

## V. Conclusion

Sonoma State University is fully prepared for the Capacity and Preparatory Review under the four WASC Standards. Additionally, the university continues to demonstrate good progress on its outcomes for the Educational Effectiveness Review:

1. The distinctive qualities of a Sonoma State University education
2. Curriculum and the roles of General Education and the Major
  - Implement, assess and evaluate the FYE Pilot
  - Develop a GE Plan
  - Complete an academic program review cycle by Fall 2009
  - Support departments in assessing diversity efforts

As illustrated in the reflective essays for each of the four standards, the university has critically evaluated its compliance with the CFRs and specific guidelines. The university has also prepared the [SSU Portfolio](#), which provides specific evidence to support SSU's fulfillment of its core commitment to institutional capacity.

SSU engaged in an extensive self-review of the standards and attended conscientiously to the concerns raised in the WASC Commission letter after the 5<sup>th</sup> year review, organizing its reflective essays around these concerns. Additionally, the essays focus on SSU's capacity to engage the issues outlined for the Educational Effectiveness Review.

1. Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives. The university believes it is fully compliant with this standard. As a campus of the California State University, SSU operates with the highest integrity, is committed to academic freedom, supports and honors demographic, cultural, and intellectual diversity, sustains a

leadership system that is responsible and accountable, and has a formally approved mission statement that clearly defines its essential values and character. The university continues to refine its educational objectives and, as a part of the Educational Effectiveness Review, has committed to a full and inclusive campus dialogue regarding the meaning of a liberal arts and sciences education. The stated goal of that process is to develop a set of student learning outcomes for the baccalaureate degree. The university continues to make progress in its commitment to diversity, identified as an area of concern by the campus community.

2. Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions. The university has acted upon the concerns raised by WASC regarding fulfilling the expectations of the *Handbook of Accreditation* with respect to Standard 2. As the reflective essay for standard 2 attests, all departments have established student learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and feedback mechanisms for their majors. All departments submit annual assessment reports and all will have completed a program review self-study by the fall of 2009. General Education reform continues with the implementation and assessment of the FYE Pilot and continued work on the revision of the breadth and capstone requirements in GE. The faculty continues to receive in-service training on assessment strategies through workshops and conferences. A conscientious assessment of student learning for the purpose of improving educational effectiveness is in place, with provisions made for continued refinement of the university's educational effectiveness goals. SSU has demonstrated productive self-analysis and responsive planning in this area since the 5<sup>th</sup> year visit.

3. Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> year team visit and subsequent WASC Commission letter, SSU has made further gains in aligning resources with purpose (CFR 3.5) and in organizational planning support for decision-making (3.8). As pointed out in the reflective essays, SSU has a strong organizational planning structure at the university level (the University Planning Steering Committee [UPSC]). Additionally, the Campus Reengineering Committee (CRC), under the direction of the Vice President for Administration and Finance, has a long history of consultative, strategic decision making. Strategic planning takes place in the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and in each of the Academic Schools, as well as in the University Library. SSU thus demonstrates that it has the planning and decision-making infrastructure in place to fulfill the expectations of this standard. As regards faculty and staff, the university has demonstrated that it employs sufficient faculty and staff to undertake the operations of the university.

Work continues in the area of balancing workload with faculty scholarship and creative activity and in the much needed area of faculty development. The recent strategic allocation of \$200,000/year over five years in permanent funding for faculty development will allow SSU to increase faculty support for a variety of activities, including travel and support for creative and scholarly work. As illustrated in the reflective essay for standard 3, the university continues to provide information resources through the University Library and Information Technology. Clearly, information access and technology need to be further addressed, and it is the intention of the university to begin supplemental funding for academic technology as those resources become available.

#### 4. Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement.

Sonoma State University has implemented plans to address the WASC Commission's concern regarding SSU's fulfillment of the expectations of Standard 4. The university has worked diligently to apply existing and anticipated resources to the strategic priorities of the university. The Institutional Proposal, approved by WASC in Spring 2006, reflects the university's commitment to uphold this standard in its statement regarding institutional outcomes of the accreditation process: "SSU's primary institutional goal for the re-accreditation process is to become an intentional, reflective, and evidence-based learning organization." Specific institutional outcomes for the accreditation process further reflect SSU's commitment to develop, utilize, and reflect on evidence-based indicators:

1. Develop and utilize indicators of performance, such as a set of functional categories for budgetary purposes; analysis of student-faculty ratio (SFR) longitudinal data to aid in alignment of resource allocations; administrative, faculty and student performance indicators; and benchmarking of financial and other data from other CSU campuses and other similar institutions (COPLAC).
2. Define the signature of an SSU education, including the roles of GE and the major, by engaging the campus community in conversation that takes as its initial texts for discussion AAC&U's *Greater Expectations Report* and *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate*.
3. Conduct program review for all academic programs and begin development of a comprehensive process for review of co-curricular and other non-academic programs.
4. Use assessment data and evidence as a basis for reflection and improvement.

Sonoma State University is prepared to meet the goals it has defined for itself in the Institutional Proposal. The university views the accreditation effort as an opportunity to achieve the outcomes that WASC has delineated for the review process, including development of effective use of indicators of educational effectiveness; greater clarity about the university's educational objectives; deeper understanding of student learning; and systematic engagement of faculty with issues of assessment and improvement of teaching and learning. The university welcomes the opportunity for peer review and comment on the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and on its readiness to engage in the Educational Effectiveness Review.

## VI. Appendices

### Appendix A: Response to and progress on previous concerns identified in the WASC

#### Commission's 5<sup>th</sup> year review letter.

SSU's last re-accreditation visit was in 1999, followed by a 5<sup>th</sup> year focused visit in 2004. The issues raised by both visits in the commission letters and SSU's response to those issues were addressed in SSU's Institutional Proposal submitted in the Fall of 2005 and approved in Spring 2006. The following includes an update of SSU's continued work on these issues following the approval of the Institutional Proposal.

#### **Assessment of Educational Effectiveness**

SSU continues its engagement in assessment of student learning in order to achieve educational effectiveness. The 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC letter clearly stated the Commission's expectation that the university "build its capacity to integrate results and actions from program review into the design of academic programs and the development of student learning outcomes." To meet that expectation, all academic programs have developed student learning outcomes for the major as well as assessment mechanisms that measure achievement of these outcomes. In the fall of 2004, all departments submitted an annual assessment report. From the data gathered, the Faculty Assessment Coordinator and the Associate Vice Provost for Academic Programs developed a rubric that placed departments in one of three categories: beginning, developing, or competent. The initial review placed 25 departments in the beginning category, 14 in the developing category, and 15 in the competent stage. The university Faculty Assessment Coordinator and the Associate Vice Provost for Academic programs met with the deans and department chairs of the schools to discuss the assessment reports, the rubric and how

departments could move forward in their assessment activities. Departments were then asked to submit 3-year assessment plans, as well as their second annual assessment report to the Provost. These plans were submitted in 2005 and form the basis for assessment activities to support academic program review. The assessment reports are now required annually.

The new program review protocol, which focuses on educational effectiveness and student learning, was developed and reviewed by the Academic Senate and the Educational Policies Committee and was implemented in the spring of 2006. Working in consultation with the School Deans, a schedule of program review has been developed that assures that all departments will undergo program review between 2005 and 2009. As of Fall 2007, 19 departments and programs have completed their self-studies; the remaining 19 departments will engage in their self-studies in 2007-2008. Required data exhibit 7.1 Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (2006-2007) provides an overview of the rich assessment strategies currently employed by departments and programs at the university. The Faculty Assessment Coordinator position, which the 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC team noted was slated to be eliminated, has been renewed and continues to support departments and schools in their assessment efforts.

### **Alignment of Institutional Priorities with Mission**

In the 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC visit letter, the Commission noted its concern with the level of the university's planning efforts: "Will Sonoma State engage in ongoing institution-wide planning and devise ways to measure effectiveness in fulfilling its planning goals?" The Commission was encouraged that the campus was receptive to institutional planning for the purposes of informed decision-making and that Academic Affairs had made progress on developing a division-wide planning process, including a mission, goals and vision statement with accompanying strategic initiatives.

After the 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC visit and receipt of the Commission letter, President Armiñana began a university-wide strategic planning effort and formed the University Planning Steering Committee (UPSC). The UPSC initiated a serious institution-wide effort to focus on institutional purposes, educational objectives, and appropriate alignment of fiscal and physical resources with long-range planning. The UPSC is a university-wide steering committee, co-chaired by the Provost and the Chief Financial Officer. Membership includes the President; the Cabinet; and key academic, fiscal, student affairs, faculty, and student leaders. The Plan, discussed in the Reflective Essay for Standard 4, has identified strategic areas/goals, objectives, and initiatives for the university.

Concurrently, strategic planning activities are underway in each of the five academic schools (Arts and Humanities, Business and Economics, Education, Science and Technology, and Social Sciences), as well as in the University Library, the School of Extended Education, and the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM)



Division. The Division of Administration and Finance continues its planning efforts through the work of the Campus Reengineering Committee, which reviews, analyzes and recommends to the Division of Administration and Finance on issues related to budget, strategic planning, reengineering activities, revenue enhancement initiatives, and service improvement programs. This committee, established in 1994, has a long history of planning and represents constituencies from throughout the university, including faculty, staff, students, and cabinet level administrators.

### **Improving the Climate for Diversity**

As the Commission's 5<sup>th</sup> year letter notes, SSU "has taken seriously the issue of creating a more welcoming and inclusive community." The work of the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM) Division and the Campus Climate Committee continues to be pivotal in addressing recruitment, retention, and the campus climate for underrepresented students. The Commission verified that SSU's commitment to and practices of increasing and promoting diversity are compliant with the WASC standards. However, SSU continues to work on ways to further support underrepresented students in both their curricular and co-curricular activities. Additional initiatives are outlined in the Reflective Essay for Standard 1.

### **General Education and the "Marks" of the SSU Student Experience**

The 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC visiting team expressed concern about assessment efforts in General Education (GE), but acknowledged the difficult work that SSU has undertaken in the GE reform effort. SSU's attention has been focused on the reform of General Education and the implementation of a six point plan for full GE reform. The first point

of the plan, the development of a first year experience (FYE), has been implemented as a two year pilot project for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The FYE Pilot team selected a Faculty Assessment Coordinator who worked with a small group of faculty and staff assessment experts in developing an assessment strategy for the pilot. This multi-faceted assessment plan employs both indirect and direct assessment measures. The first year assessments have been completed and analyzed by the assessment team. Currently, the FYE Pilot report with recommendations is being reviewed by both the GE Subcommittee and the Educational Policies Committee for action.

Dialogue has also begun on the important work of defining the “mark” or “signature” of an SSU undergraduate liberal arts and sciences education. A team of faculty and administrators attended the AAHE/WASC workshop on institutional assessment in January 2005 and returned with a plan for discussion of the outcomes of an SSU education. A large team of 20 faculty and administrators, funded by the Division of Academic Affairs, attended the annual AAC&U conference in San Francisco in January 2005. An academic affairs council retreat in the summer of 2005 centered on a discussion of the AAC&U’s publication, *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate*, in order to begin a dialogue about the mark of an SSU education in the academic schools under the leadership of the school deans.

In 2007-2008, under the leadership of the Provost and the Academic Senate, the university will engage in a discussion of the baccalaureate with the goal of developing a set of university wide student learning outcomes. Using *College Learning for the New Global Century*, a report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise, as its key reference, this initiative is intended to assist the university

in defining a set of outcomes for the baccalaureate that reflect SSU's commitment to a liberal arts and sciences education.

The Office of Institutional Research piloted the Rand Corporation's Collegial Learning Assessment (CLA) in the fall of 2004 and spring of 2005. The CSU has now committed its 23 campuses to a plan for administering the CLA as a means of assessing student writing, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning. All campuses will administer the CLA to a cohort of freshmen and seniors and will report results to the system-wide office. The CSU, and therefore SSU, is committed to working with AASCU and NASUGLC on a Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

### **Institutional Commitment to Sustained Follow-Up**

The Commission's 5<sup>th</sup> year letter expressed concern that insufficient progress had been made in the vital areas of student learning and educational effectiveness. The preceding discussion addresses progress that has been made since the 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC team visit in these key areas. Clearly, SSU is demonstrating a strong institutional commitment to sustained follow-up through the implementation of permanent institutional structures that ensure on-going strategic planning, program review, GE reform, and commitment to the core mission of the university through the development of a signature liberal arts and sciences undergraduate education. Assessment of student learning has become a key component of academic program review and of the work of the GE reform initiative. Analysis of data, benchmarking and development of key indicators of institutional effectiveness are increasingly a part of informed decision-making at all levels of the university. Some examples include using student-faculty ratios by department at SSU compared to CSU averages, the 2004 National Study of

Instructional Cost and Productivity report, the 80% tenure track to 20% temporary faculty goal for each department, and using CIRP and YFCY data compared to that of other public 4-year colleges and universities.

### **Substantive Change Issue**

It was through the audit of the online and off-campus programs list that was provided to us by WASC that SSU discovered that two programs (MA in Education – Larkspur; MA in Education – Del Norte) had not gone through the WASC substantive change approval process for off-site programs. As soon as this was discovered, the university's ALO informed WASC and began the substantive change approval process for these two programs. The MA in Education – Del Norte was not required to complete the substantive change approval process as the cohort had completed their course of study. The MA in Education – Larkspur was approved by the WASC Commission for the current cohort.

The following processes are in place or will be put in place to ensure that this does not occur in the future:

1. At the beginning of each academic year, the WASC ALO will review the audit of the online and off-campus approved programs list provided by WASC to make sure that all programs are accurately reflected. This list will be shared with the Academic Deans, who will be asked to confirm the accuracy of the list.
2. All new degree programs being proposed will be required to indicate on the curriculum proposal forms whether they are programs that need to go through the substantive change process (e.g., are they 50% or more online or are they 25 miles or more from the campus).

3. Department chairs will receive information on the WASC substantive change process at the beginning of each academic year. This information will be reinforced in the new department chair orientation process.
4. Departments with online and/or off site degree programs will be required to include these programs in their departmental program review.
5. Finally, when the current curriculum guide is updated, a section will be added that defines the steps that need to be taken in order to receive substantive change approvals from WASC.

Currently, SSU has received WASC Commission approval to begin a BA in Liberal Studies at Napa Valley College. This program began in the fall of 2007. SSU is also considering beginning a BA in Global Studies in Singapore and has scheduled a March 2008 substantive change committee review with an anticipated start date for the program in the fall of 2008.

