to those economic and technological changes. The expansion of existing academic programs and the development of new programs may not be accepted by current or prospective students or by the employers of our graduates. Even if we are able to develop acceptable new programs, we may not be able to begin offering those new programs in a timely fashion or as quickly as our competitors offer similar programs. If we are unable to adequately respond to changes in market requirements due to regulatory or financial constraints, unusually rapid technological changes, or other factors, the rates at which our graduates obtain jobs in their fields of study could suffer, our ability to attract and retain students could be impaired, and our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations could be adversely affected.

We have invested significant resources to develop and implement features that enhance the online classroom experience, such as delivering course content through streaming video, simulations, and other interactive

enhancements. Our information technology systems and tools could become impaired or obsolete due to our action or failure to act. For instance, we could install new information technology without accurately assessing its costs or benefits, or we could experience delayed or ineffective implementation of new information technology. We could fail to respond in a timely manner for future technological developments in our industry. Should our actions or failure to act impair or render our information technology less effective, this could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition, results of operations and cash flows.

Table of Contents

We may not be able to successfully implement our growth strategy if we are not able to improve the content of our existing academic programs or to develop new programs on a timely basis and in a cost-effective manner, or at all.

We continually seek to improve the content of our existing programs and develop new programs in order to meet changing market needs. The success of any of our programs and courses, both ground and online, depends in part on our ability to expand the content of our existing programs, develop new programs in a cost-effective manner, and meet the needs of existing and prospective students and employers in a timely manner, as well as on the acceptance of our actions by existing or prospective students and employers. Even if we are able to develop acceptable new programs, we may not be able to introduce these new programs in a timely fashion or as quickly as our competitors are able to introduce competing programs. If we do not respond adequately to changes in market conditions, our ability to attract and retain students could be impaired and our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations could suffer.

The development and approval of new programs and courses, both ground and online, are subject to requirements and limitations imposed by the Department of Education, state licensing agencies, and the relevant accrediting commissions, and in certain cases, such as with doctoral programs, involves a process that can take several years to complete. The imposition of restrictions on the initiation of new educational programs by any of our regulatory agencies, or delays in obtaining approvals of such programs, may delay our expansion plans. Establishing new academic programs or modifying existing academic programs may also require us to make investments in specialized personnel, increase marketing efforts, and reallocate resources. We may have limited experience with the subject matter of new programs.

If we are unable to expand our existing programs, offer new programs on a timely basis or in a cost-effective manner, or otherwise manage effectively the operations of newly established programs, our business, prospects, financial condition, and results of operations could be adversely affected.

Risks Related to Our Business Technology Infrastructure

Our current success and future growth depend on the continued growth in users seeking educational services on the Internet.

Our business relies in part on the Internet for its success. A number of factors could inhibit the continued acceptance of the Internet and adversely affect our profitability, including:

inadequate Internet infrastructure;

security and privacy concerns;

the unavailability of cost-effective Internet service and other technological factors; and

changes in government regulation of Internet use.

If the number of potential students seeking educational services on the Internet does not continue to increase, our business may not grow as planned.

We may incur liability for the unauthorized duplication or distribution of class materials posted online for class discussions.

In some instances, our faculty members or our students may post various articles or other third-party content on class discussion boards. Third parties may raise claims against us for the unauthorized duplication of material posted online for class discussions. Any such claims could subject us to costly litigation and impose a significant strain on our financial resources and management personnel regardless of whether the claims have merit. Our general liability insurance may not cover potential claims of this type adequately or at all, and we may be required to alter the content of our courses or pay monetary damages, which may be significant.

We are subject to laws and regulations as a result of our collection and use of personal information, and any violations of such laws or regulations, or any breach, theft, or loss of such information, could adversely affect our reputation and operations.

Possession and use of personal information in our operations subjects us to risks and costs that could harm our business. We collect, use, and retain large amounts of personal information regarding our applicants, students, faculty, staff, and their families, including social security numbers, tax return information, personal and family financial data, and credit card numbers. We also collect and maintain personal information of our employees in the ordinary course of our business. Our services can be accessed globally through the Internet. Therefore, we may be subject to the application of national privacy laws in countries outside the U.S. from which applicants and students access our services. Such privacy laws could impose conditions that limit the way we market and provide our services.

Table of Contents

Our computer networks and the networks of certain of our vendors that hold and manage confidential information on our behalf may be vulnerable to unauthorized access, employee theft or misuse, computer hackers, computer viruses, and other security threats. Confidential information may also inadvertently become available to third parties when we integrate systems or migrate data to our servers following an acquisition of a school or in connection with periodic hardware or software upgrades.

Due to the sensitive nature of the personal information stored on our servers, our networks may be targeted by hackers seeking to access this data. A user who circumvents security measures could misappropriate sensitive information or cause interruptions or malfunctions in our operations. Although we use security and business controls to limit access and use of personal information, a third party may be able to circumvent those security and business controls, which could result in a breach of student or employee privacy. In addition, errors in the storage, use, or transmission of personal information could result in a breach of privacy for current or prospective students or employees. Possession and use of personal information in our operations also subjects us to legislative and regulatory burdens that could require us to implement certain policies and procedures, such as the procedures we adopted to comply with the Red Flags Rule that was promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission, or FTC, under the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act and that requires the establishment of guidelines and policies regarding identity theft related to student credit accounts, and could require us to make certain notifications of data breaches and restrict our use of personal information. A violation of any laws or regulations relating to the collection or use of personal information could result in the imposition of fines against us. As a result, we may be required to expend significant resources to protect against the threat of these security breaches or to alleviate problems caused by these breaches. A major breach, theft, or loss of personal information regarding our students and their families or our employees that is held by us or our vendors, or a violation of laws or regulations relating to the same, could have a material adverse effect on our reputation and result in further regulation and oversight by federal and state authorities and increased costs of compliance.

Capacity constraints, system disruptions, or security breaches in our online computer networks and phone systems could have a material adverse effect on our ability to attract and retain students.

The performance and reliability of the infrastructure of our computer networks and phone systems, including our online programs, is critical to our operations, reputation and to our ability to attract and retain students. Any computer system disruption or failure, or a sudden and significant increase in traffic on the servers that host our online operations, may result in our online courses and programs being unavailable for a period of time. In addition, any significant failure of our computer networks or servers, whether as a result of third-party actions or in connection with planned upgrades and conversions, could disrupt our on-campus operations. Individual, sustained, or repeated occurrences could significantly damage the reputation of our online operations and result in a loss of potential or existing students. Additionally, our online operations are vulnerable to interruption or malfunction due to events beyond our control, including natural disasters and network and telecommunications failures. Our computer networks may also be vulnerable to unauthorized access, computer hackers, computer viruses, malicious code, organized cyber-attacks and other security problems. A user who circumvents security measures could misappropriate proprietary information or cause interruptions to or malfunctions in operations. As a result, we may be required to expend significant resources to protect against the threat of these security breaches or to alleviate problems caused by these incidents. Any interruption to our online operations could have a material adverse effect on our ability to attract students to our online programs and to retain those students.

A failure of our information systems to properly store, process and report relevant data may reduce our management's effectiveness, interfere with our regulatory compliance and increase our operating expenses.

We are dependent on the integrity of our data management systems. If these systems do not effectively collect, store and process relevant data for the operation of our business, whether due to equipment malfunctions or constraints, software deficiencies, or human error, our ability to effectively report, plan, forecast and execute our business plan and comply with applicable laws and regulations, including the Higher Education Act, as reauthorized, and the regulations thereunder, will be impaired, perhaps materially. Any such impairment could materially and adversely affect our financial condition, results of operations, and cash flows.

Risks Related to Owning our Common Stock

Your percentage ownership in us may be diluted by future issuances of capital stock, which could reduce your influence over matters on which stockholders vote.

Our Board of Directors has the authority, without action or vote of our stockholders, to issue all or any part of our authorized but unissued shares of common stock, including shares issuable upon the exercise of options or the grant of restricted stock, shares that may be issued to satisfy our payment obligations under our incentive plans, or shares of our authorized but unissued preferred stock. Issuances of common stock or voting preferred stock would reduce your influence over matters on which our stockholders vote, and, in the case of issuances of preferred stock, likely would result in your interest in us being subject to the prior rights of holders of that preferred stock.

Table of Contents

Provisions in our charter documents and the Delaware General Corporation Law could make it more difficult for a third party to acquire us and could discourage a takeover and adversely affect existing stockholders.

Anti-takeover provisions of our certificate of incorporation, bylaws, the Delaware General Corporation Law, or DGCL, and regulations of state and federal education agencies could diminish the opportunity for stockholders to participate in acquisition proposals at a price above the then-current market price of our common stock. For example, while we have no present plans to issue any preferred stock, our Board of Directors, without further stockholder approval, may issue shares of undesignated preferred stock and fix the powers, preferences, rights, and limitations of such class or series, which could adversely affect the voting power of your shares. In addition, our bylaws provide for an advance notice procedure for nomination of candidates to our Board of Directors that could have the effect of delaying, deterring, or preventing a change in control. Further, as a Delaware corporation, we are subject to provisions of the DGCL regarding business combinations, which can deter attempted takeovers in certain situations. The approval requirements of the Department of Education, our regional accrediting commission, and state education agencies for a change in control transaction could also delay, deter, or prevent a transaction that would result in a change in control. We may, in the future, consider adopting additional anti-takeover measures. The authority of our Board of Directors to issue undesignated preferred or other capital stock and the anti-takeover provisions of the DGCL, as well as other current and any future anti-takeover measures adopted by us, may, in certain circumstances, delay, deter, or prevent takeover attempts and other changes in control of the company not approved by our Board of Directors.

The price of our common stock may fluctuate.

The market price of our common stock could fluctuate significantly for various reasons, which include:

our quarterly or annual earnings or earnings of other companies in our industry;

the public's reaction to our press releases, our other public announcements, and our filings with the SEC;

changes in earnings estimates or recommendations by research analysts who track our common stock or the stocks of other companies in our industry;

changes in our number of enrolled students;

new or proposed laws or regulations or new or proposed interpretations of laws or regulations applicable to our business;

seasonal variations in our student population;

damage to our reputation or other adverse effects as a result of negative publicity in the media, in industry or governmental reports, or otherwise, affecting us or other companies in the for-profit postsecondary education sector;

the availability and cost of Title IV funds, other student financial aid, and private loans;

the failure to maintain or keep in good standing our regulatory approvals and accreditations;

changes in accounting standards, policies, guidance, interpretations, or principles;

changes in general conditions in the U.S. and global economies or financial markets, including those resulting from war, incidents of terrorism, or responses to such events;

an adverse economic or other development that affects job prospects in our core disciplines;

litigation involving our University, or investigations or audits by regulators into the operations of our University or our competitors; and

sales of common stock by our directors, executive officers, and significant stockholders.

In addition, in recent years, the stock market has experienced extreme price and volume fluctuations. This volatility has had a significant impact on the market price of securities issued by many companies, including companies in our industry. The changes frequently appear to occur without regard to the operating performance of these companies. The price of our common stock could fluctuate based upon factors that have little or nothing to do with our University, and these fluctuations could materially reduce our stock price.

Table of Contents

In the past, following periods of volatility in the market price of a company's securities, securities class action litigation has often been brought against that company. Because of the potential volatility of our stock price, we may become the target of securities litigation in the future. Securities litigation could result in substantial costs and divert management's attention and resources from our business.

If securities analysts do not publish research or reports about our business or industry or if they downgrade their evaluations of our stock, the price of our stock could decline.

The trading market for our common stock depends in part on the research and reports that industry or financial analysts publish about us, our business and the for-profit education sector. In recent periods, a number of analysts have dropped coverage of the sector. If one or more of the analysts covering us downgrade their estimates or evaluations of our stock, the price of our stock could decline. If additional analysts cease coverage of us or our sector, we could lose visibility in the market for our stock, which in turn could cause our stock price to decline.

We currently do not intend to pay dividends on our common stock and, consequently, your only opportunity to achieve a return on your investment is if the price of our common stock appreciates.

We do not expect to pay dividends on shares of our common stock in the foreseeable future and intend to use cash to grow our business. The payment of cash dividends in the future, if any, will be at the discretion of our Board of Directors and will depend upon such factors as earnings levels, capital requirements, our overall financial condition, and any other factors deemed relevant by our Board of Directors. Consequently, your only opportunity to achieve a positive return on your investment in us will be if the market price of our common stock appreciates.

Item 1B. Unresolved Staff Comments

None.

Item 2. Properties

We own our ground campus, which is located on 200+ acres in the center of the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area, near downtown Phoenix. Our on-campus facilities currently consist of classroom buildings, lecture halls, a 300-seat theater, a 155,000-volume newly renovated library, a media arts complex that provides communications students with audio and video equipment, a 55,000 square foot recreation center for both student-athletes and on-campus students, a 140,000 square foot/ 7,500 seat basketball and entertainment arena, a gymnasium, an activity center that contains a food court, a bowling alley and other student services, a student union which was recently remodeled and expanded, dormitories, apartments, campus pools, athletic facilities and parking garages. Additionally, we have several office buildings used for administration. In order to accommodate the continued growth of our traditional ground population, we completed four additional dormitories, an additional classroom building for our College of Science, Engineering and Technology and a third parking structure prior to the 2015/2016 school year and has recently started construction on three more apartment style residence halls, a 170,000 square foot classroom building for its College of Science, Engineering and Technology, a student service center and a fourth parking structure.

We also lease three additional facilities for employees in Arizona, and four facilities in Arizona and one in New Mexico for classroom and labs for our nursing professional studies students. We lease apartments in an off-site apartment building in Phoenix, Arizona for traditional ground students. Additionally, we lease five office locations in California and one in Colorado. We may add additional space in Arizona and in other states in the southwest U.S. to

accommodate our growth plans in 2016 and beyond.

Item 3. *Legal Proceedings*

From time to time, we are subject to ordinary and routine litigation incidental to our business. While the outcomes of these matters are uncertain, management does not expect that the ultimate costs to resolve these matters will have a material adverse effect on our financial position, results of operations or cash flows.

Item 4. *Mine Safety Disclosures*

None.

Table of Contents**PART II****Item 5. *Market for Registrant's Common Equity, Related Stockholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities*****Market Information**

Our common stock trades on the Nasdaq Global Market under the symbol LOPE. The holders of our common stock are entitled to one vote per share on any matter to be voted upon by stockholders. All shares of common stock rank equally as to voting and all other matters. The shares of common stock have no preemptive or conversion rights, no redemption or sinking fund provisions, are not liable for further call or assessment and are not entitled to cumulative voting rights.

The table below sets forth the high and low sales prices for our common stock, as reported by the Nasdaq Global Market.

| | High | Low |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| 2015 | | |
| First Quarter | \$ 48.29 | \$ 42.63 |
| Second Quarter | \$ 45.82 | \$ 41.30 |
| Third Quarter | \$ 45.17 | \$ 35.38 |
| Fourth Quarter | \$ 42.81 | \$ 36.18 |
| 2014 | | |
| First Quarter | \$ 51.12 | \$ 41.71 |
| Second Quarter | \$ 47.89 | \$ 41.63 |
| Third Quarter | \$ 47.76 | \$ 40.24 |
| Fourth Quarter | \$ 51.99 | \$ 36.95 |

 Holders

As of December 31, 2015, there were approximately 207 registered holders of record of common stock. A substantially greater number of holders of common stock are street name or beneficial holders, whose shares are held of record by banks, brokers and other financial institutions.

Dividends

We currently intend to retain all future earnings for the operation and expansion of our business and do not anticipate paying cash dividends on our common stock in the foreseeable future.

Recent Sales of Unregistered Securities

None.

Securities Authorized for Issuance under Equity Compensation Plans

The information required by Item 201(d) of Regulation S-K is provided under Item 12, *Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management and Related Stockholder Matters*, Equity Compensation Plan Information, which is incorporated herein by reference.

Purchases of Equity Securities by the Issuer and Affiliated Purchasers

Our Board of Directors has authorized the University to repurchase up to \$75.0 million in aggregate of common stock, from time to time, depending on market conditions and other considerations. The current expiration date on the repurchase authorization by our Board of Directors is September 30, 2016. Repurchases occur at our discretion. Repurchases may be made in the open market or in privately negotiated transactions, pursuant to the applicable Securities and Exchange Commission rules. The amount and timing of future share repurchases, if any, will be made as market and business conditions warrant. Since the approval of our share repurchase plan, we have purchased 3.1 million shares of common stock at an aggregate cost of \$60.4 million, which are recorded at cost in the accompanying December 31, 2015 consolidated balance sheet and statement of stockholders equity. At December 31, 2015, there remained \$14.6 million available under our current share repurchase authorization. During the fourth quarter and the year ended December 31, 2015, we repurchased 288,397 shares of common stock at an aggregate cost of \$11.3 million.

Table of Contents

The following table sets forth our share repurchases of common stock and our share repurchases in lieu of taxes, which are not included in the repurchase plan totals as they were effected in conjunction with the vesting of restricted share awards, during each period in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2015:

| Period | Total Number of Shares Purchased | Average Price Paid Per Share | Total Number of Shares Purchased as Part of Publicly Announced Program | Maximum Dollar Value of Shares That May Yet Be Purchased Under the Program |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Share Repurchases | | | | |
| October 1, 2015 – October 31, 2015 | | \$ | | \$ 25,865,000 |
| November 1, 2015 – November 30, 2015 | | \$ | | \$ 25,865,000 |
| December 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 | 288,397 | \$ 39.11 | 288,397 | \$ 14,586,000 |
| Total | 288,397 | \$ 39.11 | 288,397 | \$ 14,586,000 |
| Tax Withholdings | | | | |
| October 1, 2015 – October 31, 2015 | 1,320 | \$ | | \$ |
| November 1, 2015 – November 30, 2015 | | \$ | | \$ |
| December 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 | | \$ | | \$ |
| Total | 1,320 | \$ | | \$ |

University Stock Performance

The following graph compares the cumulative total return of our common stock with the cumulative total returns of the S&P 500 Index and our selected peer group of five companies that includes: Capella Education Company, American Public Education, Inc., Apollo Education Group Inc., Strayer Education Inc. and Bridgepoint Education, Inc. This chart assumes that an investment of \$100 was made in our common stock, in the index, and in the peer group on December 31, 2010 and that all dividends paid by us and such companies were reinvested, and tracks the relative performance of such investments through December 31, 2015.

Table of Contents

| | 12/10 | 12/11 | 12/12 | 12/13 | 12/14 | 12/15 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Grand Canyon Education, Inc. | 100.00 | 81.47 | 119.81 | 222.56 | 238.18 | 204.80 |
| S&P 500 | 100.00 | 102.11 | 118.45 | 156.82 | 178.29 | 180.75 |
| Peer Group | 100.00 | 111.17 | 52.57 | 69.63 | 80.95 | 33.59 |

The information contained in the performance graph shall not be deemed soliciting material or to be filed with the SEC nor shall such information be deemed incorporated by reference into any future filing under the Securities Act or the Exchange Act, except to the extent that we specifically incorporate it by reference into such filing.

The stock price performance included in this graph is not necessarily indicative of future stock price performance.

Table of Contents**Item 6. Selected Consolidated Financial and Other Data**

The following selected consolidated financial and other data should be read in conjunction with Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*, and Item 7, *Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations*, to fully understand the information presented below. The selected consolidated income statement data and other data, excluding period end enrollment, for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013, and the selected consolidated balance sheet data as of December 31, 2015, and 2014, have been derived from our audited consolidated financial statements for such years, which are included herein. The selected consolidated income statement data and other data, excluding period end enrollment, for the years ended December 31, 2012 and 2011, and the selected consolidated balance sheet data as of December 31, 2013, 2012, and 2011, have been derived from our audited consolidated financial statements for such years, which are not included herein. Our historical results are not necessarily indicative of our results for any future period.

| | Year Ended December 31, | | | | |
|---|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
| | (In thousands, except per share data) | | | | |
| Income Statement Data: | | | | | |
| Net revenue | \$ 778,200 | \$ 691,055 | \$ 598,335 | \$ 511,257 | \$ 426,741 |
| Costs and expenses: | | | | | |
| Instructional costs and services | 329,651 | 288,791 | 254,419 | 220,403 | 194,801 |
| Admissions advisory and related ⁽¹⁾ | 112,572 | 108,567 | 97,077 | 85,917 | 70,758 |
| Advertising ⁽¹⁾ | 76,229 | 65,808 | 60,985 | 51,023 | 45,587 |
| Marketing and promotional ⁽¹⁾ | 7,287 | 7,439 | 5,644 | 4,360 | 3,610 |
| General and administrative | 42,100 | 39,635 | 36,934 | 35,502 | 29,043 |
| Lease termination costs | | | | | 782 |
| Total costs and expenses | 567,839 | 510,240 | 455,059 | 397,205 | 344,581 |
| Operating income | 210,361 | 180,815 | 143,276 | 114,052 | 82,160 |
| Interest expense | (1,248) | (1,801) | (2,244) | (699) | (720) |
| Interest income and other | (106) | 684 | 3,863 | 71 | 88 |
| Income before income taxes | 209,007 | 179,698 | 144,895 | 113,424 | 81,528 |
| Income tax expense | 77,596 | 68,232 | 56,184 | 43,977 | 30,982 |
| Net income | \$ 131,411 | \$ 111,466 | \$ 88,711 | \$ 69,447 | \$ 50,546 |
| Earnings per common share | | | | | |
| Basic | \$ 2.86 | \$ 2.45 | \$ 1.98 | \$ 1.57 | \$ 1.13 |
| Diluted | \$ 2.78 | \$ 2.37 | \$ 1.92 | \$ 1.53 | \$ 1.12 |
| Shares used in computing earnings per common share | | | | | |
| Basic | 45,975 | 45,538 | 44,731 | 44,332 | 44,631 |
| Diluted | 47,281 | 47,006 | 46,131 | 45,251 | 45,105 |

Table of Contents

| | As of December 31, | | | | |
|--|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
| | (In thousands) | | | | |
| Other Data: | | | | | |
| Capital expenditures | \$ 218,301 | \$ 168,646 | \$ 93,490 | \$ 104,876 | \$ 80,545 |
| Depreciation and amortization | \$ 35,379 | \$ 29,177 | \$ 25,141 | \$ 21,627 | \$ 16,738 |
| Adjusted EBITDA ⁽²⁾ | \$ 263,125 | \$ 227,812 | \$ 185,086 | \$ 149,593 | \$ 107,428 |
| Period end enrollment ⁽³⁾ | | | | | |
| Online | 59,311 | 55,060 | 49,580 | 44,690 | 38,918 |
| Ground | 15,195 | 12,746 | 10,078 | 7,602 | 4,999 |
| Balance Sheet Data: | | | | | |
| Cash and cash equivalents, marketable securities and investments | \$ 106,400 | \$ 166,022 | \$ 164,244 | \$ 105,111 | \$ 21,189 |
| Restricted cash, cash equivalents and investments | 75,384 | 67,840 | 64,368 | 56,189 | 56,670 |
| Total assets | 898,430 | 755,713 | 616,100 | 494,923 | 317,847 |
| Capital lease obligations (including short-term) | 1,485 | 497 | 586 | 674 | 1,144 |
| Notes payable (including short-term) | 79,877 | 86,493 | 93,100 | 99,701 | 21,640 |
| Total stockholders' equity | 610,251 | 476,232 | 344,844 | 234,059 | 163,293 |

- (1) During the first quarter of 2013, the University made changes in its presentation of operating expenses and revised prior periods to conform to the current presentation. All years presented in the five year table were reclassified to conform to the current presentation.
- (2) Adjusted EBITDA is defined as net income plus interest expense net of interest income, plus income tax expense, plus depreciation and amortization (EBITDA), as adjusted for (i) the amortization of prepaid royalty payments recorded in conjunction with a settlement of a dispute with our former owner; (ii) contributions to Arizona school tuition organizations in lieu of the payment of state income taxes; (iii) share-based compensation; and (iv) one-time, unusual charges or gains, such as litigation and regulatory reserves, impairment charges and asset write-offs, exit or lease termination costs, contract termination fees, or the gain (loss) recognized on the settlement of a third party note receivable.
- (3) Enrollment represents individual students who attended a course during the last two months of the calendar quarter.

We present Adjusted EBITDA because we consider it to be an important supplemental measure of our operating performance. We also make certain compensation decisions based, in part, on our operating performance, as measured by Adjusted EBITDA, and our credit agreement requires us to comply with covenants that include performance metrics substantially similar to Adjusted EBITDA. All of the adjustments made in our calculation of Adjusted EBITDA are adjustments to items that management does not consider to be reflective of our core operating performance. Management considers our core operating performance to be that which can be affected by our managers in any particular period through their management of the resources that affect our underlying revenue and profit generating operations during that period. Royalty expenses paid to our former owner, contributions to Arizona school tuition organizations in lieu of the payment of state income taxes, share-based compensation, one time unusual charges or gains, such as estimated litigation and regulatory reserves, exit costs, contract and lease termination fees, and the gain recognized on the settlement of notes receivable are not considered reflective of our core performance. We believe Adjusted EBITDA allows us to compare our current operating results with corresponding historical periods and with the operational performance of other companies in our industry because it does not give effect to potential differences caused by variations in capital structures (affecting relative interest expense, including the impact of write-offs of deferred financing costs when companies refinance their indebtedness), tax positions (such as the impact on periods or companies of changes in effective tax rates or net operating losses), the book amortization of

intangibles (affecting relative amortization expense), and other items that we do not consider reflective of underlying operating performance. We also present Adjusted EBITDA because we believe it is frequently used by securities analysts, investors, and other interested parties as a measure of performance.

In evaluating Adjusted EBITDA, investors should be aware that in the future we may incur expenses similar to the adjustments described above. Our presentation of Adjusted EBITDA should not be construed as an inference that our future results will be unaffected by expenses that are unusual, non-routine, or non-recurring. Adjusted EBITDA has limitations as an analytical tool, and you should not consider it in isolation, or as a substitute for net income, operating income, or any other performance measure derived in accordance with and reported under GAAP or as an alternative to cash flow from operating activities or as a measure of our liquidity. Some of these limitations are that it does not reflect:

cash expenditures for capital expenditures or contractual commitments;

changes in, or cash requirements for, our working capital requirements;

interest expense, or the cash required to replace assets that are being depreciated or amortized; and

Table of Contents

the impact on our reported results of earnings or charges resulting from the items for which we make adjustments to our EBITDA, as described above and set forth in the table below.

In addition, other companies, including other companies in our industry, may calculate these measures differently than we do, limiting the usefulness of Adjusted EBITDA as a comparative measure. Because of these limitations, Adjusted EBITDA should not be considered as a substitute for net income, operating income, or any other performance measure derived in accordance with GAAP, or as an alternative to cash flow from operating activities or as a measure of our liquidity. We compensate for these limitations by relying primarily on our GAAP results and use Adjusted EBITDA only as a supplemental performance measure. For more information, see our consolidated financial statements and the notes to those statements included elsewhere in this Annual Report on Form 10-K.

The following table reconciles Adjusted EBITDA to net income for the periods indicated:

| (In thousands) | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Net income | \$ 131,411 | \$ 111,466 | \$ 88,711 |
| Plus: interest expense net of interest and other income | 395 | 1,117 | 2,027 |
| Plus: income tax expense | 77,596 | 68,232 | 56,184 |
| Plus: depreciation and amortization | 35,379 | 29,177 | 25,141 |
| EBITDA | 244,781 | 209,992 | 172,063 |
| Plus: royalty to former owner ^(a) | 296 | 296 | 296 |
| Plus: prepaid royalty impairment and other fixed asset impairments ^(b) | 2,755 | 3,441 | |
| Plus: contributions made in lieu of state income taxes ^(c) | 2,750 | 2,750 | 2,500 |
| Plus: estimated litigation and regulatory reserves ^(d) | 328 | 870 | 3,937 |
| Plus: lease termination costs ^(e) | | 518 | |
| Plus: loss (gain) on note receivable ^(f) | 958 | | (3,646) |
| Plus: share-based compensation ^(g) | 11,257 | 9,945 | 9,936 |
| Adjusted EBITDA | \$ 263,125 | \$ 227,812 | \$ 185,086 |

- (a) Represents the amortization of prepaid royalty payments, as discussed in Note 2 to our consolidated financial statements that are included in Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*.
- (b) Represents the prepaid royalty impairment and other fixed asset impairments. The 2015 amount represents the write-off of the remaining book value of on campus buildings removed to make way for new dormitories and a classroom building as well as an internal use software write off. The 2014 amount relates to the termination during 2014 of our use of the Ken Blanchard name for our College of Business, as discussed in Note 2 to our consolidated financial statements that are included in Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*.
- (c) Reflects contributions to various Arizona school tuition organizations to assist with funding for education. In connection with such contributions made we received a dollar-for-dollar state income tax credit, which resulted in a reduction in our effective income tax rate to 37.1%, 38.0% and 38.8% for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, respectively. Had these contributions not been made, our effective tax rate would have been

37.9%, 38.9% and 39.8%, for 2015, 2014 and 2013, respectively. Such contributions are viewed by our management to be made in lieu of payments of state income taxes and are therefore excluded from evaluation of our core operating performance.

- (d) Reflects \$3.9 million for the program review reserve in 2013, and \$0.3 million and \$0.9 million for estimated litigation reserves in 2015 and 2014, respectively. See Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*.
- (e) Represents lease termination costs incurred related to the early termination of leased space. See Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*.
- (f) Represents loss (gain) on a note receivable purchased in December 2012. See Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*.
- (g) Reflects share-based compensation expense relating to restricted stock awards and option grants made to employees and directors.

Table of Contents

Item 7. *Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations*

The following discussion and analysis of our financial condition and results of operations for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014 should be read in conjunction with our consolidated financial statements and related notes that appear in Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*. In addition to historical information, the following discussion contains forward-looking statements that reflect our plans, estimates and beliefs. Our actual results could differ materially from those discussed in the forward-looking statements. Factors that could cause or contribute to these differences include those discussed below and elsewhere in this Annual Report on Form 10-K, particularly in Item 1A, *Risk Factors* and *Forward-Looking Statements*.

Executive Overview

We are a comprehensive regionally accredited university that offers approximately 200 graduate and undergraduate degree programs and certificates across eight colleges both online and on ground at our approximately 200+ acre campus in Phoenix, Arizona, and onsite at facilities we lease and at facilities owned by third party employers. Our undergraduate programs are designed to be innovative and meet the future needs of employers, while providing students with the needed critical thinking and effective communication skills developed through a Christian, liberal arts foundation. We offer master and doctoral degrees in contemporary fields that are designed to provide students with the capacity for transformational leadership in their chosen industry, emphasizing the immediate relevance of theory, application, and evaluation to promote personal and organizational change. At December 31, 2015, we had approximately 74,500 students. At December 31, 2015, 79.6% of our students were enrolled in our online programs, and, of our working adult students (online and professional studies students), 47.8% were pursuing masters or doctoral degrees.

Key Trends, Developments and Challenges

The following circumstances and trends present opportunities, challenges and risks.

Evolving Postsecondary Education Market. We believe that there is a large number of traditional-aged students looking for a residential experience at an affordable, private, Christian university. As a result of state funding challenges, most state universities are receiving less state subsidies and therefore have been forced to increase tuition, decrease the number of students they can accept and/or make other changes that impact the student experience. Some private universities also are facing enrollment challenges as a result of their high tuition costs. We also believe the number of non-traditional students who work, are raising a family, or are doing both while trying to earn a college degree continues to grow. The continued economic environment in the U.S., however, has caused an increased number of potential students and/or their parents to consider the cost of education as a primary factor in choosing the school that they will attend. Given these trends, we believe that many individuals will be attracted to our high quality academic programs at affordable tuition rates. We also believe that competition for students continues to increase. We compete primarily with traditional public and four-year degree-granting regionally accredited colleges and universities and other proprietary degree-granting regionally accredited schools. An increasing number of traditional colleges, universities and community colleges are offering distance learning and other online education programs, including programs that are geared towards the needs of working adult students. This trend has been accelerated by private companies that provide and/or manage online learning platforms for traditional colleges and universities. As the proportion of traditional colleges and universities providing alternative learning modalities increases, we face increasing competition for students from such institutions, including those with well-established reputations for excellence.

Regulation and Oversight. We are subject to extensive regulation by federal and state governmental agencies and accrediting bodies. In particular, the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (the Higher Education Act), and the

regulations promulgated thereunder by the Department of Education subject us to significant regulatory scrutiny on the basis of numerous standards that schools must satisfy in order to participate in the various federal student financial assistance programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. See Item 1. Business Regulation. Recent regulations have imposed new reporting and disclosure requirements that have caused increased administrative burden and costs and may have a negative effect on our growth and enrollments. In addition, in recent years, there has been increased focus by Congress on the role that proprietary educational institutions play in higher education and various proposals to modify the laws to which proprietary educational institutions are subject. We cannot predict what legislation, if any, may result from these Congressional proposals or what impact any such legislation might have on the proprietary education sector generally or our business in particular. To the extent that any laws or regulations are adopted, or other administrative actions are taken, that limit our participation in Title IV programs or the amount of student financial aid for which the students at our institutions are eligible, our enrollments, revenues and results of operation could be materially and adversely affected.

Table of Contents**Fiscal Year 2015 Events**

We experienced the following significant events in 2015:

Enrollment, Net Revenue, Operating Income Growth with No Increase in Ground Tuition Rates. We achieved enrollment growth of 9.9% during the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015, as ground enrollment increased 19.2% and online enrollment increased 7.7% over the prior year. We attribute the significant growth in our ground enrollment between years to our increasing brand recognition and the value proposition that our ground traditional campus affords to traditional-aged students and their parents. After scholarships, our ground traditional students pay tuition, room, board, and fees in an amount that is often half to a third of what it costs to attend a private, traditional university in another state and an amount comparable to what it costs to attend a public university. Our online students pay tuition and fees in an amount that is often less than the cost of other high service online programs such as ours. For example, our largest local competitor's undergraduate tuition for online programs ranges from \$490 to \$553 per credit hour and its graduate tuition for online programs ranges from \$492 to \$852 per credit hour while our online tuition per credit hour ranges from \$355 to \$470 for undergraduate programs and \$330 to \$640 for graduate programs. There are online programs that are less expensive than ours but those programs generally do not provide the full level of support services that we provide to our students. Although our online enrollment continues to grow, as the proportion of traditional colleges and universities providing alternative learning modalities increases, we will face increasing competition for working adult students from such institutions, including those with well-established reputations for excellence. We did not raise tuition in any of our programs for our 2014-2015 academic year. A tuition increase of approximately 1% was implemented for the majority of online programs for our 2015-2016 academic year. We have not raised our tuition for our traditional ground programs in seven years. Net revenues increased 12.6% over the prior year primarily due to the enrollment growth and due to an increase in ancillary revenues resulting from the increased traditional student enrollment (e.g. housing, food, etc.). Operating income was \$210.4 million for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015, an increase of 16.3% over the \$180.8 million in operating income for 2014.

Continued Program Expansion. In the Fall of 2014, the University launched the College of Science, Engineering and Technology, rolling out programs in computer science and information technology. In the Fall of 2015, three engineering programs, Electrical Engineering, Bio-medical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering began. In total the University now offers approximately 200 graduate and undergraduate degree programs and certificates across eight colleges with over 30 new programs or emphases rolled out in 2015.

Capital Expenditures. Our capital expenditures in 2015 of \$204.7 million were primarily related to the expansion of our 200+ acre physical campus in Phoenix, Arizona and significant investments in technology innovation to support our students and staff. In order to accommodate the continued growth of the traditional ground population, the University completed four additional dormitories, an additional classroom building for the College of Science, Engineering and Technology and a third parking structure for the 2015/2016 school year and has recently started construction on three more apartment style residence halls, a 170,000 square foot classroom building for its College of Science, Engineering and Technology, a student service center and a fourth parking structure. In addition, the

University acquired approximately 25 acres of land adjacent to or near campus for future development. Included in off-site development during 2015 is \$10.0 million we spent to revitalize what was formerly known as the Maryvale Golf Course under a partnership agreement with the City of Phoenix. The golf course is now known as Grand Canyon University Championship golf course. Also, in late 2015, we commenced construction on an off-site office building and parking garage that is in close proximity to our ground traditional campus. Employees that work in two leased office buildings in the Phoenix area will be consolidated into this new building when it is expected to be completed in late 2016. Although the University is funding the construction of the building and parking garage, the University is marketing these, along with a recently refurbished office building in the same development, as part of a sale-leaseback transaction. These investments are intended to support our growing on-campus student population as well as enhance the brand of the University.

Community Involvement and the Public Good. In 2014, the University announced a five-point plan to restore west Phoenix through a) a unique partnership with Habitat for Humanity to repair hundreds of homes in the University's neighborhood; b) an ongoing initiative with the Phoenix Police Department to improve public safety; c) the creation of jobs and commerce on the main campus and along the Camelback Road corridor in West Phoenix; d) the development of a trained workforce in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and e) the continued support of K-12 students at neighborhood schools via our Outreach Program. Our students are serving as tutors and mentors to these high school students and the results thus far have been extremely positive. The University continues to be involved in more than 120 community events and projects throughout the year, helping organizations such as the Phoenix Dream Center, Feed My Starving Children, Hopefest, Arizona Foster Care, Phoenix Rescue Mission, Boy/Girl Scouts, Goodwill Arizona, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Young Life and Elevate Phoenix. The University also puts on popular gift drives at Christmas and Easter to help brighten those seasons for many underprivileged families. Our faculty, staff and students also go out into our surrounding neighborhoods to participate in University sponsored programs such as Serve the City, Canyon Kids, 12 Months of Service and the Run to Fight Children's Cancer.

Table of Contents**Revenue and Enrollment**

Net revenue consists principally of tuition, room and board charges attributable to students residing on our ground campus, application and graduation fees, and fees from educational resources such as access to online materials or commissions we earn from bookstore and publication sales, less scholarships. Factors affecting our net revenue include: (i) the number of students who are enrolled and who remain enrolled in our courses; (ii) the number of credit hours per student; (iii) our degree and program mix; (iv) changes in our tuition rates; (v) the timing of our ground traditional campus semesters; (vi) the amount of the scholarships that we offer; and (vii) the number of students housed in, and the rent charged for, our on-campus student apartments and dormitories.

We define enrollment as individual students who attended a course during the last two months of the calendar quarter. We offer three 15-week semesters in a calendar year with one start available per semester for our traditional ground students. Online and professional studies students have more frequent class starts in five, seven, eight and sixteen-week courses through the calendar year. Enrollments are a function of the number of continuing students at the beginning of each period and new enrollments during the period, which are offset by graduations, withdrawals, and inactive students during the period. Inactive students for a particular period include students who are not registered in a class and, therefore, are not generating net revenue for that period, but who have not withdrawn from Grand Canyon University.

We believe that the principal factors that affect our enrollments and net revenue are the number and breadth of the programs we offer; the attractiveness of our program offerings and learning experience, particularly for career-oriented adults who are seeking pay increases or job opportunities that are directly tied to higher educational attainment; the effectiveness of our marketing, recruiting and retention efforts, which is affected by our brand strength and price point; the quality of our academic programs and student services; the convenience and flexibility of our online delivery platform; the availability and cost of federal and other funding for student financial aid; the seasonality of our net revenue, which is enrollment driven and is typically lowest in our second fiscal quarter and highest in our fourth fiscal quarter; and general economic conditions, particularly as they might affect job prospects in our core disciplines.

The following is a summary of our student enrollment at December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013 by degree type and by instructional delivery method:

| | 2015 ⁽¹⁾ | | December 31, 2014 ⁽¹⁾ | | 2013 ⁽¹⁾ | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | # of Students | % of Total | # of Students | % of Total | # of Students | % of Total |
| Graduate degree ⁽²⁾ | 29,237 | 39.2% | 26,319 | 38.8% | 22,476 | 37.7% |
| Undergraduate degree | 45,269 | 60.8% | 41,487 | 61.2% | 37,182 | 62.3% |
| Total | 74,506 | 100.0% | 67,806 | 100.0% | 59,658 | 100.0% |

| | 2015 ⁽¹⁾ | | December 31, 2014 ⁽¹⁾ | | 2013 | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| | # of Students | % of Total | # of Students | % of Total | # of Students | % of Total |
| Online ⁽³⁾ | 59,311 | 79.6% | 55,060 | 81.2% | 49,580 | 83.1% |

Edgar Filing: Grand Canyon Education, Inc. - Form 10-K

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Ground ⁽⁴⁾ | 15,195 | 20.4% | 12,746 | 18.8% | 10,078 | 16.9% |
| Total | 74,506 | 100.0% | 67,806 | 100.0% | 59,658 | 100.0% |

- (1) Enrollment represents individual students who attended a course during the last two months of the calendar quarter. Included in enrollment at December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013 are students pursuing non-degree certificates of 679, 585, and 487, respectively.
- (2) Includes 6,302, 5,570 and 4,285 students pursuing doctoral degrees at December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, respectively.
- (3) As of December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, 47.8%, 46.0% and 43.5%, respectively, of our working adult students (online and professional studies students) were pursuing graduate or doctoral degrees.
- (4) Includes our traditional on-campus students, as well as our professional studies students.

Table of Contents

For the 2014-15 academic year (the academic year begins in May), our prices per credit hour range from \$350 to \$465 for undergraduate online and professional studies courses, \$325 to \$600 for graduate online courses, \$630 for doctoral online programs, and \$688 for undergraduate courses for ground students. For our active duty and active reserve online and professional studies students, our prices per credit hour are \$250 for undergraduate, \$400 for graduate courses and \$599 for doctoral courses. The overall price of each course varies based upon the number of credit hours per course (with most courses representing four credit hours), the degree level of the program, and the discipline. In addition, we charge a fixed \$8,250 block tuition for undergraduate ground students taking between 12 and 18 credit hours per semester, with an additional \$688 per credit hour for credits in excess of 18. A traditional undergraduate degree typically requires a minimum of 120 credit hours. The minimum number of credit hours required for a master's degree and overall cost for such a degree varies by program, although such programs typically require approximately 36 credit hours. The doctoral program requires approximately 60 credit hours. A tuition increase of approximately 1% was implemented for the majority of online programs in September 2015. The University has not raised tuition for its traditional ground programs in seven years.

Based on current tuition rates, tuition for a full program would generally equate to between \$15,450 and \$37,000 for an online master's program, between \$42,600 and \$56,400 for a full four-year online bachelor's program, \$38,400 for a full doctoral program, and approximately \$66,000 for a full four-year bachelor's program taken on our ground campus. The tuition amounts referred to above assume no reductions for transfer credits or scholarships, which many of our students utilize to reduce their total program costs. For example, the average student on our ground traditional campus will pay approximately \$8,300 in tuition in the 2015-16 school year after scholarships. Thus, based on the number of transfer credits and the scholarships they receive it is likely that a student will pay less than \$34,000 in tuition for a bachelor's degree on our ground campus. For the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, our revenue was reduced by approximately \$163.9 million, \$140.0 million and \$111.8 million, respectively, as a result of scholarships that we offered to our students. The increase in scholarships reflects our increased revenues and our resulting increased use of scholarships (especially academic scholarships), to attract high performing students to our ground traditional campus.

Revenue per student for the year ended December 31, 2015 increased over 2014 primarily due to our residential traditional campus enrollment growing at a rate higher than our working adult enrollment. When factoring in room, board, and fees, the revenue per student is higher for these students than for our working adult students. We did not raise tuition in any of our programs for our 2014-2015 academic years and have not raised our tuition for our traditional ground program in seven years. A tuition increase of approximately 1% was implemented for the majority of online programs in September 2015. This reflects a concerted effort to control tuition pricing for students so that debt levels assumed by our students are reasonable. Tuition increases have not historically been, and may not in the future be, consistent across our programs due to market conditions and differences in operating costs of individual programs.

We derive a majority of our net revenues from tuition financed by the Title IV programs. For the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, we derived cash receipts equal to approximately 74.8%, 76.5%, and 78.5%, respectively, of our net revenues from Title IV programs. Our students also may rely on scholarships, personal savings, private loans, and employer tuition reimbursements to pay a portion of their tuition and related expenses.

Critical Accounting Policies and Estimates

The discussion of our financial condition and results of operations is based upon our consolidated financial statements, which have been prepared in accordance with U.S. generally accepted accounting principles, or GAAP. During the preparation of these consolidated financial statements, we are required to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets, liabilities, revenues, costs and expenses, and related disclosures. On an ongoing basis,

we evaluate our estimates and assumptions, including those discussed below. We base our estimates on historical experience and on various other assumptions that we believe are reasonable under the circumstances. The results of our analysis form the basis for making assumptions about the carrying values of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. Actual results may differ from these estimates under different assumptions or conditions, and the impact of such differences may be material to our consolidated financial statements.

We believe that the following critical accounting policies involve our more significant judgments and estimates used in the preparation of our consolidated financial statements:

Revenue recognition. Net revenues consist primarily of tuition and fees derived from courses taught by us online, at our approximately 200+ acre campus in Phoenix, Arizona, and at facilities we lease or those of employers, as well as from related educational resources such as access to online materials. Tuition revenue and most fees and related educational resources are recognized pro-rata over the applicable period of instruction, net of scholarships awarded by us. Generally, we will refund all or a portion of tuition already paid pursuant to our refund policy, dependent upon length of course and modality and subject to certain state specific refund requirements. If a student withdraws at a time when only a portion, or none of the tuition is refundable, then in accordance with its revenue recognition policy, the University continues to recognize the tuition that was not refunded pro-rata over the applicable period of instruction. However, for students that have taken out financial aid to pay their tuition and for which a return to Title IV is required as a result of his or her withdrawal, the University recognizes revenue after a student withdraws only at the time of cash collection. Sales tax collected from students is excluded from net revenues. We also charge online students an upfront learning management fee, which is deferred and recognized over the average expected term of a student. Costs that are direct and incremental to new online students are also deferred and recognized ratably over the average expected term of a student. Deferred revenue and student deposits in any period represent the excess of tuition, fees and other student payments received as compared to amounts recognized as revenue on the statement of operations and are reflected as current liabilities in the accompanying balance sheet. Our educational programs have starting and ending dates that differ from our quarters. Therefore, at the end of each fiscal quarter, a portion of revenue from these programs is not yet earned. Other revenues may be recognized as sales occur or services are performed.

Table of Contents

Allowance for doubtful accounts. We record an allowance for doubtful accounts for estimated losses resulting from the inability, failure or refusal of our students to make required payments, which includes the recovery of financial aid funds advanced to a student for amounts in excess of the student's cost of tuition and related fees that we may have to return under Title IV after a student drops. We determine the adequacy of our allowance for doubtful accounts based on an analysis of our historical bad debt experience, current economic trends, and the aging of the accounts receivable and student status. We apply a reserve to our receivables based upon an estimate of the risk presented by the age of the receivables and student status. We write off accounts receivable balances of active students at the earlier of the time the balance is deemed uncollectible, or one year after the revenue is generated. We reserve for receivables due from inactive students on a more accelerated basis than those due from active students and write off inactive student accounts at 150 days, as amounts due from inactive students are much more difficult to collect than amounts due from active students. We monitor our collections and write-off experience to assess whether adjustments to the estimated reserve are necessary.

Long-Lived Assets (other than goodwill). We evaluate the recoverability of our long-lived assets for impairment whenever events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying amount of an asset may not be recoverable. Recoverability of assets to be held and used is measured by a comparison of the carrying amount of an asset to undiscounted future net cash flows expected to be generated by the assets. If such assets are considered to be impaired, the impairment to be recognized is measured by the amount by which the carrying amount of the assets exceeds the fair value of the assets.

Income taxes. We recognize the amount of taxes payable or refundable for the current year and deferred tax assets and liabilities for future tax consequences of events that have been recognized in our consolidated financial statements or tax returns. Deferred tax assets and liabilities are measured using enacted tax rates in effect for the year in which the temporary differences are expected to be realized. Our deferred tax assets are subject to periodic recoverability assessments. Valuation allowances are established, when necessary, to reduce deferred tax assets to the amount that more likely than not will be realized. Realization of the deferred tax assets is principally dependent upon achievement of projected future taxable income offset by deferred tax liabilities. We evaluate the realizability of the deferred tax assets annually. Since becoming a taxable corporation in August 2005, we have not recorded any valuation allowances to date on our deferred income tax assets. We evaluate and account for uncertain tax positions using a two-step approach. Recognition occurs when we conclude that a tax position based solely on its technical merits, is more-likely-than-not to be sustained upon examination. Measurement determines the amount of benefit that is greater than 50% likely to be realized upon the ultimate settlement with a taxing authority that has full knowledge of the facts. Derecognition of a tax position that was previously recognized occurs when we determine that a tax position no longer meets the more-likely-than-not threshold of being sustained upon examination. As of December 31, 2015 and 2014, the University has reserved approximately \$1,706 and \$0, respectively, for uncertain tax positions, including interest and penalties. The increase in the reserve in 2015 was attributable to apportionment positions taken on state income tax returns related to the sourcing of receipts from services.

Table of Contents**Results of Operations**

The following table sets forth statements of operations data as a percentage of net revenue for each of the periods indicated:

| | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Net revenue | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Costs and expenses | | | |
| Instructional costs and services | 42.4 | 41.8 | 42.5 |
| Admissions advisory and related | 14.5 | 15.7 | 16.2 |
| Advertising | 9.8 | 9.5 | 10.2 |
| Marketing and promotional | 0.9 | 1.1 | 0.9 |
| General and administrative | 5.4 | 5.7 | 6.2 |
| Total costs and expenses | 73.0 | 73.8 | 76.1 |
| Operating income | 27.0 | 26.2 | 23.9 |
| Interest expense | (0.2) | (0.3) | (0.4) |
| Interest income and other | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.6 |
| Income before income taxes | 26.9 | 26.0 | 24.2 |
| Income tax expense | 10.0 | 9.9 | 9.4 |
| Net income | 16.9 | 16.1 | 14.8 |

Year Ended December 31, 2015 Compared to Year Ended December 31, 2014

Net revenue. Our net revenue for the year ended December 31, 2015 was \$778.2 million, an increase of \$87.1 million, or 12.6%, as compared to net revenue of \$691.1 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This increase was primarily due to an increase in ground and online enrollment and, to a lesser extent, an increase in room and board and other student fees, partially offset by an increase in institutional scholarships. We did not raise tuition in any of our programs for our 2014-15 academic year. A tuition increase of approximately 1% was implemented for the majority of our online programs in September 2015. We have not raised our tuition for our traditional ground program in seven years. End-of-period enrollment increased 9.9% between December 31, 2015 and 2014, as ground enrollment increased 19.2% and online enrollment increased 7.7% over the prior year. The majority of the ground enrollment growth between years was residential students at our ground traditional campus in Phoenix, Arizona. We attribute the significant growth in our ground enrollment between years to our increasing brand recognition and the value proposition that our ground traditional campus affords to traditional-aged students and their parents. After scholarships, our ground traditional students pay for tuition, room, board, and fees, often half to a third of what it costs to attend a private, traditional university in another state and an amount comparable to what it costs to attend a public university. Although our online enrollment continues to grow, as the proportion of traditional colleges and universities providing alternative learning modalities increases, we will face increasing competition for working adult students from such institutions, including those with well-established reputations for excellence. The growth in revenue per student between years is primarily due to our residential traditional campus enrollment growing at a rate higher than our working adult enrollment. When factoring in room, board and fees, the revenue per student is higher for these

students than for our working adult students.

Instructional costs and services expenses. Our instructional costs and services expenses for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$329.7 million, an increase of \$40.9 million, or 14.1%, as compared to instructional costs and services expenses of \$288.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This increase was primarily due to increases in instructional compensation and related expenses including share-based compensation, faculty compensation, occupancy and depreciation and amortization, dues, fees, subscriptions and other instructional supplies, bad debt expense and other miscellaneous instructional costs and services of \$15.3 million, \$7.3 million, \$8.0 million, \$7.6 million, \$1.6 million and \$1.1 million, respectively. The increase in employee compensation and related expenses and faculty compensation are primarily due to the increase in the number of staff to support the increasing number of students attending the University and increased benefit costs between years. In addition, we continue to increase our full-time faculty between years. The increase in occupancy, depreciation and amortization is the result of us placing into service additional buildings to support the growing number of ground traditional students. The increase in dues, fees, subscriptions and other instructional supplies is primarily due to increased licensing fees related to educational resources and increased food costs associated with a higher number of residential students. Our instructional costs and services expenses as a percentage of net revenue increased by 0.6% to 42.4% for the year ended December 31, 2015, as compared to 41.8% for the year ended December 31, 2014 due to an increase in dues, fees, subscriptions and other instructional supplies as a percentage of revenue due to the low profit margin derived on food sales, and occupancy, depreciation and amortization increasing as a percentage of revenue, partially offset by a decrease in bad debt expense from 2.2% of net revenue for the year ended December 31, 2014 to 2.1% of net revenues for the year ended December 31, 2015. We anticipate that instructional costs and services will continue to increase as a percentage of revenue due to these factors.

Table of Contents

Admissions advisory and related expenses. Our admissions advisory and related expenses for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$112.6 million, an increase of \$4.0 million, or 3.7%, as compared to admissions advisory and related expenses of \$108.6 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This increase was primarily due to increases in employee compensation and related expenses, partially offset by decreases in other admissions advisory expenses of \$5.1 million and \$1.2 million, respectively. Employee compensation and related expenses increased as a result of increasing the number of enrollment counselors and increasing benefit costs between years. Our admissions advisory and related expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased by 1.2% to 14.5% for the year ended December 31, 2015, from 15.7% for the year ended December 31, 2014 primarily due to our ability to leverage our admissions advisory personnel across an increasing revenue base. Although we are hopeful that we will continue to see leverage of our admissions advisory personnel, we do not anticipate the leverage in future years will be as significant as in 2015.

Advertising expenses. Our advertising expenses for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$76.2 million, an increase of \$10.4 million, or 15.8%, as compared to advertising expenses of \$65.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This increase was primarily due to increased digital media and branding advertising focused on the southwestern United States region. Our advertising expenses as a percentage of net revenue increased by 0.3% to 9.8% for the year ended December 31, 2015, from 9.5% for the year ended December 31, 2014 as we have intentionally increased our advertising spend to increase brand awareness. We plan to continue to increase our advertising spend on brand awareness in 2016 to counter the increased advertising of our competitors.

Marketing and promotional expenses. Our marketing and promotional expenses for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$7.3 million, a decrease of \$0.1 million, or 2.0%, as compared to marketing and promotional expenses of \$7.4 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. Our marketing and promotional expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased slightly by 0.2% to 0.9% for the year ended December 31, 2015, from 1.1% for the year ended December 31, 2014.

General and administrative expenses. Our general and administrative expenses for the year ended December 31, 2015 were \$42.1 million, an increase of \$2.5 million, or 6.2%, as compared to general and administrative expenses of \$39.6 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This increase was primarily due to increases in legal, audit and insurance costs and employee compensation and related expenses including share-based compensation of \$1.7 million and \$0.4 million respectively, and our continued increases in contributions to charities, our community and city and state public-private partnerships. During 2015 and 2014 our contributions to private school tuition organizations in lieu of state income taxes were \$2.8 million for both years. Our general and administrative expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased by 0.3% to 5.4% for the year ended December 31, 2015, from 5.7% for the year ended December 31, 2014 due to our ability to leverage our general and administrative expenses across an increasing revenue base.

Interest expense. Our interest expense for the year ended December 31, 2015 was \$1.2 million, a decrease of \$0.6 million, as compared to interest expense of \$1.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This decrease was primarily due to an increase in ongoing construction projects, resulting in higher capitalized interest and a decrease in the average balance of our credit facility between periods due to scheduled monthly principal payments. Our interest expense decreased as a percentage of net revenue by 0.1% to 0.2% for the year ended December 31, 2015, from 0.3% for the year ended December 31, 2014.

Interest income and other. Our interest income and other for the year ended December 31, 2015 was a loss of \$0.1 million, a decrease of \$0.8 million, as compared to interest income and other of \$0.7 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. The decrease was primarily due to the Arizona Court of Appeals reversing an earlier award of late penalty income of \$1.0 million from the settlement of a note receivable.

Income tax expense. Income tax expense for the year ended December 31, 2015 was \$77.6 million, an increase of \$9.4 million from \$68.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2014. This increase was primarily attributable to increased income before income taxes. Our effective tax rate was 37.1% and 38.0% for the year ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively. Our effective tax rate in 2015 is lower than the prior year due to state tax apportionment and rate changes. The tax rate for both periods is less than the annual effective tax rates due to the contributions made in lieu of state income taxes in the third quarter of both years.

Net income. Our net income for the year ended December 31, 2015 was \$131.4 million, an increase of \$19.9 million, as compared to \$111.5 million for the year ended December 31, 2014, due to the factors discussed above.

Table of Contents***Year Ended December 31, 2014 Compared to Year Ended December 31, 2013***

Net revenue. Our net revenue for the year ended December 31, 2014 was \$691.1 million, an increase of \$92.8 million, or 15.5%, as compared to net revenue of \$598.3 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily due to an increase in ground and online enrollment and, to a lesser extent, an increase in room and board and other student fees, partially offset by an increase in institutional scholarships. We did not raise tuition in any of our programs for our 2013-2014 or 2014-15 academic years and have not raised our tuition for our traditional ground program in six years. End-of-period enrollment increased 13.7% between

December 31, 2014 and 2013, as ground enrollment increased 26.5% and online enrollment increased 11.1% over the prior year. The majority of the ground enrollment growth between years was residential students at our ground traditional campus in Phoenix, Arizona. We attribute the significant growth in our ground enrollment between years to our increasing brand recognition and the value proposition that our ground traditional campus affords to traditional-aged students and their parents. After scholarships our ground traditional students pay for tuition, room, board, and fees, often half to a third of what it costs to attend a private, traditional university in another state and an amount comparable to what it costs to attend the public universities in the state of Arizona as an in-state student. Although our online enrollment continues to grow, as the proportion of traditional colleges and universities providing alternative learning modalities increases, we will face increasing competition for working adult students from such institutions, including those with well-established reputations for excellence. The growth in revenue per student between years is primarily due to our residential traditional campus enrollment growing at a rate higher than our working adult enrollment. When factoring in room, board and fees, the revenue per student is higher for these students than for our working adult students.

Instructional costs and services expenses. Our instructional costs and services expenses for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$288.8 million, an increase of \$34.4 million, or 13.5%, as compared to instructional costs and services expenses of \$254.4 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily due to increases in instructional compensation and related expenses including share-based compensation, faculty compensation, occupancy and depreciation and amortization, dues, fees, subscriptions and other instructional supplies, and other miscellaneous instructional costs and services of \$10.4 million, \$8.6 million, \$8.1 million, \$6.7 million, and \$5.5 million. These increases were partially offset by a decrease in bad debt expense of \$4.9 million which resulted primarily from improved student retention and improved collection efforts. The increase in employee compensation and related expenses and faculty compensation are primarily due to the increase in the number of staff to support the increasing number of students attending the University. In addition, we continue to increase our online full-time faculty between years. The increase in occupancy, depreciation and amortization is the result of us placing into service additional buildings to support the growing number of ground traditional students. The increase in dues, fees, subscriptions and other instructional supplies is primarily due to increased licensing fees related to educational resources and increased food costs associated with a higher number of residential students. Our instructional costs and services expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased by 0.7% to 41.8% for the year ended December 31, 2014, as compared to 42.5% for the year ended December 31, 2013 as bad debt expense decreased to 2.2% of net revenues for the year ended December 31, 2014 from 3.3% of net revenues for the year ended December 31, 2013 as well as our ability to leverage our instructional costs and services across an increasing revenue base, partially offset by an increase in dues, fees, subscriptions and other instructional supplies as a percentage of revenue due to the low profit margin derived on food sales.

Admissions advisory and related expenses. Our admissions advisory and related expenses for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$108.6 million, an increase of \$11.5 million, or 11.8%, as compared to admissions advisory and related expenses of \$97.1 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily due to increases in employee compensation and related expenses, and other admissions advisory expenses of \$10.2 million

and \$1.3 million, respectively. Employee compensation and related expenses increased as a result of increasing the number of enrollment counselors between years. Our admissions advisory and related expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased by 0.5% to 15.7% for the year ended December 31, 2014, from 16.2% for the year ended December 31, 2013 primarily due to our ability to leverage our admissions advisory personnel across an increasing revenue base.

Advertising expenses. Our advertising expenses for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$65.8 million, an increase of \$4.8 million, or 7.9%, as compared to advertising expenses of \$61.0 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily due to increased brand advertising focused on the southwestern United States region. Our advertising expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased by 0.7% to 9.5% for the year ended December 31, 2014, from 10.2% for the year ended December 31, 2013. We spend less on advertising for ground traditional students than for online students and our ground traditional campus enrollment is growing faster than our online student enrollment.

Marketing and promotional expenses. Our marketing and promotional expenses for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$7.4 million, an increase of \$1.8 million, or 31.8%, as compared to marketing and promotional expenses of \$5.6 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily the result of increases in employee compensation and related expenses of \$1.8 million. Our marketing and promotional expenses as a percentage of net revenue increased slightly by 0.2% to 1.1% for the year ended December 31, 2014, from 0.9% for the year ended December 31, 2013.

General and administrative expenses. Our general and administrative expenses for the year ended December 31, 2014 were \$39.6 million, an increase of \$2.7 million, or 7.3%, as compared to general and administrative expenses of \$36.9 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily due to an increase in legal and insurance costs and other general and administrative costs including charitable contributions of \$0.6 million, and \$2.1 million, respectively. During 2014 we increased our contributions to school tuition organizations in lieu of state income taxes to \$2.8 million from \$2.5 million in 2013, and we continue to contribute to charities, our community and city and state public-private partnerships. Our general and administrative expenses as a percentage of net revenue decreased by 0.5% to 5.7% for the year ended December 31, 2014, from 6.2% for the year ended December 31, 2013 due to our ability to leverage our general and administrative expenses across an increasing revenue base.

Table of Contents

Interest expense. Our interest expense for the year ended December 31, 2014 was \$1.8 million, a decrease of \$0.4 million, as compared to interest expense of \$2.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This decrease was primarily due to a decrease in the average balance of our credit facility between periods due to scheduled monthly principal payments. Our interest expense decreased as a percentage of net revenue by 0.1% to 0.3% for the year ended December 31, 2014, from 0.4% for the year ended December 31, 2013.

Interest income and other. Our interest income and other for the year ended December 31, 2014 was \$0.7 million, a decrease of \$3.2 million, as compared to interest income and other of \$3.9 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. The decrease was primarily due to late penalty income and default interest earned on a settlement of a note receivable in 2013.

Income tax expense. Income tax expense for the year ended December 31, 2014 was \$68.2 million, an increase of \$12.0 million from \$56.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2013. This increase was primarily attributable to increased income before income taxes. Our effective tax rate was 38.0% and 38.8% for the year ended December 31, 2014 and 2013, respectively. Our effective tax rate in 2014 is lower than the prior year due primarily to state tax rate changes that began a gradual phase-in process during the first quarter of 2014.

Net income. Our net income for the year ended December 31, 2014 was \$111.5 million, an increase of \$22.8 million, as compared to \$88.7 million for the year ended December 31, 2013, due to the factors discussed above.

Seasonality

Our net revenue and operating results normally fluctuate as a result of seasonal variations in our business, principally due to changes in enrollment. Student population varies as a result of new enrollments, graduations, and student attrition. The majority of our traditional ground students do not attend courses during the summer months (May through August), which affects our results for our second and third fiscal quarters. Since a significant amount of our campus costs are fixed, the lower revenue resulting from the decreased ground student enrollment has historically contributed to lower operating margins during those periods. We intend to continue to increase the relative proportion of our students that are ground traditional students. Thus, we expect this summer effect to become more pronounced in future years. Partially offsetting this summer effect in the third quarter has been the sequential quarterly increase in enrollments that has occurred as a result of the traditional fall school start. This increase in enrollments also has occurred in the first quarter, corresponding to calendar year matriculation. In addition, we typically experience higher net revenue in the fourth quarter due to its overlap with the semester encompassing the traditional fall school start and in the first quarter due to its overlap with the first semester of the calendar year. A portion of our expenses do not vary proportionately with these fluctuations in net revenue, resulting in higher operating income in the first and fourth quarters relative to other quarters. We expect quarterly fluctuation in operating results to continue as a result of these seasonal patterns.

Liquidity, Capital Resources, and Financial Position

Liquidity. During 2015, we financed our operating activities and capital expenditures primarily through cash provided by operating activities. Our unrestricted cash, cash equivalents and investments were \$106.4 million at December 31, 2015 and our restricted cash, cash equivalents and investments were \$75.4 million. In December 2012, we entered into a new credit agreement, which increased our term loan to \$100 million with a maturity date of December 2019. Additionally, this facility, as amended in January 2016, provides a revolving line of credit in the amount of \$150 million through December 2017 to be utilized for working capital, capital expenditures and other general corporate purposes. Indebtedness under the credit facility is secured by our assets and is guaranteed by certain of our subsidiaries. No amounts were drawn on the revolver as of December 31, 2015.

In order to accommodate the continued growth of the traditional ground population, the University completed four additional dormitories, an additional classroom building for the College of Science, Engineering and Technology and a third parking structure prior to the 2015/2016 school year and has recently started construction on three more apartment style residence halls, a 170,000 square foot classroom building for its College of Science, Engineering and Technology, a student service center, and a fourth parking structure. In addition, the University acquired 25 acres of land adjacent to or near campus for future development. Included in off-site development during 2015 is \$10.0 million we spent to revitalize what was formerly known as the Maryvale Golf Course under a partnership agreement with the City of Phoenix. The golf course is now known as Grand Canyon University Championship golf course. Also in late fall 2015 we commenced construction on an office building and a parking garage that is in close proximity to our ground traditional campus. Employees that work in two leased office buildings in the Phoenix area will be consolidated into this new building when it is completed in late 2016. Although the University is funding the construction of the building and parking garage, the University is marketing these, along with a recently refurbished office building in the same development, as part of a sale-leaseback transaction. We anticipate capital expenditures in 2016 for the campus projects described above as well as for technology enhancements and equipment for our growing employee base, but excluding the offsite office building and parking garage, will be approximately \$180 million.

Table of Contents

Based on our current level of operations and anticipated growth, we believe that our cash flow from operations and other sources of liquidity, including cash, and cash equivalents, will provide adequate funds for ongoing operations, planned capital expenditures, and working capital requirements for at least the next 24 months.

Share Repurchase Program

Our Board of Directors has authorized the University to repurchase up to \$75 million in aggregate of common stock, from time to time, depending on market conditions and other considerations. The current expiration date on the repurchase authorization by our Board of Directors is September 30, 2016. Repurchases occur at the University's discretion.

Under our share purchase authorization, we may purchase shares in the open market or in privately negotiated transactions, pursuant to the applicable Securities and Exchange Commission Rules. The amount and timing of future share repurchases, if any, will be made as market and business conditions warrant.

Since the approval of the initial share repurchase plan, the University has purchased 3.1 million shares of common stock at an aggregate cost of \$60.4 million, which includes 288,397 shares of common stock at an aggregate cost of \$11.3 million during the year ended December 31, 2015. At December 31, 2015, there remains \$14.6 million available under our current share repurchase authorization.

Cash Flows

Operating Activities. Net cash provided by operating activities for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013 was \$173.9 million, \$167.0 million and \$118.4 million, respectively. Cash provided by operations in 2015, 2014 and 2013 resulted from our net income plus non-cash charges for provision for bad debts, depreciation and amortization, timing of income tax and employee related payments and student deposits and changes in other working capital.

Investing Activities. Net cash used in investing activities was \$200.9 million, \$161.0 million, and \$172.5 million for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013, respectively. Our cash used in investing activities is primarily related to the purchase of short-term investments and property and equipment, partially offset by proceeds from the sale or maturity of short-term investments and in 2013 proceeds received from the settlement of a note receivable. Proceeds from investment, net of purchases of short-term investments, was \$17.4 million and \$7.6 million during the year ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively. Purchases of short-term investments, net of proceeds of these investments, was \$108.4 million during the year ended December 31, 2013. Capital expenditures were \$204.7 million, \$168.7 million and \$78.9 million for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013, respectively. In 2015, in order to accommodate the continued growth of our traditional ground population, we completed four additional dormitories, a classroom building for our College of Science, Technology and Engineering, and a third parking structure prior to the 2015/2016 school year and have recently started construction on three more apartment style residence halls, a 170,000 square foot classroom building for our College of Science, Engineering and Technology, a student service center, and a fourth parking structure, as well as land purchases adjacent to or near our Phoenix campus, and purchases of computer equipment, other internal use software projects and furniture and equipment to support our increasing employee headcount. Included in off-site development during 2015 is \$10.0 million we spent to revitalize what was formerly known as the Maryvale Golf Course under a partnership agreement with the City of Phoenix. The golf course is now known as Grand Canyon University Championship golf course. Also, in late 2015, we commenced construction on an off-site office building and parking garage that is in close proximity to our ground traditional campus. Employees that work in two leased office buildings in the Phoenix area will be consolidated into this new building when it is expected to be completed in late 2016. In 2014, capital expenditures primarily consisted of ground campus building projects such as the construction of an additional classroom building and parking garage,

additional residence halls that accommodate another 1,600 students and land purchases adjacent to our Phoenix campus to support our growing traditional student enrollment as well as purchases of computer equipment, other internal use software projects and furniture and equipment to support our increasing employee headcount. In 2013, capital expenditures primarily consisted of ground campus building projects including the construction costs for two additional dormitories and an expansion of our student union, which includes additional food services and library space to support our growing traditional student enrollment as well as purchases of computer equipment, other internal use software projects and furniture and equipment to support our increasing employee headcount. In addition, during 2013 we spent \$14.5 million to refurbish an off-site building that is being used as office space for our employees.

Financing Activities. Net cash used in financing activities was \$15.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2015. Net cash provided by financing activities was \$3.4 million and \$4.8 million for the years ended December 31, 2014 and 2013, respectively. During 2015, \$11.3 million was used to purchase treasury stock in accordance with the University's share repurchase program and \$4.3 million was used to purchase common shares withheld in lieu of income taxes resulting from restricted share awards while principal payments on notes payable and capital leases totaled \$6.8 million, partially offset by proceeds from the exercise of stock options of \$3.5 million and excess tax benefits from share-based compensation of \$3.6 million. During 2014, proceeds from the exercise of stock options of \$7.8 million and excess tax benefits from share-based compensation of \$7.6 million were partially offset by \$3.7 million used to purchase common shares withheld in lieu of income taxes resulting from restricted share awards and \$1.6 million used to purchase treasury stock in accordance with the University's share repurchase program and principal payments on notes payable and capital leases totaling \$6.7 million. During 2013, proceeds from the exercise of stock options of \$16.3 million and excess tax benefits from share-based compensation of \$4.5 million were partially offset by \$9.3 million used to purchase treasury stock in accordance with the University's share repurchase program and principal payments on notes payable and capital leases totaling \$6.7 million.

Table of Contents**Contractual Obligations**

The following table sets forth, as of December 31, 2015, the aggregate amounts of our significant contractual obligations and commitments with definitive payment terms due in each of the periods presented (in millions):

| | Total | Payments Due by Period | | | |
|--|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|
| | | Less than 1 Year | 2-3 Years | 4-5 Years | More than 5 Years |
| Long term notes payable ⁽¹⁾ | \$ 79.9 | \$ 6.6 | \$ 13.3 | \$ 60.0 | \$ 0.0 |
| Capital lease obligations ⁽²⁾ | 1.5 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| Purchase obligations ⁽³⁾ | 209.5 | 205.1 | 2.2 | 1.2 | 1.0 |
| Operating lease obligations ⁽⁴⁾ | 20.9 | 5.7 | 7.3 | 6.1 | 1.8 |
| Total contractual obligations | \$ 311.8 | \$ 218.1 | \$ 23.4 | \$ 67.5 | \$ 2.8 |

- (1) See Note 6, Notes Payable and Other Noncurrent Liabilities, to our consolidated financial statements, included in Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*, for a discussion of our long term notes payable and other obligations.
- (2) See Note 7, Capital Lease Obligations, to our consolidated financial statements, included in Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*, for a discussion of our capital lease obligations.
- (3) Represents unconditional purchase obligations and other obligations. Amount consists primarily of construction agreements for construction in progress on our ground traditional campus and an off-site office building and parking garage.
- (4) See Note 8, Commitments and Contingencies, to our consolidated financial statements, included in Item 8, *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*, for a discussion of our operating lease obligations.

Off-Balance Sheet Arrangements

We do not have any off-balance sheet arrangements that have had or are reasonably likely to have a material current or future effect on our financial condition, changes in financial condition, revenues or expenses, results of operations, liquidity, capital expenditures, or capital resources.

Non-GAAP Discussion

In addition to our GAAP results, we use Adjusted EBITDA as a supplemental measure of our operating performance and as part of our compensation determinations. Adjusted EBITDA is not required by or presented in accordance with GAAP and should not be considered as an alternative to net income, operating income, or any other performance measure derived in accordance with GAAP, or as an alternative to cash flow from operating activities or as a measure of our liquidity. See Item 6, *Selected Consolidated Financial and Other Data*, for a discussion of our Adjusted EBITDA computation and reconciliation.

Recent Accounting Pronouncements

See Note 2, Summary of Significant Accounting Policies, in Item 8, Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data

Item 7A. Quantitative and Qualitative Disclosures about Market Risk

Impact of inflation. We believe that inflation has not had a material impact on our results of operations for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, or 2013. There can be no assurance that future inflation will not have an adverse impact on our operating results and financial condition.

Table of Contents

Market risk. On February 27, 2013 we entered into an interest rate corridor to manage our 30-day LIBOR interest exposure from variable rate debt, which matures in December 2019. The corridor instrument, which hedges variable interest rate risk starting March 1, 2013 through December 20, 2019 with a notional amount of \$80.0 million as of December 31, 2015, permits us to hedge our interest rate risk at several thresholds. Under this arrangement, in addition to the credit spread, we will pay variable interest rates based on the 30-day LIBOR rates monthly until that index reaches 1.5%. If 30-day LIBOR is equal to 1.5% through 3.0%, we will continue to pay 1.5%. If the 30-day LIBOR exceeds 3.0%, we will pay actual 30-day LIBOR less 1.5%.

Except with respect to the foregoing, we have no derivative financial instruments or derivative commodity instruments. We invest cash in excess of current operating requirements in short term certificates of deposit and money market instruments, municipal bond portfolios, or municipal mutual funds at multiple financial institutions.

Interest rate risk. We manage interest rate risk through the instruments noted above and by investing excess funds in cash equivalents, BB or higher rated municipal bonds and municipal mutual funds bearing variable interest rates, which are tied to various market indices or individual bond coupon rates. Our future investment income may fall short of expectations due to changes in interest rates or we may suffer losses in principal if we are forced to sell securities before their maturity date that have declined in market value due to changes in interest rates. At December 31, 2015, a 10% increase or decrease in interest rates would not have a material impact on our future earnings, fair values, or cash flows. For information regarding our variable rate notes payable, see *Market risk* above.

Table of Contents

Item 8. *Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Data*

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| <u>Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm</u> | 60 |
| <u>Consolidated Balance Sheets as of December 31, 2015 and 2014</u> | 61 |
| <u>Consolidated Income Statements for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 62 |
| <u>Consolidated Statements of Comprehensive Income for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 63 |
| <u>Consolidated Statements of Stockholders' Equity for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 64 |
| <u>Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 65 |
| <u>Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements</u> | 66 |

Table of Contents

Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm

The Board of Directors and Stockholders

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.:

We have audited the accompanying consolidated balance sheets of Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and subsidiaries (the Company) as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, and the related consolidated statements of income, comprehensive income, stockholders' equity, and cash flows for each of the years in the three-year period ended December 31, 2015. These consolidated financial statements are the responsibility of the Company's management. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these consolidated financial statements based on our audits.

We conducted our audits in accordance with the standards of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (United States). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audits to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. An audit includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. An audit also includes assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall financial statement presentation. We believe that our audits provide a reasonable basis for our opinion.

In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and subsidiaries as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, and the results of their operations and their cash flows for each of the years in the three-year period ended December 31, 2015, in conformity with U.S. generally accepted accounting principles.

We also have audited, in accordance with the standards of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (United States), Grand Canyon Education, Inc.'s internal control over financial reporting as of December 31, 2015, based on criteria established in *Internal Control - Integrated Framework (2013)* issued by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, and our report dated February 17, 2016 expressed an unqualified opinion on the effectiveness of the Company's internal control over financial reporting.

/s/ KPMG LLP

Phoenix, Arizona

February 17, 2016

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Consolidated Balance Sheets**

| (In thousands, except par value) | As of December 31, | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 |
| ASSETS: | | |
| Current assets | | |
| Cash and cash equivalents | \$ 23,036 | \$ 65,238 |
| Restricted cash, cash equivalents and investments | 75,384 | 67,840 |
| Investments | 83,364 | 100,784 |
| Accounts receivable, net | 8,298 | 7,605 |
| Income taxes receivable | 3,952 | 1 |
| Deferred income taxes | 6,448 | 6,149 |
| Other current assets | 20,863 | 19,428 |
| Total current assets | 221,345 | 267,045 |
| Property and equipment, net | 667,483 | 478,170 |
| Prepaid royalties | 3,355 | 3,650 |
| Goodwill | 2,941 | 2,941 |
| Other assets | 3,306 | 3,907 |
| Total assets | \$ 898,430 | \$ 755,713 |
| LIABILITIES AND STOCKHOLDERS' EQUITY: | | |
| Current liabilities | | |
| Accounts payable | \$ 34,149 | \$ 22,715 |
| Accrued compensation and benefits | 17,895 | 23,995 |
| Accrued liabilities | 13,846 | 13,533 |
| Income taxes payable | 29 | 4,906 |
| Student deposits | 76,742 | 69,584 |
| Deferred revenue | 37,876 | 36,868 |
| Due to related parties | 675 | 403 |
| Current portion of capital lease obligations | 697 | 91 |
| Current portion of notes payable | 6,625 | 6,616 |
| Total current liabilities | 188,534 | 178,711 |
| Capital lease obligations, less current portion | 788 | 406 |
| Other noncurrent liabilities | 4,302 | 4,513 |
| Deferred income taxes, non-current | 21,303 | 15,974 |
| Notes payable, less current portion | 73,252 | 79,877 |
| Total liabilities | 288,179 | 279,481 |
| Commitments and contingencies | | |
| Stockholders' equity | | |

Edgar Filing: Grand Canyon Education, Inc. - Form 10-K

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| Preferred stock, \$0.01 par value, 10,000 shares authorized; 0 shares issued and outstanding at December 31, 2015 and 2014 | | |
| Common stock, \$0.01 par value, 100,000 shares authorized; 50,288 and 49,746 shares issued and 46,877 and 46,744 shares outstanding at December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively | 503 | 497 |
| Treasury stock, at cost, 3,411 and 3,002 shares of common stock at December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively | (69,332) | (53,770) |
| Additional paid-in capital | 177,167 | 158,549 |
| Accumulated other comprehensive loss | (489) | (35) |
| Retained earnings | 502,402 | 370,991 |
| Total stockholders equity | 610,251 | 476,232 |
| Total liabilities and stockholders equity | \$ 898,430 | \$ 755,713 |

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these consolidated financial statements.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.
Consolidated Income Statements

| (In thousands, except per share amounts) | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Net revenue | \$ 778,200 | \$ 691,055 | \$ 598,335 |
| Costs and expenses: | | | |
| Instructional costs and services | 329,651 | 288,791 | 254,419 |
| Admissions advisory and related, including \$1,575 in 2015; \$2,974 in 2014; and \$3,412 in 2013, respectively, to related parties | 112,572 | 108,567 | 97,077 |
| Advertising | 76,229 | 65,808 | 60,985 |
| Marketing and promotional | 7,287 | 7,439 | 5,644 |
| General and administrative | 42,100 | 39,635 | 36,934 |
| Total costs and expenses | 567,839 | 510,240 | 455,059 |
| Operating income | 210,361 | 180,815 | 143,276 |
| Interest expense | (1,248) | (1,801) | (2,244) |
| Interest income and other | (106) | 684 | 3,863 |
| Income before income taxes | 209,007 | 179,698 | 144,895 |
| Income tax expense | 77,596 | 68,232 | 56,184 |
| Net income | \$ 131,411 | \$ 111,466 | \$ 88,711 |
| Earnings per share: | | | |
| Basic income per share | \$ 2.86 | \$ 2.45 | \$ 1.98 |
| Diluted income per share | \$ 2.78 | \$ 2.37 | \$ 1.92 |
| Basic weighted average shares outstanding | 45,975 | 45,538 | 44,731 |
| Diluted weighted average shares outstanding | 47,281 | 47,006 | 46,131 |

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these consolidated financial statements.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Consolidated Statements of Comprehensive Income**

| (In thousands) | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Net income | \$ 131,411 | \$ 111,466 | \$ 88,711 |
| Other comprehensive income (loss), net of tax: | | | |
| Unrealized (losses) gains on hedging derivatives, net of taxes of \$230, \$186, and \$382 for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, respectively | (372) | (300) | 565 |
| Unrealized (losses) gains on available for sale securities, net of taxes of \$50, \$60 and \$11 for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, respectively | (82) | (93) | 16 |
| Comprehensive income | \$ 130,957 | \$ 111,073 | \$ 89,292 |

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these consolidated financial statements.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Consolidated Statements of Stockholders Equity****(In thousands)**

| | Common Stock | | Treasury Stock | | Additional Paid-in Capital | Accumulated Other Comprehensive Income (Loss) | Retained Earnings | Total |
|--|--------------|--------|----------------|------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------------|------------|
| | Shares | Amount | Shares | Amount | | | | |
| | Balance at | | | | | | | |
| December 31, 2012 | 47,136 | \$ 471 | 2,420 | \$(39,136) | \$ 102,133 | \$ (223) | \$ 170,814 | \$ 234,059 |
| Comprehensive income | | | | | | 581 | 88,711 | 89,292 |
| Common stock purchased for treasury | | | 340 | (8,323) | | | | (8,323) |
| Share-based compensation | 594 | 6 | 40 | (973) | 9,917 | | | 8,950 |
| Restricted shares forfeited | | | 45 | | | | | |
| Exercise of stock options | 1,160 | 12 | | | 16,266 | | | 16,278 |
| Excess tax benefits | | | | | 4,588 | | | 4,588 |
| Balance at | | | | | | | | |
| December 31, 2013 | 48,890 | 489 | 2,845 | (48,432) | 132,904 | 358 | 259,525 | 344,844 |
| Comprehensive income | | | | | | (393) | 111,466 | 111,073 |
| Common stock purchased for treasury | | | 38 | (1,676) | | | | (1,676) |
| Share-based compensation | 317 | 3 | 77 | (3,662) | 9,941 | | | 6,282 |
| Restricted shares forfeited | | | 42 | | | | | |
| Exercise of stock options | 539 | 5 | | | 7,820 | | | 7,825 |
| Excess tax benefits | | | | | 7,884 | | | 7,884 |
| Balance at | | | | | | | | |
| December 31, 2014 | 49,746 | 497 | 3,002 | (53,770) | 158,549 | (35) | 370,991 | 476,232 |
| Comprehensive income | | | | | | (454) | 131,411 | 130,957 |
| Common stock purchased for treasury | | | 288 | (11,279) | | | | (11,279) |
| Share-based compensation | 324 | 3 | 94 | (4,283) | 11,269 | | | 6,989 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|------------|------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Restricted shares forfeited | | | 27 | | | | | |
| Exercise of stock options | 218 | 3 | | 3,486 | | | | 3,489 |
| Excess tax benefits | | | | 3,863 | | | | 3,863 |
| Balance at December 31, 2015 | 50,288 | \$ 503 | 3,411 | \$(69,332) | \$ 177,167 | \$ (489) | \$ 502,402 | \$ 610,251 |

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these consolidated financial statements.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows**

| (In thousands) | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Cash flows provided by operating activities: | | | |
| Net income | \$ 131,411 | \$ 111,466 | \$ 88,711 |
| Adjustments to reconcile net income to net cash provided by operating activities: | | | |
| Share-based compensation | 11,257 | 9,945 | 9,936 |
| Excess tax benefits from share-based compensation | (3,636) | (7,637) | (4,469) |
| Provision for bad debts | 16,620 | 15,045 | 19,897 |
| Depreciation and amortization | 35,675 | 29,473 | 25,437 |
| Loss (gain) on note receivable | 958 | | (3,646) |
| Loss on asset disposal and fixed asset impairments | 2,755 | 2,475 | |
| Deferred income taxes | 4,576 | 2,651 | 5,472 |
| Prepaid royalty impairment | | 966 | |
| Changes in assets and liabilities: | | | |
| Restricted cash, cash equivalents and investments | (7,544) | (3,472) | (8,404) |
| Accounts receivable | (17,313) | (15,433) | (19,163) |
| Prepaid expenses and other | (2,351) | 81 | (7,316) |
| Due to/from related parties | 272 | (51) | (69) |
| Accounts payable | 5,002 | (2,448) | 8,563 |
| Accrued liabilities | (5,772) | 2,991 | (1,756) |
| Income taxes receivable/payable | (4,965) | 16,378 | (7,769) |
| Deferred rent | (1,211) | (2,298) | (204) |
| Deferred revenue | 1,008 | 4,052 | 4,202 |
| Student deposits | 7,158 | 2,812 | 9,027 |
| Net cash provided by operating activities | 173,900 | 166,996 | 118,449 |
| Cash flows used in investing activities: | | | |
| Capital expenditures | (204,718) | (168,646) | (78,948) |
| Purchases of land, building and golf course improvements related to off-site development | (13,583) | | (14,542) |
| Proceeds received from note receivable | | | 29,187 |
| Restricted funds held for derivative collateral and legal matter | | | 225 |
| Purchases of investments | (48,122) | (114,919) | (168,953) |
| Proceeds from sale or maturity of investments | 65,542 | 122,555 | 60,533 |
| Net cash used in investing activities | (200,881) | (161,010) | (172,498) |
| Cash flows (used in) provided by financing activities: | | | |
| Principal payments on notes payable and capital lease obligations | (6,784) | (6,696) | (6,689) |
| | (15,562) | (5,338) | (9,296) |

Repurchase of common shares including shares withheld in lieu of income taxes

| | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Net proceeds from exercise of stock options | 3,489 | 7,825 | 16,278 |
| Excess tax benefits from share-based compensation | 3,636 | 7,637 | 4,469 |
| Net cash (used in) provided by financing activities | (15,221) | 3,428 | 4,762 |
| Net (decrease) increase in cash and cash equivalents | (42,202) | 9,414 | (49,287) |
| Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of year | 65,238 | 55,824 | 105,111 |
| Cash and cash equivalents, end of year | \$ 23,036 | \$ 65,238 | \$ 55,824 |

Supplemental disclosure of cash flow information

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Cash paid during the year for interest | \$ 1,244 | \$ 1,793 | \$ 2,176 |
| Cash paid during the year for income taxes | \$ 75,587 | \$ 48,835 | \$ 59,892 |
| Cash received for income tax refunds | \$ 4 | \$ 385 | \$ 728 |

Supplemental disclosure of non-cash investing and financing activities

| | | | |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|
| Purchases of property and equipment included in accounts payable | \$ 13,277 | \$ 5,845 | \$ 1,494 |
| Purchases of equipment through capital lease obligations | \$ 1,156 | \$ | \$ |
| Shortfall tax expense from share-based compensation | \$ 26 | \$ 16 | \$ 209 |
| Tax benefit of Spirit warrant intangible | \$ 253 | \$ 260 | \$ 267 |

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these consolidated financial statements.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

1. Nature of Business

Grand Canyon Education, Inc. (together with its subsidiaries, the University) was formed in Delaware in November 2003 as a limited liability company, under the name Significant Education, LLC, for the purpose of acquiring the assets of Grand Canyon University from a non-profit foundation on February 2, 2004. On August 24, 2005, the University converted from a limited liability company to a corporation and changed its name to Significant Education, Inc. On May 9, 2008, the University changed its name to Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

The University is a comprehensive regionally accredited university that offers approximately 200 graduate and undergraduate degree programs and certificates across eight colleges both online and on ground at our 200+ acre campus in Phoenix, Arizona, and at facilities we lease and at facilities owned by third party employers. Our undergraduate programs are designed to be innovative and to meet the future needs of employers, while providing students with the needed critical thinking and effective communication skills developed through a Christian, liberal arts foundation. We offer master and doctoral degrees in contemporary fields that are designed to provide students with the capacity for transformational leadership in their chosen industry, emphasizing the immediate relevance of theory, application, and evaluation to promote personal and organizational change. The University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. The University's wholly owned subsidiaries are primarily used to facilitate expansion of the University campus.

2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Principles of Consolidation

The consolidated financial statements include the accounts of Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and its wholly owned subsidiaries. Intercompany transactions have been eliminated in consolidation.

Use of Estimates

The preparation of financial statements in conformity with U.S. generally accepted accounting principles requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts in the consolidated financial statements and accompanying notes. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

Cash and Cash Equivalents

The University invests a portion of its cash in excess of current operating requirements in short term certificates of deposit and money market instruments. The University considers all highly liquid investments with maturities of three months or less at the time of purchase to be cash equivalents.

Restricted Cash, Cash Equivalents and Investments

A significant portion of the University's revenue is received from students who participate in government financial aid assistance programs. Restricted cash, cash equivalents and investments primarily represent amounts received from the

federal and state governments under various student aid grant and loan programs, such as Title IV. The University receives these funds subsequent to the completion of the authorization and disbursement process and holds them for the benefit of the student. The U.S. Department of Education (Department of Education) requires Title IV funds collected in advance of student billings to be restricted until the course begins. The University records all of these amounts as a current asset in restricted cash, cash equivalents and investments. The majority of these funds remain as restricted for an average of 60 to 90 days from the date of receipt.

Investments

The University considers its investments in municipal bond, mutual funds and municipal securities as available-for-sale securities. Available-for-sale securities are carried at fair value, determined using Level 1 and Level 2 of the hierarchy of valuation inputs, with the use of quoted market prices and inputs other than quoted prices that are observable for the assets, with unrealized gains and losses, net of tax, reported as a separate component of other comprehensive income. Unrealized losses considered to be other-than-temporary are recognized currently in earnings. Amortization of premiums, accretion of discounts, interest and dividend income and realized gains and losses are included in interest and other income.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)*****Note Receivable***

The University purchased a note receivable from a financial institution at fair market value in the fourth quarter of 2012 for \$27,000. The note bore interest at 11%, which represented the 6% rate of the loan plus the 5% default rate. The principal and most of the interest due on the note was paid in March 2013, resulting in the full return on investment of the note receivable and an additional gain in interest income and other income of \$2,187 on the loan. However, the borrower has disputed certain amounts remaining due under the note agreement, including default interest in the amount of \$432, a late payment liquidated damage in the amount of \$1,392, and a statutory trustee's fee in the amount of \$139. The funds disputed by the borrower, plus interest thereon, were deposited into an escrow account with the clerk of the Maricopa County Superior Court pending resolution of the disputed issues. In the third quarter of 2013, the court ruled in favor of the University with respect to the late payment liquidated damage and default interest accrued thereon. Accordingly, the University recorded interest and other income of \$1,459 for the year ended December 31, 2013. The court ordered the late payment liquidated damage funds and interest thereon to be released to the University on October 28, 2013 unless prior to said date, borrower filed with the court a formal notice of appeal and simultaneously deposited an additional \$344 into escrow with the clerk of the court representing continued interest accruing on the late payment liquidated damage pending an appeal. On October 28, 2013 borrower deposited with the clerk of the court the required cash bond in the amount of \$344 and filed its formal notice of appeal. On January 29, 2015, the court ruled in favor of the University with respect to the remaining default interest and interest thereon. In January 2016, the Arizona Court of Appeals issued a ruling reversing the Maricopa County Superior Court's award of the \$1,392 late payment liquidated damage and the Maricopa County Superior Court released to us the remaining default interest and other fees due to the University totaling \$501. Although, the University intends to appeal the late payment penalty decision to the Arizona Supreme Court, the University reversed other income of \$958 for the year ended December 31, 2015 due to the uncertain outcome.

Property and Equipment

Property and equipment are recorded at cost less accumulated depreciation. Depreciation is computed using the straight-line method. Normal repairs and maintenance are expensed as incurred. Expenditures that materially extend the useful life of an asset are capitalized. Construction in progress represents items not yet placed in service and are not depreciated. Internally developed software represents qualifying salary and consulting costs for time spent on developing internal use software and is included in construction in progress until its completion. The University capitalizes interest using its interest rates on the specific borrowings used to finance the improvements, which approximated 1.9% in 2015, 2014, and 2013. Interest cost capitalized and incurred in the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013 are as follows:

| | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Interest incurred | \$ 1,962 | \$ 2,180 | \$ 2,626 |

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Interest capitalized | 714 | 379 | 382 |
| Interest expense | \$ 1,248 | \$ 1,801 | \$ 2,244 |

Depreciation is provided using the straight-line method over the estimated useful lives of the assets. Furniture and fixtures, computer equipment, and vehicles generally have estimated useful lives of ten, four, and five years, respectively. Leasehold improvements are depreciated over the shorter of their lease term or their useful life. Land improvements and buildings are depreciated over lives ranging from 10 to 40 years.

Leases

The University enters into various lease agreements in conducting its business. At the inception of each lease, the University evaluates the lease agreement to determine whether the lease is an operating or capital lease. In addition, many of the lease agreements contain renewal options and tenant improvement allowances. When such items are included in a lease agreement, the University records a deferred liability on the balance sheet and records the rent expense evenly over the term of the lease. Leasehold improvements are included as investing activities and are included as additions to property, plant and equipment. For leases with renewal options, the University records rent expense and amortizes the leasehold improvement on a straight-line basis over the initial non-cancelable lease term unless it intends to exercise the renewal option. Once it extends the renewal option, the University amortizes any tenant improvement allowances over the extended lease period as well as the leasehold improvement asset (unless the extended lease term is longer than the economic life of the asset). The University expenses any additional payments under its operating leases for taxes, insurance or other operating expenses as incurred.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

Other Assets

During 2010, the University entered into an agreement with an affiliated entity to develop a new learning management system for use by the University. Through this agreement, the University prepaid perpetual license fees, acquired source code rights for the software developed, and prepaid maintenance and service fees for at least the first seven years of use for an aggregate amount of \$4,900, which was paid in full as of December 31, 2011. The University commenced utilization of this software in October 2011. Included in current other assets is the amount that will be amortized in the next twelve month cycle for maintenance and service fees and included in property and equipment is the amount that will be amortized over fifteen years for the perpetual licenses.

Long-Lived Assets

The University evaluates the recoverability of its long-lived assets for impairment, other than goodwill, whenever events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying amount of an asset may not be recoverable. Recoverability of assets to be held and used is measured by a comparison of the carrying amount of an asset to undiscounted future net cash flows expected to be generated by the assets. If such assets are considered to be impaired, the impairment to be recognized is measured by the amount by which the carrying amount of the assets exceeds the fair value of the assets.

Prepaid Royalties

In connection with the February 2004 acquisition of the assets of Grand Canyon University from a non-profit foundation, the University entered into a royalty fee arrangement with the former owner in which the University agreed to pay a stated percentage of cash revenue generated by its online programs. The University settled all future royalty obligations with the former owner in April 2008 when it finalized an agreement to pay \$22,500 to the former owner. Of this payment \$5,920 was considered as settlement of the future royalty payment obligation and is included in the accompanying balance sheet as a component of Prepaid Royalty and is being amortized over a period of 20 years.

In addition, in June 2004, the University entered into a license agreement relating to the University's use of the Ken Blanchard name for its College of Business. Under the terms of that agreement the University agreed to pay Blanchard a royalty generated on net tuition from certain programs in the University's College of Business and to issue Blanchard shares of common stock with the actual number of shares issued to be contingent upon the University's achievement of stated enrollment levels in its College of Business during the term of the agreement. The fair value of the shares issued to Blanchard as part of the license agreement of \$3,394 was determined at the date it became probable that shares would then be earned and then adjusted until the date the shares were vested. During 2014, the University reached an agreement to cease the use of the Ken Blanchard name for its College of Business when it renamed the school the Colangelo School of Business; accordingly the remaining balance of the prepaid royalty was expensed during the year ended December 31, 2014.

Goodwill

Goodwill represents the excess of the cost over the fair market value of net assets acquired, including identified intangible assets. Goodwill is tested annually or more frequently if circumstances indicate potential impairment. The Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) has issued guidance that permits an entity to first assess qualitative factors to determine whether it is necessary to perform the two-step quantitative goodwill impairment test. The University performed its annual goodwill impairment test, by performing a qualitative assessment. Following this assessment, the University determined that it is more likely than not that its fair value exceeds its carrying amount.

Share-Based Compensation

The University measures and recognizes compensation expense for share-based payment awards made to employees, consultants and directors, including employee stock options and restricted stock awards. The University calculates the fair value of share-based awards on the date of grant. The University calculates the fair value of share-based awards to consultants on the date of vesting. The University amortizes the share-based compensation expense over the period that the awards are expected to vest, net of estimated forfeiture rates. If the actual forfeitures differ from management estimates, adjustments to compensation expense are recorded. The University reports cash flows resulting from tax deductions in excess of the compensation cost realized for those options (excess tax benefits) as financing cash flows. The University reports cash flows resulting from tax deductions that are less than the compensation cost realized for those option (tax shortfalls) as a noncash transaction in the consolidated statement of cash flows.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

For stock options, the University uses the Black-Scholes-Merton option pricing model to estimate fair value. The option pricing model requires the University to estimate certain key assumptions such as expected life, volatility, risk free interest rates, and dividend yield to determine the fair value of share-based awards, based on historical information and management judgment. The assumptions used in calculating the fair value of stock-based awards represent the University's best estimates, but these estimates involve inherent uncertainties and the application of management judgment. The fair value of the University's restricted stock awards is based on the market price of its common stock on the date of grant.

Derivatives and Hedging

Derivative financial instruments are recorded on the balance sheet as assets or liabilities and re-measured at fair value at each reporting date. For derivatives designated as cash flow hedges, the effective portion of the gain or loss on the derivative is reported as a component of other comprehensive income and reclassified into earnings in the same period or period during which the hedged transaction affects earnings. Gains and losses on the derivative representing either hedge ineffectiveness or hedge components excluded from the assessment of effectiveness are recognized in current earnings.

Derivative financial instruments enable the University to manage its exposure to interest rate risk. The University does not engage in any derivative instrument trading activity. Credit risk associated with the University's derivatives is limited to the risk that a derivative counterparty will not perform in accordance with the terms of the contract. Exposure to counterparty credit risk is considered low because these agreements have been entered into with institutions with Aa or higher credit ratings, and they are expected to perform fully under the terms of the agreements.

Fair Value of Financial Instruments

The carrying value of cash and cash equivalents, accounts receivable, note receivable, accounts payable, accrued compensation and benefits and accrued liabilities approximate their fair value based on the liquidity or the short-term maturities of these instruments. The carrying value of notes payable approximate fair value based on its variable rate index. The carrying value of other notes payable and capital lease obligations approximate fair value based upon market interest rates available to the University for debt of similar risk and maturities. Derivative financial instruments are carried at fair value, determined using Level 2 of the hierarchy of valuation inputs as defined in the FASB Accounting Standards Codification (Codification), with the use of inputs other than quoted prices that are observable for the asset or liability. See Note 9, Derivative Instruments.

The fair value of investments, primarily municipal securities, including municipal bond portfolios and a mutual fund holding municipal securities, were determined using Level 1 and Level 2 of the hierarchy of valuation inputs, with the use of quoted market prices and inputs other than quoted prices that are observable for the assets. The unit of account used for valuation is the individual underlying security. The municipal securities are comprised of city and county bonds related to schools, water and sewer, utilities, transportation, healthcare and housing. Because these securities are held by the University as investments, assessment of non-performance risk is not applicable as such considerations

are only applicable in evaluating the fair value measurements for liabilities.

The fair value of the prepaid royalty asset relating to the settlement of future royalty payment obligations to the former owner was determined using an income approach, based on management's forecasts of revenue to be generated through its online education program using Level 3 of the hierarchy of valuation inputs. The rate utilized to discount net cash flows to their present values was 35%. This discount rate was determined after consideration of the University's weighted average cost of capital giving effect to estimates of the University's risk-free rate, beta coefficient, equity risk premium, small size risk premium, and company-specific risk premium.

Income Taxes

The University accounts for income taxes payable or refundable for the current year and deferred tax assets and liabilities for future tax consequences of events that have been recognized in the University's consolidated financial statements or tax returns. Deferred tax assets and liabilities are measured using enacted tax rates in effect for the year in which the temporary differences are expected to be realized.

The University applies a more-likely-than-not threshold for financial statement recognition and measurement of an uncertain tax position taken or expected to be taken in a tax return. The University recognizes interest and penalties related to uncertain tax positions in income tax expense. As of December 31, 2015 and 2014, the University has reserved approximately \$1,706 and \$0, respectively, for uncertain tax positions, including interest and penalties, which is classified within accrued liabilities on the accompanying consolidated balance sheet.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

The University has deferred tax assets, which are subject to periodic recoverability assessments. Valuation allowances are established, when necessary, to reduce deferred tax assets to the amount that more likely than not will be realized. Realization of the deferred tax assets is principally dependent upon achievement of projected future taxable income.

Commitments and Contingencies

The University accrues for a contingent obligation when it is probable that a liability has been incurred and the amount is reasonably estimable. When the University becomes aware of a claim or potential claim, the likelihood of any loss exposure is assessed. If it is probable that a loss will result and the amount of the loss is estimable, the University records a liability for the estimated loss. If the loss is not probable or the amount of the potential loss is not estimable, the University will disclose the claim if the likelihood of a potential loss is reasonably possible and the amount of the potential loss could be material. Estimates that are particularly sensitive to future changes include tax, legal, and other regulatory matters, which are subject to change as events evolve, and as additional information becomes available during the administrative and litigation process. The University expenses legal fees as incurred.

Revenue Recognition

Net revenues consist primarily of tuition and fees derived from courses taught by the University online, at its over 200+ acre campus in Phoenix, Arizona, and at facilities it leases or those of employers, as well as from related educational resources that the University provides to its students, such as access to online materials. Tuition revenue and most fees from related educational resources are recognized pro-rata over the applicable period of instruction, net of scholarships provided by the University. For the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, the University's revenue was reduced by approximately \$163,893, \$139,962 and \$111,789, respectively, as a result of scholarships that the University offered to students. The University maintains an institutional tuition refund policy, which provides for all or a portion of tuition to be refunded if a student withdraws during stated refund periods. Certain states in which students reside impose separate, mandatory refund policies, which override the University's policy to the extent in conflict. If a student withdraws at a time when only a portion, or none of the tuition is refundable, then in accordance with its revenue recognition policy, the University continues to recognize the tuition that was not refunded pro-rata over the applicable period of instruction. However, for students that have taken out financial aid to pay their tuition and for which a return to Title IV is required as a result of his or her withdrawal, the University recognizes revenue after a student withdraws only at the time of cash collection. Sales tax collected from students is excluded from net revenues. Collected but unremitted sales tax is included as an accrued liability in our consolidated balance sheet. The University also charges online students an upfront learning management fee, which is deferred and recognized over the average expected term of a student. Costs that are direct and incremental to new online students are also deferred and recognized ratably over the average expected term of a student. Deferred revenue and student deposits in any period represent the excess of tuition, fees, and other student payments received as compared to amounts recognized as revenue on the income statement and are reflected as current liabilities in the accompanying consolidated balance sheets. The University's educational programs have starting and ending dates that differ from its fiscal quarters. Therefore, at the end of each fiscal quarter, a portion of revenue from these programs is not yet earned. Other revenues may be recognized as sales occur or services are performed.

Allowance for Doubtful Accounts

The University records an allowance for doubtful accounts for estimated losses resulting from the inability, failure or refusal of its students to make required payments, which includes the recovery of financial aid funds advanced to a student for amounts in excess of the student's cost of tuition and related fees that we may have to return under Title IV after a student drops. The University determines the adequacy of its allowance for doubtful accounts based on an analysis of its historical bad debt experience, current economic trends, and the aging of the accounts receivable and student status. The University applies reserves to its receivables based upon an estimate of the risk presented by the age of the receivables and student status. The University writes off accounts receivable balances of active students at the earlier of the time the balances were deemed uncollectible, or one year after the revenue is generated. The University accelerates the write off of inactive student accounts such that the accounts are written off by day 150. The University continues to reflect accounts receivable with an offsetting allowance as long as management believes there is a reasonable possibility of collection. Bad debt expense is recorded as an instructional costs and services expense in the consolidated income statement.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

Instructional Costs and Services

Instructional costs and services consist primarily of costs related to the administration and delivery of the University's educational programs. This expense category includes salaries, benefits and share-based compensation for full-time and adjunct faculty and administrative personnel, information technology costs, bad debt expense, curriculum and new program development costs (which are expensed as incurred) and costs associated with other support groups that provide services directly to the students. This category also includes an allocation of depreciation, amortization, rent, and occupancy costs attributable to the provision of educational services, primarily at the University's Phoenix, Arizona campus.

Admissions Advisory and Related

Admissions advisory and related expenses include salaries and benefits for admissions advisory personnel, and revenue share expense as well as an allocation of depreciation, amortization, rent and occupancy costs attributable to the admissions advisory personnel.

Advertising

Advertising expenses include brand advertising, marketing leads and other branding activities. Advertising costs are expensed as incurred.

Marketing and Promotional

Marketing and promotional expenses include salaries, benefits and share-based compensation for marketing personnel, and other promotional expenses. This category also includes an allocation of depreciation, amortization, rent, and occupancy costs attributable to marketing and promotional activities. Marketing and promotional costs are expensed as incurred.

General and Administrative

General and administrative expenses include salaries, and benefits and share-based compensation of employees engaged in corporate management, finance, human resources, compliance, and other corporate functions. General and administrative expenses also include an allocation of depreciation, amortization, rent, and occupancy costs attributable to the departments providing general and administrative functions.

Related party expenses

The University is a party to a revenue sharing arrangement (the Collaboration Agreement) with Mind Streams L.L.C. (Mind Streams), a related party, under which the University, in accordance with applicable Department of Education guidance, pays a percentage of net revenue that it receives from applicants recruited by Mind Streams that matriculate

at the University. The University terminated the agreement in 2014 and the University is not accepting any new applicants recruited by Mind Streams. The expenses incurred in conjunction with the Collaboration Agreement are included in admissions advisory and related expenses on our Consolidated Income Statement.

Insurance/Self-Insurance

The University uses a combination of insurance and self-insurance for a number of risks, including claims related to employee health care, workers' compensation, general liability, and business interruption. Liabilities associated with these risks are estimated based on, among other things, historical claims experience, severity factors, and other actuarial assumptions. The University's loss exposure related to self-insurance is limited by stop loss coverage on a per occurrence and aggregate basis. Expected loss accruals are based on estimates, and while the University believes the amounts accrued are adequate, the ultimate loss may differ from the amounts provided.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

Concentration of Credit Risk

The University believes the credit risk related to cash equivalents and investments is limited due to its adherence to an investment policy that required investments to have a minimum BB rating, depending on the type of security, by one major rating agency at the time of purchase. All of the University's cash equivalents and investments as of December 31, 2015 and 2014 consist of investments rated BB or higher by at least one rating agency. Additionally, the University utilizes more than one financial institution to conduct initial and ongoing credit analysis on its investment portfolio to monitor and lower the potential impact of market risk associated with its cash equivalents and investment portfolio.

A majority of the University's revenues are derived from tuition financed under the Title IV programs of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (the Higher Education Act). The financial aid and assistance programs are subject to political and budgetary considerations and are subject to extensive and complex regulations. The University's administration of these programs is periodically reviewed by various regulatory agencies. Any regulatory violation could be the basis for the initiation of potentially adverse actions including a suspension, limitation, or termination proceeding, which could have a material adverse effect on the University.

Students obtain access to federal student financial aid through a Department of Education prescribed application and eligibility certification process. Student financial aid funds are generally made available to students at prescribed intervals throughout their predetermined expected length of study. Students typically apply the funds received from the federal financial aid programs first to pay their tuition and fees. Any remaining funds are distributed directly to the student.

Segment Information

The University operates as a single educational delivery operation using a core infrastructure that serves the curriculum and educational delivery needs of both its ground and online students regardless of geography. The University's Chief Executive Officer manages the University's operations as a whole and no expense or operating income information is generated or evaluated on any component level.

Recent Accounting Pronouncements

In May 2014, the FASB issued *Revenue from Contracts with Customers*. The standard is a comprehensive new revenue recognition model that requires revenue to be recognized in a manner to depict the transfer of goods or services to a customer at an amount that reflects the consideration expected to be received in exchange for those goods or services. After the FASB amended the standard in July 2015, the standard is effective for us January 1, 2018 and early adoption is permitted effective January 1, 2017. The University does not expect adoption of this guidance to have a material impact on its financial condition, results of operations or disclosures.

In April 2015, the FASB issued, *Simplifying the Presentation of Debt Issuance Costs*. The guidance requires that debt issuance costs related to a recognized debt liability be presented in the balance sheet as a direct deduction from the carrying amount of that debt liability, consistent with debt discounts. The guidance will be effective for the University's annual reporting period beginning January 1, 2016, and applied on a retrospective basis. Early adoption is also permitted. The University plans to adopt this new standard on January 1, 2016 and does not expect adoption of this guidance to have a material impact on its financial condition, results of operations, or disclosures.

In April 2015, the FASB issued, *Intangibles-Goodwill and Other-Internal-Use Software, Customer's Accounting for Fees Paid in a Cloud Computing Arrangement*. The guidance requires customers to determine whether a cloud computing arrangement contains a software license. If the arrangement contains a software license, customers must account for fees related to the software license element in a manner consistent with how the acquisition of other software licenses is accounted for under ASC 350-40; if the arrangement does not contain a software license, customers must account for the arrangement as a service contract. The standard will take effect for the University for the year ending December 31, 2016 and all interim periods therein. Entities may adopt this guidance retrospectively, or prospectively for arrangements entered into, or materially modified, after the standard's effective date. The University does not expect adoption of this guidance to have a material impact on its financial condition, results of operations, or disclosures.

In November 2015, the FASB issued, *Income Taxes: Balance Sheet Classification of Deferred Taxes*. This standard requires that deferred tax assets and liabilities be classified as noncurrent on the balance sheet rather than being separated into current and noncurrent. This standard is effective for fiscal years, and interim periods within those years, beginning after December 15, 2016. Early adoption is permitted and the standard may be applied either retrospectively or on a prospective basis to all deferred tax assets and liabilities. The University plans to adopt this standard on January 1, 2016 and does not expect adoption of this guidance to have a material impact on its financial condition, results of operations, or disclosures.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)**

In January 2016, the FASB issued *Financial Instruments – Overall: Recognition and Measurement of Financial Assets and Financial Liabilities*. The standard addresses certain aspects of recognition, measurement, presentation, and disclosure of financial instruments. This standard is effective for fiscal years, and interim periods within those years, beginning after December 15, 2017, and early adoption is not permitted. Accordingly, the standard is effective for us on January 1, 2018. We are currently evaluating the impact that the standard will have on our consolidated financial statements.

The University has determined that no other recent accounting pronouncements apply to its operations or would otherwise have a material impact on its consolidated financial statements.

3. Investments

The following is a summary of investments as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, which includes \$67,840 of restricted investments as of December 31, 2014. In 2014, the University recorded a non-cash transaction to reflect the restriction of \$67,840 of investments. The University considered all investments as available for sale.

| | | As of December 31, 2015 | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | Adjusted Cost | Gross Unrealized Gains | Gross Unrealized (Losses) | Estimated Fair Value |
| Municipal securities | \$ 83,507 | \$ 26 | \$ (169) | \$ 83,364 |
| Municipal bond mutual fund | 55,720 | | (115) | 55,605 |
| Total restricted and unrestricted investments | \$ 139,227 | \$ 26 | \$ (284) | \$ 138,969 |

| | | As of December 31, 2014 | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | Adjusted Cost | Gross Unrealized Gains | Gross Unrealized (Losses) | Estimated Fair Value |
| Municipal securities | \$ 83,364 | \$ 51 | \$ (177) | \$ 83,238 |
| Municipal bond mutual fund | 85,386 | | | 85,386 |
| Total restricted and unrestricted investments | \$ 168,750 | \$ 51 | \$ (177) | \$ 168,624 |

The cash flows of municipal securities are backed by the issuing municipality's credit worthiness. All municipal securities are due in one year or less as of December 31, 2015. For the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, the

net unrealized losses on available-for-sale securities were \$(159) and (\$93), net of taxes, respectively.

4. Valuation and Qualifying Accounts

| | Balance at Beginning of Year | Charged to Expense | Deductions⁽¹⁾ | Balance at End of Year |
|---|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Allowance for doubtful accounts receivable: | | | | |
| Year ended December 31, 2015 | \$ 6,472 | 16,620 | (17,955) | \$ 5,137 |
| Year ended December 31, 2014 | \$ 9,678 | 15,045 | (18,251) | \$ 6,472 |
| Year ended December 31, 2013 | \$ 8,657 | 19,897 | (18,876) | \$ 9,678 |

(1) Deductions represent accounts written off, net of recoveries.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)****5. Property and Equipment**

Property and equipment consist of the following:

| | As of December 31, | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 |
| Land | \$ 103,280 | \$ 76,537 |
| Land improvements | 13,389 | 8,800 |
| Buildings | 392,754 | 298,124 |
| Building and leasehold improvements | 72,494 | 45,855 |
| Equipment under capital leases | 6,467 | 5,310 |
| Computer equipment | 91,225 | 75,990 |
| Furniture, fixtures and equipment | 51,352 | 38,162 |
| Internally developed software | 25,996 | 20,813 |
| Other | 1,099 | 1,099 |
| Construction in progress | 54,506 | 20,693 |
| | 812,562 | 591,383 |
| Less accumulated depreciation and amortization | (145,079) | (113,213) |
| Property and equipment, net | \$ 667,483 | \$ 478,170 |

Depreciation and amortization expense associated with property and equipment, including assets under capital lease, totaled \$34,821, \$28,529, and \$24,546 for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013, respectively.

6. Notes Payable and Other Noncurrent Liabilities

In December 2012, we entered into a new credit agreement, which increased our term loan to \$100 million with a maturity date of December 2019. Additionally, this facility, as amended in January 2016, provides a revolving line of credit in the amount of \$150 million through December 2017 to be utilized for working capital, capital expenditures, share repurchases and other general corporate purposes. The amendment to this facility increased the revolving line of credit from \$50 million to \$150 million. Indebtedness under the credit facility is secured by our assets and is guaranteed by certain of our subsidiaries. The Agreement contains standard covenants that, among other things, restrict the University's ability to incur additional debt or make certain investments, require the University to maintain compliance with certain applicable regulatory standards, and require the University to achieve certain financial ratios and maintain certain financial condition. Indebtedness under the Agreement is secured by the University's assets and is guaranteed by certain of the University's subsidiaries. As of December 31, 2015, the University is in compliance with its debt covenants. No amounts were drawn on the revolver as of December 31, 2015.

| | As of December 31, | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 |
| Notes Payable | | |
| Note payable, monthly payment of \$556; interest at 30 day LIBOR plus 1.75% (1.99% at December 31, 2015) through December 31, 2019 | \$ 79,525 | \$ 86,049 |
| Annuities; quarterly payments of \$34; extending through 2019; interest at 10% | 352 | 444 |
| | 79,877 | 86,493 |
| Less: Current portion | 6,625 | 6,616 |
| | \$ 73,252 | \$ 79,877 |

Payments due under the notes payable obligations are as follows as of December 31, 2015:

| | |
|------|-----------|
| 2016 | \$ 6,625 |
| 2017 | 6,636 |
| 2018 | 6,691 |
| 2019 | 59,925 |
| | \$ 79,877 |

Long-term deferred rent included in other noncurrent liabilities as of December 31, 2015 and 2014 was \$3,502 and \$4,513, respectively.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)****7. Capital Lease Obligations**

Capital lease obligations consist of the following:

| | As of December 31, | |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 |
| Capital Lease Obligations | | |
| Capital leases for equipment, monthly payments totaling \$33; interest rate at 2.2%, through 2019 | \$ 1,485 | \$ 497 |
| Less: Current portion of capital lease obligations | 697 | 91 |
| | \$ 788 | \$ 406 |

Payments due under future minimum lease payments under the capital lease obligations are as follows as of December 31, 2015:

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| 2016 | \$ 700 |
| 2017 | 290 |
| 2018 | 290 |
| 2019 | 208 |
| | 1,488 |
| Less: Portion representing interest | 3 |
| Present value of minimum lease payments | \$ 1,485 |

8. Commitments and Contingencies***Leases***

The University leases certain land, buildings and equipment under non-cancelable operating leases expiring at various dates through 2022. Future minimum lease payments under operating leases due each year are as follows at December 31, 2015:

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 2016 | \$ 5,683 |
| 2017 | 3,935 |
| 2018 | 3,432 |
| 2019 | 3,022 |
| 2020 | 3,065 |
| Thereafter | 1,804 |
| Total minimum payments | \$ 20,941 |

Total rent expense and related taxes and operating expenses under operating leases for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013 was \$7,759, \$8,409, and \$7,074, respectively.

Legal Matters

From time to time, the University is party to various lawsuits, claims, and other legal proceedings that arise in the ordinary course of business, some of which are covered by insurance. When the University is aware of a claim or potential claim, it assesses the likelihood of any loss or exposure. If it is probable that a loss will result and the amount of the loss can be reasonably estimated, the University records a liability for the loss. If the loss is not probable or the amount of the loss cannot be reasonably estimated, the University discloses the nature of the specific claim if the likelihood of a potential loss is reasonably possible and the amount involved is material. With respect to the majority of pending litigation matters, the University's ultimate legal and financial responsibility, if any, cannot be estimated with certainty and, in most cases, any potential losses related to those matters are not considered probable.

Upon resolution of any pending legal matters, the University may incur charges in excess of presently established reserves. Management does not believe that any such charges would, individually or in the aggregate, have a material adverse effect on the University's financial condition, results of operations or cash flows.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)*****Tax Reserves, Non-Income Tax Related***

From time to time the University has exposure to various non-income tax related matters that arise in the ordinary course of business. At December 31, 2015 and 2014, the University has reserved approximately \$0 and \$659, respectively, for tax matters where its ultimate exposure is considered probable and the potential loss can be reasonably estimated.

9. Derivative Instruments

On June 30, 2009 and February 27, 2013, respectively, the University entered into an interest rate swap and an interest rate corridor to manage its 30 Day LIBOR interest exposure related to its variable rate debt. Neither of these instruments contained financing elements. The contractual terms of the University's derivative instruments have not been structured such that net payments made by one party in the earlier periods are to be subsequently returned by the counterparty in later periods of the derivative's term. Neither of the University's derivative instruments have been amended or modified since their inception. The fair value of the interest rate corridor instrument as of December 31, 2015 and 2014 was \$728 and \$1,332, respectively, which is included in other assets. The interest rate swap was terminated upon its expiration date in April 2014. The fair values of each derivative instrument were determined using a hypothetical derivative transaction and Level 2 of the hierarchy of valuation inputs. These derivative instruments were originally designated as cash flow hedges of variable rate debt obligations. The adjustments of \$602, \$486, and \$947 for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, respectively, for the effective portion of the gain/loss on the derivatives is included as a component of other comprehensive income, net of taxes.

The interest rate corridor instrument reduces variable interest rate risk starting March 1, 2013 through December 20, 2019 with a notional amount of \$80,000 as of December 31, 2015. The corridor instrument's terms permit the University to hedge its interest rate risk at several thresholds; the University pays variable interest monthly based on the 30-day LIBOR rates until that index reaches 1.5%. If 30-day LIBOR is equal to 1.5% through 3.0%, the University pays 1.5%. If 30-day LIBOR exceeds 3.0%, the University pays actual 30-day LIBOR less 1.5%. Therefore, the University has hedged its exposure to future variable rate cash flows through December 20, 2019.

As of December 31, 2015 no derivative ineffectiveness was identified. Any ineffectiveness in the University's derivative instruments designated as hedges would be reported in interest expense in the income statement. As of December 31, 2015, \$2 of credit default risk interest expense was recorded in interest expense in the income statement. At December 31, 2015, the University does not expect to reclassify any gains or losses on derivative instruments from accumulated other comprehensive income (loss) into earnings during the next 12 months.

10. Earnings Per Share

Basic earnings per common share is calculated by dividing net income available to common stockholders by the weighted average number of common shares outstanding for the period. Diluted earnings per common share reflects the assumed conversion of all potentially dilutive securities, consisting of stock options, for which the estimated fair

value exceeds the exercise price, less shares which could have been purchased with the related proceeds, unless anti-dilutive. For employee equity awards, repurchased shares are also included for any unearned compensation adjusted for tax.

The table below reflects the calculation of the weighted average number of common shares outstanding, on an as if converted basis, used in computing basic and diluted earnings per common share.

| | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Denominator: | | | |
| Basic common shares outstanding | 45,975 | 45,538 | 44,731 |
| Effect of dilutive stock options and restricted stock | 1,306 | 1,468 | 1,400 |
| Diluted common shares outstanding | 47,281 | 47,006 | 46,131 |

Diluted weighted average shares outstanding exclude the incremental effect of shares that would be issued upon the assumed exercise of stock options and vesting of restricted stock. For each of the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013, approximately 385, 174 and 134, respectively, of the University's stock options and restricted stock awards outstanding were excluded from the calculation of diluted earnings per share as their inclusion would have been anti-dilutive. These options and restricted stock awards could be dilutive in the future.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)****11. Equity Transactions*****Preferred Stock***

As of December 31, 2015 and 2014, the University had 10,000 shares of authorized but unissued and undesignated preferred stock. The University's charter provides that the board of directors has authority to issue preferred stock, with voting powers, designations, preferences, and special rights, qualifications, limitation, or restrictions as permitted by law as determined by the board of directors, without stockholder approval. The board of directors may authorize the issuance of preferred stock with voting or conversion rights that could adversely affect the voting power or other rights of the holders of the common stock.

Treasury Stock

The Board of Directors has authorized the University to repurchase up to \$75,000 in aggregate of common stock, from time to time, depending on market conditions and other considerations. The expiration date on the repurchase authorization has been extended to September 30, 2016. Repurchases occur at the University's discretion. Repurchases may be made in the open market or in privately negotiated transactions, pursuant to the applicable Securities and Exchange Commission rules. The amount and timing of future share repurchases, if any, will be made as market and business conditions warrant. Since its approval of the share repurchase plan, the University has purchased 3,076 shares of common stock at an aggregate cost of \$60,414, which includes 288 shares of common stock at an aggregate cost of \$11,279 during the year ended December 31, 2015, which are recorded at cost in the accompanying December 31, 2015 consolidated balance sheet and statement of stockholders' equity. At December 31, 2015, there remained \$14,586 available under its current share repurchase authorization.

12. Income Taxes

The University has deferred tax assets and liabilities that reflect the net tax effects of temporary differences between the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities for financial reporting purposes and the amounts used for income tax purposes. Deferred tax assets are subject to periodic recoverability assessments. Realization of the deferred tax assets, net of deferred tax liabilities is principally dependent upon achievement of projected future taxable income. Based upon the level of historical taxable income and projections for future taxable income over the periods in which the deferred tax assets are deductible, management believes it is more-likely-than-not that the University will realize the benefits of these deductible differences. The University has no valuation allowance at December 31, 2015 and 2014. The components of income tax expense (benefit) are as follows:

| | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|----------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Current: | | | |

Edgar Filing: Grand Canyon Education, Inc. - Form 10-K

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Federal | \$ 63,481 | \$ 50,980 | \$ 40,949 |
| State | 5,222 | 6,216 | 5,540 |
| | 68,703 | 57,196 | 46,489 |
| Deferred: | | | |
| Federal | 4,473 | 2,734 | 4,209 |
| State | 557 | 418 | 898 |
| | 5,030 | 3,152 | 5,107 |
| Tax expense recorded as an increase of paid-in capital | 3,863 | 7,884 | 4,588 |
| | \$ 77,596 | \$ 68,232 | \$ 56,184 |

A reconciliation of income tax computed at the U.S. statutory rate to the effective income tax rate is as follows:

| | Year Ended December 31, | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
| Statutory U.S. federal income tax rate | 35.0% | 35.0% | 35.0% |
| State income taxes, net of federal tax benefit | 3.3 | 4.3 | 5.5 |
| State tax credits, net of federal effect | (1.2) | (1.5) | (1.8) |
| Nondeductible expenses | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.3 |
| Other | (0.1) | 0.1 | (0.2) |
| Effective income tax rate | 37.1% | 38.0% | 38.8% |

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)**

Significant components of the University's deferred income tax assets and liabilities are as follows:

| | As of December 31, | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 |
| Deferred tax assets: | | |
| Allowance for doubtful accounts | \$ 2,051 | \$ 2,654 |
| Share-based compensation | 9,330 | 8,487 |
| Deferred tuition revenue | 1,336 | 610 |
| Deferred scholarship | 1,091 | 959 |
| Deferred rent | 1,078 | 1,290 |
| Intangibles | 1,778 | 3,312 |
| Other | 3,482 | 2,871 |
| Deferred tax assets | 20,146 | 20,183 |
| Deferred tax liability: | | |
| Property and equipment | (33,710) | (28,203) |
| Other | (1,291) | (1,805) |
| Deferred tax liability | (35,001) | (30,008) |
| Net deferred tax liability | \$ (14,855) | \$ (9,825) |

The deferred tax amounts above have been classified in the University's balance sheets as follows:

| | As of December 31, | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| | 2015 | 2014 |
| Deferred income taxes, current | \$ 6,448 | \$ 6,149 |
| Deferred income taxes, non-current | (21,303) | (15,974) |
| Net deferred tax liability | \$ (14,855) | \$ (9,825) |

The University recognizes the impact of a tax position in its financial statements if that position is more-likely-than-not to be sustained on audit, based on the technical merits of the position. The University discloses

all unrecognized tax benefits, which includes the reserves recorded for uncertain tax positions on filed tax returns and the unrecognized portion of affirmative claims. The University recognizes interest and penalties related to uncertain tax positions in income tax expense. Unrecognized tax benefits as of December 31, 2015 and 2014 were not significant.

The University is subject to taxation in the United States, in states with an income tax and in several local jurisdictions. During the second quarter ended June 30, 2014, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) commenced an examination of the University's 2011 income tax return. The IRS concluded its audit of the University's 2011 income tax return with no changes to our reported tax or tax liability. Additionally, we are currently under audit by several state taxing authorities. We do not anticipate any material adjustments as a result of these audits. As of December 31, 2015, the earliest tax year still subject to examination for federal and state purposes is 2012 and 2011, respectively.

13. Regulatory

The University is subject to extensive regulation by federal and state governmental agencies and accrediting bodies. In particular, the Higher Education Act and the regulations promulgated thereunder by the Department of Education, subject the University to significant regulatory scrutiny on the basis of numerous standards that schools must satisfy in order to participate in the various federal student financial assistance programs under Title IV.

To participate in the Title IV programs, an institution must be authorized to offer its programs of instruction by the relevant agency of the state in which it is located, accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Department of Education and certified as eligible by the Department of Education. The Department of Education will certify an institution to participate in the Title IV programs only after the institution has demonstrated compliance with the Higher Education Act and the Department of Education's extensive regulations regarding institutional eligibility. An institution must also demonstrate its compliance to the Department of Education on an ongoing basis. As of December 31, 2015, management believes the University is in compliance with the applicable regulations in all material respects.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

Because the University operates in a highly regulated industry, it, like other industry participants, may be subject from time to time to investigations, claims of non-compliance, or lawsuits by governmental agencies or third parties, which allege statutory violations, regulatory infractions, or common law causes of action. While there can be no assurance that regulatory agencies or third parties will not undertake investigations or make claims against the University, or that such claims, if made, will not have a material adverse effect on the University's business, results of operations or financial condition, management believes the University is in compliance with applicable regulations in all material respects.

In connection with its administration of the Title IV federal student financial aid programs, the Department of Education periodically conducts program reviews at selected schools that receive Title IV funds. In July 2010, the Department of Education initiated a program review of the University covering the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 award years. On September 27, 2013, the University and the Department of Education entered into an agreement that fully resolved the findings in the preliminary program review report and closed the program review. In connection with this closure, the University paid a total of \$7,387, the majority of which consisted of returns of Title IV funds to the lenders of our students, related to the inadequate procedures related to non-passing grade finding. Although when the University makes a return to Title IV the applicable student is obligated to repay the University for the amounts returned, the University agreed that it would not seek reimbursement from these students.

A second program review, focused on the University's administration of the Title IV programs in which it participates, its administration of the Clery Act and related regulations, and its compliance with the requirements of the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 award years, was initiated in April 2014. The final program review determination letter received in June 2014 sets forth three findings, each of which involved individual student-specific information gathering and/or reporting errors and all of which the University promptly corrected to the Department of Education's satisfaction. Accordingly, the final program review determination letter concluded that the University had taken all corrective actions necessary to resolve the findings and that the program review had been closed with no further action required.

On October 28, 2013, the University received a new program participation agreement with full certification from the Department of Education, which gives the University the ability to participate in the Title IV programs through September 30, 2017.

90/10 Disclosure

The University derives a substantial portion of its revenues from student financial aid received by its students under the Title IV programs administered by the Department of Education pursuant to the Higher Education Act. To continue to participate in the student financial aid programs the University must comply with the regulations promulgated under the Higher Education Act. The regulations restrict the proportion of cash receipts for tuition and fees from eligible programs to not more than 90 percent from Title IV programs (the 90/10 revenue test). If an institution fails to satisfy the test for one year, its participation status becomes provisional for two consecutive fiscal years. If the test is not satisfied for two consecutive years, eligibility to participate in Title IV programs is lost for at

least two fiscal years. Using the Department of Education's cash-basis, regulatory formula under the 90/10 Rule as currently in effect, for its 2015, 2014, and 2013 fiscal years, the University derived 74.8%, 76.5%, and 78.5%, respectively, for its 90/10 revenue from Title IV program funds.

14. Share-Based Compensation Plans

Adoption of Equity Plans

On September 27, 2008 the University's shareholders approved the adoption of the 2008 Equity Incentive Plan (Incentive Plan) and the 2008 Employee Stock Purchase (ESPP). A total of 4,200 shares of the University's common stock was originally authorized for issuance under the Incentive Plan. On January 1 of each subsequent year in accordance with the terms of the Incentive Plan, the number of shares authorized for issuance under the Incentive Plan automatically increases by 2.5% of the number of shares of common stock issued and outstanding on the applicable December 31, unless the Compensation Committee of our Board of Directors elects to decline the increase or chooses a lower increase. The Compensation Committee elected to decline the increase that would have gone into effect as of January 1, 2016, leaving the number of shares of common stock authorized for issuance under the Incentive Plan at 12,167. Although the ESPP has not yet been implemented, a total of 1,050 shares of the University's common stock have been authorized for sale under the ESPP.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)*****Incentive Plan******Restricted Stock***

During fiscal year 2015, 2014, and 2013, the University granted 315, 308 and 575 shares of common stock, respectively, with a service vesting condition to certain of its executives, officers, faculty and employees. The restricted shares have voting rights and vest evenly at 20% over each of the next five years. Upon vesting, shares will be held in lieu of taxes equivalent to the minimum statutory tax withholding required to be paid when the restricted stock vests. In 2015, 2014, and 2013, the University granted 9, 9, and 11 shares of common stock, respectively, to certain of the non-employee members of the University's board of directors. The restricted shares have voting rights and vest within one year of the date of grant. In addition, in 2013 the University granted 8 shares of common stock to a consultant. The restricted shares have voting rights and vest evenly at a rate of 20% per year over each of the next five years.

A summary of the activity related to restricted stock granted under the University's Incentive Plan is as follows:

| | Total Shares | Weighted Average Grant Date Fair Value per Share |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2012 | 553 | \$ 17.04 |
| Granted | 594 | \$ 24.44 |
| Vested | (119) | \$ 17.13 |
| Forfeited, canceled or expired | (45) | \$ 20.57 |
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2013 | 983 | \$ 21.34 |
| Granted | 317 | \$ 46.02 |
| Vested | (225) | \$ 21.27 |
| Forfeited, canceled or expired | (42) | \$ 27.36 |
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2014 | 1,033 | \$ 28.75 |
| Granted | 324 | \$ 45.66 |
| Vested | (274) | \$ 27.18 |
| Forfeited, canceled or expired | (27) | \$ 30.27 |

| | | | |
|--|-------|----|-------|
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2015 | 1,056 | \$ | 34.30 |
|--|-------|----|-------|

As of December 31, 2015, there was approximately \$27,778 of total unrecognized share-based compensation cost, net of estimated forfeitures, related to unvested restricted stock awards. These costs are expected to be recognized over a weighted average period of 2.10 years.

Stock Options

No options were granted in 2015 and 2014. During 2013, the University granted time vested options to purchase shares of common stock with an exercise price equal to the fair market value on the date of grant to an employee. The time vested options vest ratably over a period of four years and expire ten years from the date of grant. Prior to 2012, the University granted time vested options to purchase shares of common stock with an exercise price equal to the fair market value on the date of grant to employees. These time vested options vest ratably over a period of five years and expire ten years from the date of grant. A summary of the activity related to stock options granted under the University's Incentive Plan is as follows:

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

| | Summary of Stock Options Outstanding | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| | Total Shares | Weighted Average Exercise Price per Share | Weighted Average Remaining Contractual Term (Years) | Aggregate Intrinsic Value \$(1) |
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2012 | 4,229 | \$ 14.57 | | |
| Granted | 25 | \$ 24.97 | | |
| Exercised | (1,160) | \$ 14.03 | | |
| Forfeited, canceled or expired | (71) | \$ 17.22 | | |
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2013 | 3,023 | \$ 14.80 | | |
| Granted | | \$ | | |
| Exercised | (539) | \$ 14.51 | | |
| Forfeited, canceled or expired | (32) | \$ 16.93 | | |
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2014 | 2,452 | \$ 14.83 | | |
| Granted | | \$ | | |
| Exercised | (218) | \$ 15.97 | | |
| Forfeited, canceled or expired | (14) | \$ 16.08 | | |
| Outstanding as of December 31, 2015 | 2,220 | \$ 14.71 | 3.83 | \$ 56,398 |
| Exercisable as of December 31, 2015 | 2,013 | \$ 14.59 | 3.68 | \$ 51,392 |
| Available for issuance as of December 31, 2015 | 1,893 | | | |

(1) Aggregate intrinsic value represents the value of the University's closing stock price on December 31, 2015 (\$40.12) in excess of the exercise price multiplied by the number of options outstanding or exercisable. As of December 31, 2015, there was approximately \$323 of total unrecognized share-based compensation cost, net of estimated forfeitures, related to unvested stock options. These costs are expected to be recognized over a weighted average period of 0.35 years.

The following table summarizes information related to stock options exercised for years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013:

| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Amounts related to options exercised: | | | |
| Intrinsic value realized by optionee | \$ 18,069 | \$ 27,499 | \$ 20,364 |
| Actual tax benefit realized by the University for tax deductions | \$ 7,228 | \$ 11,000 | \$ 8,145 |

Cash received from stock option exercises during fiscal year 2015, 2014 and 2013 totaled approximately \$3,489, \$7,825 and \$16,278, respectively.

Share-based Compensation

Share-based Compensation Expense Assumptions Restricted Stock Awards

The University measures and recognizes compensation expense for share-based payment awards made to employees, consultants and directors. The University calculates the fair value of share-based awards on the date of grant for employees and directors. The University calculates the fair value of share-based awards to consultants on the date of vesting. Stock-based compensation expense related to restricted stock grants is expensed over the vesting period using the straight-line method for University employees, the University's board of directors and the consultant, net of estimated forfeitures. The restricted shares have voting rights.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)***Share-based Compensation Expense Assumptions Stock Options*

The University granted stock options in 2013. No stock options were granted in 2015 or 2014.

Fair Value. The University uses the Black-Scholes-Merton option pricing model to estimate the fair value of the University's options as of the grant dates using the following weighted average assumptions:

| Year Ended December 31, | 2013 |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Weighted average fair value | \$ 8.20 |
| Expected volatility | 39.86% |
| Expected life (years) | 4.25 |
| Risk-free interest rate | 0.65% |
| Dividend yield | 0% |

Expected Volatility. The University believes that the use of Grand Canyon Education, Inc.'s historical stock price provides an accurate estimate of expected volatility. Therefore, the expected volatility assumption for the year ended December 31, 2013 is based upon the University's historical stock price.

Expected Life (years). In 2013, the University determined it now has enough historical option exercise information to be able to accurately estimate an expected term, and as such, its computation of expected term was calculated using its own historical data. Prior to 2013, the University used the simplified method to estimate the expected term of stock options under certain circumstances. The simplified method for estimating expected term is to use the mid-point between the vesting term and the contractual term of the share option. The University elected to use the simplified method for options granted prior to 2013 because the University did not have historical exercise data to estimate expected term due to the limited time period its shares had been publicly traded.

Risk-Free Interest Rate. The risk-free interest rate assumption is based upon the U.S. constant maturity treasury rates as the risk-free rate interpolated between the years commensurate with the expected life of the options.

Dividend Yield. The dividend yield assumption is zero since the University does not expect to declare or pay dividends in the foreseeable future.

Forfeitures. Forfeitures are estimated at the time of grant based on historical retention of employees. If necessary, management estimates are adjusted at the end of each reporting period if actual forfeitures differ from those estimates.

Expected Vesting Period. The University amortizes the share-based compensation expense, net of forfeitures, over the expected vesting period using the straight-line method.

The table below outlines share-based compensation expense for the fiscal years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013 related to restricted stock and stock options granted:

| | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Instructional costs and services | \$ 6,779 | \$ 5,921 | \$ 5,246 |
| Admissions advisory and related | 192 | 166 | 134 |
| Marketing and promotional | 130 | 220 | 229 |
| General and administrative | 4,156 | 3,638 | 4,327 |
| Share-based compensation expense included in operating expenses | 11,257 | 9,945 | 9,936 |
| Tax effect of share-based compensation | (4,503) | (3,978) | (3,974) |
| Share-based compensation expense, net of tax | \$ 6,754 | \$ 5,967 | \$ 5,962 |

401(k) Plan

The University has established a 401(k) Defined Contribution Benefit Plan (the Plan). The Plan provides eligible employees, upon date of hire, with an opportunity to make tax-deferred contributions into a long-term investment and savings program. All employees over the age of 21 are eligible to participate in the plan. The Plan allows eligible employees to contribute to the Plan subject to Internal Revenue Code restrictions and the Plan allows the University to make discretionary matching contributions. The University plans to make a matching contribution to the Plan of approximately \$1,800 for the year ended December 31, 2015. The University made discretionary matching contributions to the Plan of \$1,508 and \$1,298 for the years ended December 31, 2014 and 2013, respectively.

Table of Contents

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

(In thousands, except per share data)

15. Related Party Transactions

Related party transactions include transactions between the University and certain of its affiliates. The following transactions were in the normal course of operations and were measured at the exchange amount, which is the amount of consideration established and agreed to by the parties.

As of and for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014, and 2013, related party transactions consisted of the following:

Affiliates

Mind Streams, LLC (Mind Streams) Mind Streams is owned and operated, in part, by the father of the University's Executive Chairman. See further discussion in Note 2, Summary of Significant Accounting Policies. Related party expenses.

LOPE Kingdom Fund (LKF) LKF was formed in 2014 to provide seed funding for entrepreneurial ventures initiated by the University's students. The University's President, CEO and Director serves as the president of LKF. All of the board seats are taken by University executives. The University is not the primary beneficiary of LKF, and accordingly, the University does not consolidate LKF's statement of activities with its financial results. The University contributed \$500 for each of the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, of which \$500 and \$0 amounts were owed at December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)****16. Quarterly Results of Operations (Unaudited)**

The following table summarizes the unaudited quarterly results of operations for 2015 and 2014 and should be read in conjunction with other information included in the accompanying consolidated financial statements.

| | 2015 | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | First Quarter | Second Quarter | Third Quarter | Fourth Quarter |
| Net revenue | \$ 194,127 | \$ 174,726 | \$ 193,393 | \$ 215,954 |
| Costs and expenses: | | | | |
| Instructional costs and services | 78,687 | 75,357 | 83,180 | 92,427 |
| Admissions advisory and related | 28,333 | 27,372 | 27,506 | 29,361 |
| Advertising | 20,031 | 18,419 | 19,360 | 18,419 |
| Marketing and promotional | 1,694 | 1,788 | 1,827 | 1,978 |
| General and administrative | 9,396 | 9,534 | 12,536 | 10,634 |
| Total costs and expenses | 138,141 | 132,470 | 144,409 | 152,819 |
| Operating income | 55,986 | 42,256 | 48,984 | 63,135 |
| Interest expense | (375) | (146) | (313) | (414) |
| Interest income and other | 257 | 127 | 201 | (691) |
| Income before income taxes | 55,868 | 42,237 | 48,872 | 62,030 |
| Income tax expense | 21,689 | 16,461 | 15,530 | 23,916 |
| Net income | \$ 34,179 | \$ 25,776 | \$ 33,342 | \$ 38,114 |
| Earnings per share: | | | | |
| Basic income per share(1) | \$ 0.75 | \$ 0.56 | \$ 0.72 | \$ 0.83 |
| Diluted income per share(1) | \$ 0.72 | \$ 0.55 | \$ 0.70 | \$ 0.81 |
| Basic weighted average shares outstanding | 45,789 | 46,012 | 46,063 | 46,035 |
| Diluted weighted average shares outstanding | 47,201 | 47,263 | 47,320 | 47,337 |

(1) The sum of quarterly income per share may not equal annual income per share due to rounding.

Table of Contents**Grand Canyon Education, Inc.****Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements****(In thousands, except per share data)**

| | 2014 | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | First Quarter | Second Quarter | Third Quarter | Fourth Quarter |
| Net revenue | \$ 167,432 | \$ 158,594 | \$ 175,056 | \$ 189,973 |
| Costs and expenses: | | | | |
| Instructional costs and services | 70,678 | 67,847 | 71,714 | 78,552 |
| Admissions advisory and related | 26,261 | 26,208 | 27,324 | 28,774 |
| Advertising | 16,712 | 15,751 | 16,491 | 16,854 |
| Marketing and promotional | 1,791 | 1,907 | 1,931 | 1,810 |
| General and administrative | 8,554 | 8,994 | 11,640 | 10,447 |
| Total costs and expenses | 123,996 | 120,707 | 129,100 | 136,437 |
| Operating income | 43,436 | 37,887 | 45,956 | 53,536 |
| Interest expense | (523) | (356) | (576) | (346) |
| Interest income and other | 137 | 197 | 43 | 307 |
| Income before income taxes | 43,050 | 37,728 | 45,423 | 53,497 |
| Income tax expense | 16,762 | 14,659 | 16,407 | 20,404 |
| Net income | \$ 26,288 | \$ 23,069 | \$ 29,016 | \$ 33,093 |
| Earnings per share: | | | | |
| Basic income per share(1) | \$ 0.58 | \$ 0.51 | \$ 0.64 | \$ 0.72 |
| Diluted income per share(1) | \$ 0.56 | \$ 0.49 | \$ 0.62 | \$ 0.70 |
| Basic weighted average shares outstanding | 45,205 | 45,598 | 45,651 | 45,652 |
| Diluted weighted average shares outstanding | 46,841 | 46,990 | 47,051 | 47,097 |

(1) The sum of quarterly income per share may not equal annual income per share due to rounding.

Table of Contents

Item 9. *Changes in and Disagreements With Accountants on Accounting and Financial Disclosure*

None.

Item 9A. *Controls and Procedures*
Disclosure Controls and Procedures

We maintain disclosure controls and procedures designed to provide reasonable assurance that information required to be disclosed in reports filed under the Exchange Act is recorded, processed, summarized and reported within the specified time periods and accumulated and communicated to our management, including our Chief Executive Officer (Principal Executive Officer) and Chief Financial Officer (Principal Financial Officer), as appropriate, to allow timely decisions regarding required disclosure. We have established a Disclosure Committee, consisting of certain members of management, to assist in this evaluation. Our Disclosure Committee meets on a quarterly basis and more often if necessary.

Under the supervision and with the participation of our management, including our Principal Executive Officer and Principal Financial Officer, an evaluation was performed on the effectiveness of the design and operation of our disclosure controls and procedures (as defined in Rules 13a-15(e) or 15d-15(e) promulgated under the Exchange Act), as of the end of the period covered by this annual report. Based on that evaluation, our management, including the Principal Executive Officer and Principal Financial Officer, concluded that our disclosure controls and procedures were effective as of December 31, 2015.

Attached as exhibits to this Annual Report on Form 10-K are certifications of our Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer, which are required in accordance with Rule 13a-14 of the Exchange Act. This Disclosure Controls and Procedures section includes information concerning management's evaluation of disclosure controls and procedures referred to in those certifications and, as such, should be read in conjunction with the certifications of our Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

Management's Report on Internal Control Over Financial Reporting

Management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal control over financial reporting, as such term is defined in Exchange Act Rule 13a-15(f). Internal control over financial reporting is a process designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the reliability of financial reporting and the preparation of consolidated financial statements for external purposes in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP).

Our internal control over financial reporting includes those policies and procedures that:

- (i) pertain to the maintenance of records that, in reasonable detail, accurately and fairly reflect the transactions and dispositions of our assets;
- (ii) provide reasonable assurance that transactions are recorded as necessary to permit preparation of consolidated financial statements in accordance with GAAP, and that receipts and expenditures are being made only in accordance with authorizations of our management and directors; and

(iii) provide reasonable assurance regarding prevention or timely detection of unauthorized acquisition, use, or disposition of our assets that could have a material effect on the consolidated financial statements.

Because of its inherent limitation, our internal control systems and procedures may not prevent or detect misstatements. An internal control system, no matter how well conceived and operated, can provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurance that the objectives of the control system are met. Because of the inherent limitations in all control systems, no evaluation of controls can provide absolute assurance that all control issues and instances of fraud, if any, have been detected. Also, projections of any evaluation of effectiveness to future periods are subject to the risks that controls may become inadequate because of changes in condition, or that the degree of compliance with the policies and procedures may deteriorate.

Management performed an assessment of the effectiveness of our internal control over financial reporting as of December 31, 2015, utilizing the criteria described in the Internal Control-Integrated Framework (2013) issued by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission. The objective of this assessment was to determine whether our internal control over financial reporting was effective as of December 31, 2015. Based on its assessment, management believes that, as of December 31, 2015, the Company's internal control over financial reporting is effective.

The effectiveness of our internal control over financial reporting as of and for the year ended December 31, 2015 has been audited by KPMG LLP, an independent registered public accounting firm, as stated in their audit report which is included herein.

Table of Contents

Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm

The Board of Directors and Stockholders

Grand Canyon Education, Inc.:

We have audited Grand Canyon Education, Inc.'s internal control over financial reporting as of December 31, 2015, based on criteria established in *Internal Control – Integrated Framework (2013)* issued by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO). Grand Canyon Education, Inc.'s management is responsible for maintaining effective internal control over financial reporting, and for its assessment of the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting included in the accompanying Management's Report on Internal Control over Financial Reporting. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on the Company's internal control over financial reporting based on our audit.

We conducted our audit in accordance with the standards of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (United States). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether effective internal control over financial reporting was maintained in all material respects. Our audit included obtaining an understanding of internal control over financial reporting, assessing the risk that a material weakness exists, testing and evaluating the design and operating effectiveness of internal control based on the assessed risk. Our audit also included performing such other procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our opinion.

A company's internal control over financial reporting is a process designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the reliability of financial reporting and the preparation of consolidated financial statements for external purposes in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. A company's internal control over financial reporting includes those policies and procedures that (1) pertain to the maintenance of records that, in reasonable detail, accurately and fairly reflect the transactions and dispositions of the assets of the company; (2) provide reasonable assurance that transactions are recorded as necessary to permit preparation of consolidated financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, and that receipts and expenditures of the company are being made only in accordance with authorizations of management and directors of the company; and (3) provide reasonable assurance regarding prevention or timely detection of unauthorized acquisition, use, or disposition of the company's assets that could have a material effect on the consolidated financial statements.

Because of its inherent limitations, internal control over financial reporting may not prevent or detect misstatements. Also, projections of any evaluation of effectiveness to future periods are subject to the risk that controls may become inadequate because of changes in conditions, or that the degree of compliance with the policies or procedures may deteriorate.

In our opinion, Grand Canyon Education, Inc. maintained, in all material respects, effective internal control over financial reporting as of December 31, 2015, based on criteria established in *Internal Control – Integrated Framework (2013)* issued by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO).

We also have audited, in accordance with the standards of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (United States), the consolidated balance sheets of Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and subsidiaries as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, and the related consolidated statements of income, comprehensive income, stockholders' equity, and cash flows for each of the years in the three-year period ended December 31, 2015, and our report dated February 17, 2016, expressed an unqualified opinion on those consolidated financial statements.

/s/ KPMG LLP

Phoenix, Arizona

February 17, 2016

87

Table of Contents

Changes in Internal Control Over Financial Reporting

There were no changes in our internal control over financial reporting during the quarter ended December 31, 2015, that materially affected, or are reasonably likely to materially affect, our internal control over financial reporting.

Item 9B. *Other Information*

We have a policy governing transactions in our securities by directors, officers, employees and others which permits these individuals to enter into trading plans complying with Rule 10b5-1 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended.

We anticipate that, as permitted by Rule 10b5-1 and our policy governing transactions in our securities, some or all of our directors, officers and employees may establish or terminate trading plans in the future. We intend to disclose the names of executive officers and directors who establish or terminate a trading plan in compliance with Rule 10b5-1 and the requirements of our policy governing transactions in our securities in our future quarterly and annual reports on Form 10-Q and 10-K filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission. We undertake no obligation, however, to update or review the information provided herein, including for revision or termination of an established trading plan, other than in such quarterly and annual reports.

PART III

Item 10. *Directors, Executive Officers and Corporate Governance*

Information relating to our Board of Directors, Executive Officers, and Corporate Governance required by this item appears in the sections entitled *Corporate Governance and Board Matters* and *Proposal No. 1: Election of Directors* in our 2016 proxy statement, to be filed within 120 days of our fiscal year end (December 31, 2015) and such information is incorporated herein by reference.

Our employees must act ethically at all times and in accordance with the policies in our Code of Business Conduct and Ethics. We require full compliance with this policy from all designated employees including our Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Accounting Officer. We publish the policy, and any amendments or waivers to the policy, in the Corporate Governance section of our website located at www.gcu.edu/InvestorRelations/CorporateGovernance.

The charters of our Audit Committee, Compensation Committee, and Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee are also available in the Corporate Governance section of our website located at www.gcu.edu/InvestorRelations/CorporateGovernance.

Item 11. *Executive Compensation*

Information relating to this item appears in the section entitled *Executive Compensation* in our 2016 proxy statement, to be filed within 120 days of our fiscal year end (December 31, 2015) and such information is incorporated herein by reference.

Item 12. *Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management and Related Stockholder Matters*

Information relating to this item appears in the sections entitled Executive Compensation and Beneficial Ownership of Common Stock in our 2016 proxy statement, to be filed within 120 days of our fiscal year end (December 31, 2015) and such information is incorporated herein by reference.

Item 13. *Certain Relationships and Related Transactions, and Director Independence*

Information relating to this item appears in the sections entitled Corporate Governance and Board Matters Director Independence and Certain Relationships and Related Party Transactions in our 2016 proxy statement, to be filed within 120 days of our fiscal year end (December 31, 2015) and such information is incorporated herein by reference.

Item 14. *Principal Accounting Fees and Services*

Information relating to this item appears in the section entitled Ratification of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm Fees in our 2016 our proxy statement, to be filed within 120 days of our fiscal year end (December 31, 2015) and such information is incorporated herein by reference.

Table of Contents

PART IV

Item 15. Exhibits and Consolidated Financial Statement Schedules

(a) The following documents are filed as part of this Annual Report on Form 10-K:

1. *Consolidated Financial Statements filed as part of this report*

Index to Consolidated Financial Statements

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| <u>Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm</u> | 60 |
| <u>Consolidated Balance Sheets as of December 31, 2015 and 2014</u> | 61 |
| <u>Consolidated Income Statements for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 62 |
| <u>Consolidated Statements of Comprehensive Income for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 63 |
| <u>Consolidated Statements of Stockholders' Equity for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 64 |
| <u>Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows for the years ended December 31, 2015, 2014 and 2013</u> | 65 |
| <u>Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements</u> | 66 |

2. *Consolidated Financial Statement Schedules:*

Schedules are omitted because they are not required, or because the information required is included in the Consolidated Financial Statements and Notes thereto.

Table of Contents3. *Exhibits*

| Number | Description | Method of Filing |
|---------------|---|---|
| 3.1 | Amended and Restated Certificate of Incorporation | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to Amendment No. 6 to the University's Registration Statement on Form S-1 filed with the SEC on November 12, 2008. |
| 3.2 | Third Amended and Restated Bylaws | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to the University's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on October 29, 2014. |
| 4.1 | Specimen of Stock Certificate | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.1 to Amendment No. 2 to the University's Registration Statement on Form S-1 filed with the SEC on September 29, 2008. |
| 10.1 | Amended and Restated Executive Employment Agreement, dated September 10, 2008, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Brent Richardson | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Amendment No. 2 to the University's Registration Statement on Form S-1 filed with the SEC on September 29, 2008. |
| 10.2 | 2008 Equity Incentive Plan, as amended | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to the University's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on November 14, 2011. |
| 10.3 | 2008 Employee Stock Purchase Plan | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.5 to Amendment No. 2 to the University's Registration Statement on Form S-1 filed with the SEC on September 29, 2008. |
| 10.4 | Amended and Restated Executive Employment Agreement, dated July 30, 2012, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Brian E. Mueller | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to the University's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on August 6, 2012. |
| 10.4.1 | Amended Executive Employment Agreement, dated February 9, 2016, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Brian E. Mueller | Filed herewith. |
| 10.5 | Amended and Restated Executive Employment Agreement, dated July 30, 2012, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and W. Stan Meyer | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.2 to the University's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on August 6, 2012. |
| 10.5.1 | Amended Executive Employment Agreement, dated February 9, 2016, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and W. Stan Meyer | Filed herewith. |
| 10.6 | Amended and Restated Executive Employment Agreement, dated July 30, 2012, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Daniel E. Bachus | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.3 to the University's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on August 6, 2012. |

Edgar Filing: Grand Canyon Education, Inc. - Form 10-K

- | | | |
|--------|--|---|
| 10.6.1 | Amended Executive Employment Agreement, dated February 9, 2016, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Daniel E. Bachus | Filed herewith. |
| 10.7 | Amended and Restated Executive Employment Agreement, dated July 30, 2012, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Joseph N. Mildenhall | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.4 to the University's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on August 6, 2012. |
| 10.7.1 | Amended Executive Employment Agreement, dated February 9, 2016, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Joseph N. Mildenhall | Filed herewith. |
| 10.8 | Executive Employment Agreement, dated September 7, 2012, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Brian M. Roberts | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to the University's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on May 7, 2013. |

Table of Contents

| Number | Description | Method of Filing |
|---------------|---|--|
| 10.8.1 | Amended Executive Employment Agreement, dated February 9, 2016, by and between Grand Canyon Education, Inc. and Brian M. Roberts | Filed herewith. |
| 10.9 | Form of Director and Officer Indemnity Agreement | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.21 to Amendment No. 2 to the University's Registration Statement on Form S-1 filed with the SEC on September 29, 2008. |
| 10.10 | Credit Agreement, dated December 21, 2012, by and among Grand Canyon Education, Inc., Bank of America, N.A., and the other parties named therein. | Incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.10 to the University's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on February 19, 2013. |
| 10.10.1 | Amendment No. 1 to Credit Agreement, dated January 15, 2016, by and among Grand Canyon Education, Inc., Bank of America, N.A., and the other parties named therein. | Filed herewith. |
| 21.0 | Subsidiaries of Grand Canyon Education, Inc. | Filed herewith. |
| 23.1 | Consent of KPMG LLP, Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm | Filed herewith. |
| 24.1 | Power of Attorney | Filed herewith (on signature page) |
| 31.1 | Certification of Principal Executive Officer Pursuant to Rule 13a-14(a) and 15d-14(a) as Adopted Pursuant to Section 302 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 | Filed herewith. |
| 31.2 | Certification of Principal Financial Officer Pursuant to Rule 13a-14(a) and 15d-14(a) as Adopted Pursuant to Section 302 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 | Filed herewith. |
| 32.1 | Certification of Principal Executive Officer Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. Section 1350, as Adopted Pursuant to Section 906 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 | Filed herewith. |
| 32.2 | Certification of Principal Financial Officer Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. Section 1350, as Adopted Pursuant to Section 906 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 | Filed herewith. |
| 101.INS | XBRL Instance Document | Filed herewith. |
| 101.SCH | XBRL Taxonomy Extension Schema | Filed herewith. |
| 101.CAL | XBRL Taxonomy Extension Calculation Linkbase | Filed herewith. |
| 101.DEF | XBRL Taxonomy Extension Definition Linkbase | Filed herewith. |
| 101.LAB | XBRL Taxonomy Extension Label Linkbase | Filed herewith. |
| 101.PRE | XBRL Taxonomy Extension Presentation Linkbase | Filed herewith. |

Indicates a management contract or any compensatory plan, contract or arrangement.

This certification is being furnished solely to accompany this report pursuant to 18 U.S.C. Section 1350, and is not being filed for purposes of Section 18 of the Exchange Act, and is not to be incorporated by reference into any filings of the University, whether made before or after the date hereof, regardless of any general incorporation language in such filing.

Table of Contents**SIGNATURES**

Pursuant to the requirements of Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, the registrant has duly caused this report to be signed on its behalf by the undersigned, thereunto duly authorized.

GRAND CANYON EDUCATION, INC.

By: /s/ Brian E. Mueller
 Name: Brian E. Mueller
 Title: President and Chief Executive Officer
 Dated: February 17, 2016

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, that each person whose signature appears below constitutes and appoints Brian E. Mueller, Daniel E. Bachus, and Brian M. Roberts, and each of them, his true and lawful attorneys-in-fact and agents, with full power of substitution and resubstitution, for him and in his name, place and stead, in any and all capacities, to sign any and all amendments to this Annual Report on Form 10-K, and to file the same, with all exhibits thereto and other documents in connection therewith the Securities and Exchange Commission, granting unto said attorneys-in-fact and agents, and each of them, full power and authority to do and perform each and every act and thing requisite and necessary to be done in and about the premises, as fully and to all intents and purposes as he might or could do in person hereby ratifying and confirming all that said attorneys-in-fact and agents, or his substitute or substitutes, may lawfully do or cause to be done by virtue hereof.

Pursuant to the requirements of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, this report has been signed below by the following persons on behalf of the registrant and in the capacities and on the dates indicated.

| Signature | Title | Date |
|-------------------------|--|----------------------|
| /s/ Brian E. Mueller | President, Chief Executive Officer and Director (Principal Executive Officer) | February 17, 2016 |
| Brian E. Mueller | | |
| /s/ Daniel E. Bachus | Chief Financial Officer (Principal Financial Officer and Principal Accounting Officer) | February 17, 2016 |
| Daniel E. Bachus | | |
| /s/ Brent D. Richardson | Chairman | February 17, 2016 |
| Brent D. Richardson | | |
| /s/ David J. Johnson | Director | February 17, 2016 |
| David J. Johnson | | |
| /s/ Jack A. Henry | Director | February 17, |

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Jack A. Henry | | 2016 |
| /s/ Bradley A. Casper | Director | February 17, 2016 |
| Bradley A. Casper | | |
| /s/ Kevin F. Warren | Director | February 17, 2016 |
| Kevin F. Warren | | |
| /s/ Sara R. Dial | Director | February 17, 2016 |
| Sara R. Dial | | |