

#### IV. Reflective Essays

##### Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

The 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC visiting team found SSU to be in compliance with Standard 1. However, SSU has long been concerned with issues of diversity and continues to work towards improving the climate for diversity on the campus. The WASC Commission letter after the 5<sup>th</sup> year visit commented that “the University has taken seriously the issue of creating a more welcoming and inclusive community,” and continued that “the review verified that the University’s commitment and practices are in keeping with fulfilling those expectations.” In keeping with SSU’s on-going concern with and commitment to diversity, during the self-review, constituents identified CFR 1.5, which specifies that the institution must respond appropriately to the increasing diversity in society, as one of the areas meriting greater attention.

SSU is planning ahead for further changes in the student population, including the need to increase access to higher education for students from lower socioeconomic strata and underrepresented groups. SSU has seen a slight increase in the number of students reporting themselves as Mexican-Americans, while the percentage reporting themselves as Black (or African American) has decreased. Between 1994 and 2006, the Mexican-American student population has increased from 9% to 10% of the total population, while the African American student population has declined from 3.5% to 2% in the same time frame.

In order to increase outreach to students from diverse communities, the Recruitment Office in Admissions and Records (part of the SAEM Division) has instituted a number of diversity recruitment efforts, including:

- East Bay Initiative Program: Designed to provide outreach to high schools throughout the East Bay Area. This program exists not only to recruit students to attend SSU, but also to promote higher education in areas where minorities primarily reside. SSU representatives and students go out to the high schools to inform students on how to be eligible for admission to the California State University system/Sonoma State University.
- “CSU Super Sunday”: SSU participates in both the San Francisco Bay Area and the Los Angeles area CSU Super Sunday outreach to the African-American communities through the churches. This is an initiative of the Chancellor’s Office, and SSU is represented on the planning committee for the SF Bay Area. In the Los Angeles area, SSU has partnered with West Angeles Church of God in Christ, the largest black church in Los Angeles, and, as a result of this, seven students from the church have enrolled at SSU over a two-year period. Additionally, SSU has partnered with Young Black Scholars (YBS), sponsored by 100 Black Men of Los Angeles, and has enrolled several student as a result of this outreach activity.
- High School Instant Admissions: A pilot program consisting of 5 schools in our local area: Anderson Valley High School, Boonville; Sonoma Valley High School, Sonoma; Elsie Allen High School, Santa Rosa; Ukiah High School, Ukiah; and Armijo High School, Fairfield. The Instant Admissions Program is an

- opportunity for participating high schools to allow Sonoma State University personnel to come and determine if a student is eligible for admissions.
- **AVID-Advancement Via Individual Determination:** This is an in-school academic support program for grades 4-12 that prepares students for college eligibility and success. The program places average students in advanced classes, with the goal of leveling the playing field for minority, rural, low-income and other students without a college-going tradition in their families.
  - **Partnerships with Local High Schools:** These direct partnerships with three of the most diverse high schools in the university's service region – Elsie Allen, Roseland University Prep, and Sonoma Valley – provide an opportunity to recruit first generation, low income, and educationally disadvantaged students.
  - **The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP):** EOP has a special admission process for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. Each year approximately 200 new EOP students are recruited to attend SSU. The EOP freshmen attend a Summer Bridge Program that helps them to develop a sense of community and provides them with advising, mentoring, and academic support. This experience is followed by a first year program, the EOP Academy, in which cohorts of EOP students are placed in learning communities that support and enhance their potential for academic success. This program has produced improved retention rates for the EOP students.
  - **TRIO Federally Funded Programs:** SSU has several Pre-College Programs, including Upward Bound (Sonoma), Upward Bound Math and Science, Upward Bound (North), Upward Bound (Lake), and Academic Talent Search, which

provide outreach to our local K-12 educational community. These programs provide advising, instruction, activities, tutoring, college visits, financial aid information, career exploration, and other support activities aimed at increasing students' opportunities to access and to succeed in higher education.

- Academic School Recruitment Efforts: The School of Education funds a half-time professional staff position for pre-admission advising. This advisor works with programs and initiatives in which diverse populations participate, including regional occupational programs, migrant education programs, transfer programs, etc. The Teacher Recruitment Project (TRP) now focuses on increasing the number of Math and Science teachers under a new initiative – the Science and Mathematics Teacher Recruitment and Retention Initiative – and conducts a number of diversity outreach activities involving such entities as Bilingual College Fairs and MESA programs. In the School of Arts and Humanities, faculty recruit at various college fairs, high schools and community colleges. Specific outreach efforts have been made to the local Native American population through the Native American Studies Program. Several faculty members serve on the Board of Roseland University Prep, a local charter school, which is over 90% Latino/a. The School of Science and Technology is launching an initiative to join the MESA Program and has received a commitment of NASA/EPO funds to support this effort. Faculty and the Dean in the School of Social Science routinely recruit at high schools and colleges in the service area, as well as attend the Black Scholar Expo in Los Angeles and Oakland in an aggressive campaign to recruit students of color.

The SSU Diversity Vision Statement calls for fostering and sustaining a pluralistic, inclusive environment that empowers all members of the campus community to achieve their highest potential without fear of prejudice or discrimination.

Additionally, the University Strategic Plan highlights diversity as one of the key areas of focus. The SSU Program Review policy (see Reflective Essay Standard 2 for a full discussion) also asks departments to reflect on how their curricula address the cultural, ethnic, and social diversity of their students, how they accommodate differences in student preparation and access to educational opportunities, how they address diversity issues in advising, mentoring, and career development, and how they seek to recruit and to retain diverse faculty and students without reliance on discriminatory preferences.

In order to support the retention and graduation of underrepresented students, once they have matriculated, SSU has a number of programs, initiatives, and committees in place. These activities take place in Academic Affairs and in the SAEM Divisions. Listed below are a representative sampling of these efforts. A full review of diversity efforts is included in the SSU Portfolio under the Reaccreditation Review for Standard 1, CFR 1.5.

- TRIO Support Services: Learning Skills Services (LSS) and the McNair Scholars Program are two projects aimed at assisting low-income and first-generation students overcome barriers to success. LSS provides advising, tutoring, instruction, supplemental instruction, computer lab use and grant aid for those eligible. The McNair Scholars Program assists undergraduate students in preparing for successful entry to and graduation from doctoral programs of study.

The program provides advising, faculty mentors, research stipends, GRE prep and research methodology course work.

- Disabled Student Services (DSS): assures people with disabilities equitable opportunities for higher education. Students with disabilities qualify as underrepresented educational equity students. DSS provides specific services, such as accommodated testing, disability management advising, interpreters, note takers, readers, and access to specialized computers, which enable students to have access to, and satisfaction in the educational process.
- Center for Culture, Gender and Sexuality (CCGS): A component of the Sonoma Student Union Corporation, the CCGS is committed to the values of social justice as the foundation for the delivery of educational programs and services. The CCGS plans and coordinates a major lecture series, advises student organizations, as well as provides undergraduate internships and other resources that support student event-planning, leadership, and social activities.
- Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP): Sponsored by NSF and designed to broaden participation in science, mathematics, engineering and technology disciplines from students who belong to groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education or who face social, cultural, educational, or economic barriers to careers in the sciences.
- Multicultural Retreat: Hosted by the School of Social Sciences, this retreat brings experts in the field of critical multicultural pedagogy and SSU faculty to facilitate discussion of best practices in classroom strategies for cross-community learning or for cross-cultural learning.

- Campus Climate Committee: Assesses the general climate of the university and makes recommendations to the President regarding actions the university might take to maintain and improve a positive campus climate and serves the role of fact-finding and conflict resolution in relation to specific campus incidents which threaten a positive campus climate.

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 has in place strong policies that support these commitments and has had no interference by any political, religious, or corporate entities. The university is committed to honest communication with WASC and to abiding by Commission policies and procedures.

## Standard 2: Achieving Educational Effectiveness Through Core Functions

The 5<sup>th</sup> Year WASC report stated that the university should make substantial progress toward assessing student-learning outcomes for the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). The accrediting commission drew attention to the necessity of demonstrating compliance with Standard Two, highlighting CFRs 2.6 and 2.7. The university's own self-review not only corroborated the commission's findings, but also highlighted CFRs 2.2 and 2.12.

The university has worked assiduously to establish and implement protocols for assessing student-learning outcomes and to incorporate such assessments into curricular review and reform across the academic community. The main purpose of this reflective essay is to document those efforts. In addition, the essay will address faculty development and support activities for student learning.

### Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Under the coordinated guidance of Academic Affairs and faculty governance, faculty and administration are determining how best to integrate and assess the student learning outcomes of its General Education program with those of its departments and programs. To facilitate this result, faculty and administration have adopted a three-part strategy: 1) identify and assess student learning outcomes in the major; 2) identify and assess student learning outcomes in GE; and then 3) integrate the results of those efforts.

The university has made significant progress on parts (1) and (2). What follows in this section of the essay is our report on that progress.

#### *1) Assessment of student learning outcomes in the major*



Faculty and administration are using the mechanism of program review to administer and support assessment of student learning in the major. In 2001, faculty and administration replaced its longstanding review policy with an interim alternative. In accordance with this interim policy, all departments and programs developed 1) student learning outcomes for their major; 2) assessment strategies for those outcomes; and 3) feedback loops to insure that what they learn from their assessment strategies informs curricular reform, as needed. Departments and programs submitted reports on their assessment activities to the appropriate faculty committees and to Academic Affairs for review, documentation and consultation. Once this initial process was completed in 2004, departments began to submit annual reports on their assessment and feedback methods. All departments have submitted such reports for the academic years 2004, 2005, and 2006. These reports are accessible to the university community on the SSU assessment website.

In the spring of 2006, the Academic Senate endorsed and the President approved a new program review policy, which incorporates the previous assessment reports under its more comprehensive umbrella. The new policy takes several considerations into account: diversity and quality of faculty and staff; program mission and goals and their alignment with the mission and goals of SSU; assessment of student learning outcomes; service to the community; recruitment, retention and support for students; and curricular changes in light of assessment results. Program review also includes the comments and feedback from external reviewers, selected from comparable programs at other universities and vetted by departments, school deans, and Academic Affairs.

The following 19 departments have completed their review and/or external accreditation under the new policy: Art Studio, Art History, French, Liberal Studies (Hutchins), Spanish, Business Administration (AACSB Accreditation), Economics, School of Education (NCATE Accreditation), Kinesiology, Mathematics, Nursing (NLNAC Accreditation), Counseling (CACREP Accreditation), Music (NASM Accreditation), Mathematics, Anthropology, Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies, Environmental Studies, Psychology, and History.

The following programs are currently completing their program review in 2007-2008: American Multicultural Studies, Chicano and Latino Studies, Communication Studies, English, Philosophy, Theatre Arts, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Computer and Engineering Science, Geology, Physics, Geography, History, Human Development, Political Science, Sociology, Women's and Gender Studies, and Interdisciplinary Studies.

Departments have adopted a panoply of assessment tools to meet their respective student learning outcomes: senior capstone seminars, exit interviews, foreign language exams, senior recitals, public performances, auditions, research courses, nationwide licensing exams, portfolios, and alumni surveys. In some cases, departments have constructed new assessment tools that they administer in addition to the assessment that faculty engage in already in their courses. In other cases, departments have embedded assessment tools directly into the curriculum itself. In the School of Education, students in the multiple subject credential program use e-portfolios, which provide the department with rich assessment data and provide the students with career portfolios for seeking positions in schools. The Hutchins School of Liberal Studies has long utilized portfolio

assessment in its major program. The university has also purchased an on-line proprietary survey software program (SNAP-PRO) and developed training workshops through the University Library. Departments are now using the software to do systematic surveying, data collection, and analysis for a variety of assessment purposes.

The new program review policy established a permanent institutional mechanism not only to support and monitor assessment of student learning outcomes, but also to incorporate the results of such assessment into curricular reform. All departments and programs have identified student learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and feedback loops. All departments have submitted three reports on their assessment efforts. At the end of this academic year, the university expects that the remaining 19 departments will complete their program review as well. All of these departments are now actively engaged in the process of completing their review.

Academic Affairs has supported assessment efforts through the following activities: in 2001, the university sent a team of faculty and administrators to the AAC&U's General Education Institute in Asheville, NC; in 2005, the university sent a team of faculty and administrators to the AAHE/WASC workshop on Student Learning Outcomes; in 2005, the university sent a team of twenty members to the AAC&U Annual Meeting; in the academic year 2006-2007, Academic Affairs organized program review workshops for department chairs and faculty members; in the spring of 2006, Academic Affairs organized workshops on student learning outcomes and assessment in such areas as student learning outcomes and assessment overview, indirect assessment techniques, institutional research, direct assessment techniques, and "closing the loop" through evaluation of assessment instruments and plans. The Center for Teaching and

Professional Development has provided various workshops on assessment and technology, and the Office of Institutional Research (IR) provides institutional data to support departments in their program reviews. (See Reflective Essay for Standard 4 for additional information on IR efforts.)

A new, national initiative, the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) may also support the advancement of student learning outcomes and assessment at SSU. The VSA will require each participating institution (all CSUs will be part of the VSA) to create a university profile, consisting of data regarding student recruitment, retention, graduation, fees, etc., as well as information about the university's performance on various assessment instruments. Sonoma State University will use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). SSU has been administering the NSSE for several years, and IR routinely provides assessment results and reports to the campus community for use in effecting improvement in student retention, graduation and satisfaction. The CLA, which provides assessment data on students in the areas of writing, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning skills, was piloted at SSU in 2005 and was given again in the fall of 2007. The VSA will also allow universities to highlight in their profile specific learning outcomes and assessment efforts unique to the institution. SSU's profile will be completed in the fall of 2008.

Administration and faculty have made student learning outcomes and their assessment a priority in their pedagogical deliberations. The university has established an effective institutional structure to enable faculty to improve the quality of student learning through assessment of student learning outcomes. Verifiable assessment of student learning outcomes is vigorously underway.

2) *Assessment of student learning outcomes in the General Education Program*

In 2003, the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) of the Academic Senate created a task force of senior faculty members to propose steps for general education reform. The task force recommended a six point blueprint for change: 1) create a comprehensive and integrated freshman year experience; 2) expand choice of course offerings in the sophomore and junior years; 3) create a senior capstone seminar; 4) introduce a writing across the curriculum component; 5) support faculty to teach 1, 2 and 4; and 6) identify student learning outcomes and assessment tools for measuring success in reaching them. In May of 2004, the Academic Senate charged the General Education Subcommittee to develop a proposal to implement general education reform in accord with the six point plan.

In 2005, the Academic Senate approved an experimental pilot two-year Freshman Year Experience (FYE Pilot). A pilot cohort of 150 students was enrolled in a 9-unit, year-long course, *Identity and Global Change*, taught by 10 faculty members from disciplines such as Philosophy, English, American Multicultural Studies, Anthropology, Theatre Arts, and Music. Students received six units of general education credit for freshman composition and critical thinking and an additional three units of elective credit. The pilot included specific and detailed student learning outcomes for writing, critical thinking and student development. An assessment plan, comprised of surveys, focus groups, and authentic assessment of student learning, was developed and implemented.

The first year of the FYE Pilot is complete, and the university is embarking on the second. The general education subcommittee already has received the first year's

assessment data. It currently is considering making FYE a permanent course option for students.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the GE Subcommittee created work groups to facilitate completion of the GE reform effort. These included assessment, data collection on the current GE program, and planning for GE reform based on the six point plan. The committee began the 2007-2008 academic year with a retreat to develop goals and milestones for the work of the committee for the year.

SSU has identified and approved student learning outcomes for General Education overall and also for the freshman year experience. The first year of the FYE Pilot has been assessed and reviewed, while the second year of the pilot is currently underway. Appropriate committees of the Academic Senate in consultation with Academic Affairs are leading the effort towards completing the reform, including the Educational Policies Committee (EPC) and the Academic Planning Committee (APC). The GE subcommittee has developed a new course proposal form which incorporates student learning outcomes and assessment. The committee is also currently evaluating data on the current GE program and is investigating various models for a reformed GE Program.

#### Scholarship and Creative Activity

Opportunities for faculty scholarship and continued professional development are essential to retaining talented faculty and supporting excellent teaching and mentoring skills. The president has earmarked \$200,000 annually over the next five years for faculty research and professional development. For this academic year, Academic Affairs has allocated the first installment as follows: \$150,000 to be shared by the

Schools and Library based on FTEF (full-time equivalent faculty); \$14,000 additional support for the Center for Teaching and Professional Development (CTPD); \$16,000 for matching funds required for the Curriculum Redesign Project (a CSU system wide grant); \$10,000 for research, which will be distributed through the Faculty Subcommittee on Sponsored Programs (FSSP); and \$10,000 for General Education reform. Additionally, Academic Affairs has enhanced the Center for Teaching and Professional Development by making the Director of the CTPD a full-time position, beginning in the 2007-2008 academic year.

The Academic Schools and Library will divide their \$150,000 as follows: \$44,544, Arts and Humanities; \$17,154, Business and Economics; \$11,344, Education; \$35,552, Science and Technology; \$37,351, Social Science; and \$4,056, Library. A matrix has been designed to help guide decision making in the future as the fund grows to the \$1,000,000 in permanent faculty development allocation.

#### Support for Student Learning

Through cooperation between the Academic Senate, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM), the university established what it calls Educational Mentoring Teams (EMT) and the freshman seminar (FS). As part of its reform of general education, the university is considering whether to fold EMT and FS into its freshman year experience. The residential life staff has created a successful Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program, where students reside in living/learning communities and take a core set of general education, FS and English 101 courses together. This program consists of 10 interest groups: arts, business and economics,

communications, education (K-12), engineering, math and science, global issues/global careers, Hutchins, leadership, pre-health professions, and psychology.

In addition, the university offers other co-curricular activities and support services for its student population. For example, JUMP (Join Us Making Progress) is a community volunteer program that the Associated Students and the Student Union co-sponsor; SOAR is a summer orientation and advising program for first-time freshmen and their parents, and the Office of Residential Life assists students living on campus. Other support programs include the Center for Gender, Culture, and Sexuality, which provides multicultural programming and support for various student clubs; the Tutorial Center, which supplies academic tutoring for a variety of courses, and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which supports educationally and economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, the SAEM Division supports a strong leadership program, the Athletic Program, the Children's School, and a vibrant student club and Greek system.



### Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

During the 5<sup>th</sup> year visit, WASC found a lack of evidence regarding fiscal and physical resources being aligned with planning and purposes that supports effective decision making (CFR 3.5, 3.8). In SSU's self-review, respondents indicated areas that were strong are related to SSU's organizational structures and decision-making processes (CFRs 3.8 - 3.11). The areas identified as "needing our attention" and at "high priority" include Faculty and Staff (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.4) and Information Resources (CFR 3.7).

#### Faculty and Staff (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.4)

SSU's mission asserts that "The quality of the educational experience at Sonoma State University depends upon close human and intellectual relationships among students and faculty to foster the open exchange of ideas." Since SSU's inception, the faculty and staff community has diligently worked to create and develop SSU as a premiere regional university emphasizing liberal arts and sciences. The faculty and staff of SSU provide an education that fosters ethical exploration, civic engagement, social responsibility, and global awareness combined with a solid foundation in an academic discipline

As evidence of the collegial atmosphere among faculty at SSU, The Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey (HERI), administered at SSU in 2004-2005, found that 74% of those surveyed experience joy in their work, and 75% report being satisfied with their jobs. Interestingly, only 28% of tenured professors report having considered leaving SSU for another college. However, despite such promising numbers with regard to job satisfaction, 81% of those surveyed mentioned teaching load as a source of stress (second only to self-imposed high expectations [84%]).

Undergraduate and graduate enrollment at SSU has been consistently increasing over the past several years. This growth is expected to continue so that by 2012-2013, SSU will have 10,061 FTES (nearly 11,000 students) which is a 32% increase from 2007. The university acknowledges that this steady increase in student numbers will require SSU to hire additional personnel. The number of faculty employed at SSU has remained relatively constant over the past five years with tenured/tenure-track faculty making up slightly more than half of the instructional faculty and accounting for nearly 75% of the teaching workload. Since its inception, SSU has remained committed to hiring full-time tenure track faculty to replace vacant or newly created positions. In 2007-2008, SSU is conducting 33 searches with 11 of the searches a direct response to new FTE growth.

SSU is taking a proactive approach to student numbers, class sizes, and SFR by engaging in university-wide dialogues via various strategic planning processes. In the University Strategic Plan, one strategic goal is to “develop challenging, innovative, intellectually rigorous academic programs that engage students and faculty in life-long learning, critical thinking, inquiry and reflection.” The draft University Strategic Plan includes an initiative to maintain the student/faculty ratio (SFR) at the CSU average. This goal was, in fact, achieved in the fall of 2006 with an SSU and CSU average SFR of 21.9. Finally, the President in his Fall 2007 convocation speech pledged to work to maintain an SSU SFR similar to the CSU system average.

With regard to minority representation, women have comprised nearly 50% of the total number of temporary and tenured/tenure-track faculty over the past five years. However, women have consistently been overrepresented in the temporary ranks. For example, in 2005 there were 111 temporary male faculty members and 154 temporary

female faculty members. The lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the faculty has been an issue at SSU for several years, and there has been some success in this area. There has been an increase of 6% (from 11% in 2001 to 17% in 2006) in the percentage of full-time faculty who identify themselves as part of an ethnic minority. As a means of furthering this trend, recruitment and retention of a diverse campus community are key areas that are identified in the University Strategic Plan. The Vice Provost for Academic Affairs meets with faculty hiring committees to provide them with resources and strategies to help locate a diverse pool of candidates. Moreover, the Manager of Employee Diversity and University Compliance in Human Services is responsible for overseeing California and university policies related to diversity and non-discrimination in hiring.

Recruiting and maintaining new faculty and staff is a challenge for SSU because of the area's high cost of living and the relatively low salaries of SSU faculty as compared to those of other CSU faculty. Sonoma County is one of the most expensive areas to live in the country with a median priced home of \$500,000, which requires a qualifying income of \$116,557. In the HERI report, tenure-track faculty mentioned personal finances as the highest source of stress in their lives. Some of this stress may be alleviated thanks to the CSU and the California Faculty Association (CFA) negotiation of a 20.7% General Salary Increase that faculty will receive over four years until 2010. Several new faculty members are now renting one of ten townhouses owned by SSU that are within a ten minute walk from the center of campus. These townhouses are available to new faculty hires on an interim basis. Other housing options and relocation resources are available through the Faculty Affairs Office.

With regard to faculty development, most programs designed to enhance teaching and learning are coordinated through the Center for Teaching and Professional Development (CTPD). The CTPD has been in existence at SSU for many years and was initially staffed by a part-time director and had no administrative support. In 2004, the Director of the CTPD was given 6 units per semester and 4 units in the summer to coordinate teaching and professional development activities (this translates to approximately 8 office hours per week). In 2005, the CTPD got its first permanent “home” when the office was relocated to the first floor of the Schulz Information Center. In July 2007, the Director was hired as a full-time administrator with a year-round appointment and given staff support. The Professional Development Subcommittee, which is a Senate subcommittee comprised of faculty and staff representatives from across campus, serves the CTPD in an advisory capacity and organizes several professional development workshops throughout the year. Most recently, the University Library opened the “Learning and Teaching Center” which serves as a collaborative environment whereby students, faculty and staff can receive training, instruction, and consultation on a variety of instructionally related issues.

Faculty development is a key component of both the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan and the University Strategic Plan. In fact, Faculty and Staff Development is a separate, specific objective in the campus-wide plan. The strategic goal for this section is to “provide a supportive environment that will attract and retain faculty and staff and contribute to their professional growth.” Four objectives have been identified for this goal: 1) attract and retain excellent and diverse faculty in sufficient numbers to accommodate enrollment growth; 2) support comprehensive professional development

and training opportunities for our faculty and staff; 3) develop cultural competence in faculty, staff and administrators; and 4) develop means to ease the financial strain of living and working in Sonoma County for our faculty and staff. Each objective will have several possible initiatives identified for implementation. Furthermore, the university has pledged \$1,000,000 over the next five years to faculty development initiatives and projects (\$200,000/year from permanent general fund growth). (See Reflective Essay for Standard 2 for details.)

#### Information Technology Resources (CFR 3.7)

SSU recognizes that technology is a primary tool in the evolution of higher education. SSU, like any other university, faces the increasing pressures of upgrading old systems, purchasing new products, and training faculty and staff in the appropriate use of new technologies. SSU recognizes the importance of ensuring that information technology resources are sufficiently coordinated and supported to fulfill its educational purposes and to provide key academic and administrative functions, and thus the university is taking the following steps.

The computer refresh program is one initiative that gives faculty and staff access to the latest computer technology (i.e., faster processing, more memory, and upgraded versions of hardware and software). Academic Affairs is annually replacing one-fourth of SSU's computer workstations at a cost of approximately \$100,000/per year. This means that faculty will be receiving a new computer once every four years. In 2006-2007, 123 workstations were replaced and 72 will be replaced in 2007-2008. Although funding for the first two years was derived from a temporary source, the remainder of the initiative

will be included in the permanent budget. Other divisions, in particular Administration and Finance, have similar refresh programs.

The Division of Administration and Finance (A&F) is responsible for delivering and managing the Common Management System (CMS) project which is a CSU-mandated initiative that is meant to streamline administrative functions. The software chosen by the CSU is PeopleSoft. In 2007, SSU updated to PeopleSoft HRSA version 8.9 (Human Resources and Student Administration), and this upgrade has made a considerable difference in the lives of our students, faculty and staff because of the system's capacity to provide for the efficient access and sharing of valuable information. SSU's successful effort in implementing the CMS project was recognized as a "CMS Success Story" by the CSU-CMS Project in 2003.

As a department within A&F, Information Technology (IT) brings together expert teams across a range of technologies to provide the necessary guidance and leadership in instructional and administrative technology. SSU/IT provides a technology infrastructure of network, telecommunications, servers, and workstations. SSU/IT specifies campus-wide standards and provides consulting in order to ensure all technology systems are cost-effective and architecturally sound.

Instructional Technology Services supports the academic mission of SSU through promoting and enabling the integration of technology into teaching and learning that enhances the educational experience of our faculty, staff and students. The fact that IT is housed within the Division of Administration and Finance has created some unique challenges at SSU. To ensure appropriate coordination of their efforts, the Chief Information Officer and IT Senior Director regularly meet with the Provost in order to

discuss academic resources, such as computer labs, digital video production, media services, academic software distribution, and videoconferencing. Through IT, all faculty members have access to the WebCT course management system, which is linked to the enrollment module in the Common Management System (CMS). Workshops on how to utilize the features of WebCT are routinely offered through the CTPD.

The University Library in the Jean and Charles Schulz Information Center provides a variety of research and educational technology resources including wireless access and printing, public computers and software, a nine-station digital lab, and a loan program for computers and digital cameras. Patrons have access to a collection of over 650,000 information resources, many in digital format, which enhances access for students and faculty from remote sites. Included are more than 30,000 full-text serials online, about 140 specialized electronic databases and 19,000 e-books. Where information beyond our local holdings is required, patrons may access a powerful resource-sharing network known as Link+ with a combined collection of 8 million titles. This is a “direct request” system in which the patron personally places book requests, which are automatically forwarded to a lending library. The underlying principle of the University Library is one that is commonly adopted by schools the size of SSU: “access vs. ownership.” The library physically holds a core collection that includes basic sources of information to support the curriculum, and it also commits to fast retrieval of additional resources on-demand.

To assess the changing needs of students and faculty, the Library uses survey tools on a regular basis. In Spring 2007, the survey instrument, LibQual+, was administered for the second time, allowing SSU to track trends in use and to benchmark

nationally. LibQual+ surveys students, faculty, and staff to assess the library on “effect of service, information control, and library as a place.” Results indicated satisfaction with services, staff assistance, and the library facility, and a desire for more computing resources and deeper collections. The library staff is analyzing the data to ascertain what further improvements can be made. Finally, the new “Learning and Teaching Center” is a welcome addition to the services provided by the Library to the faculty, students, and staff of Sonoma State University.

The Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) provides high quality, customer-focused leadership and project development in support of the CSU Academic Technology initiatives. Founded in 1997 in response to the CSU’s Integrated Technology Strategy, CDL supports faculty and students through the development and dissemination of tools and strategies which employ the web and related technologies. The Center identifies learning-related problems and applies technology to support effective teaching (e.g., MERLOT). Their services are provided to projects that have the potential to reach many faculty and students in the CSU, around the country, and around the world.

#### Alignment of Resources and Organizational Planning (CFR 3.5, 3.8)

During WASC’s 2004 visit, concerns were raised with regards to SSU’s paucity of formal planning processes and a lack of communication between administration and faculty with regard to academic programs. Understandably, WASC raised the question: “Will Sonoma State engage in on-going institutional-wide planning and devise ways to measure effectiveness in fulfilling its planning goal?” WASC noted that SSU was just beginning to engage in academic and fiscal planning in order to better align institutional priorities with its mission. At that time in 2004, Academic Affairs, under the leadership



of Provost Ochoa, formed a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) that drafted mission and vision statements for the division. Prior to this formalized strategic planning process, in 1994 the Academic Planning Committee (APC) of the Academic Senate had developed a Long Range Academic Plan (LRAP) that outlined goals and academic priorities. The LRAP was one of the foundational documents provided to the SPC as they began their work on outlining goals, objectives and initiatives for the Division of Academic Affairs. In 2006, the APC developed “Core Academic Priorities,” derived from the LRAP, which were endorsed by the Academic Senate. (See Reflective Essay Standard 4 for details.)

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> year WASC visit, several campus entities have engaged in strategic planning that involved appointing committees with campus-wide representation, investing time and money into the planning process, and employing outside facilitators. By the fall of 2005, the Academic Affairs Strategic Planning Committee finalized the mission and vision, identified five general strategies, and outlined six strategic initiatives, each with two and five-year assessments. Then in the spring of 2006, the University Planning Steering Committee (UPSC) considered its review of the external environment and the internal resources and structure of SSU. Based on this analysis, UPSC has now identified strategic goals, objectives, and initiatives. (See Reflective Essay for Standard 4 for details.) Other entities that engage in planning include the University Library, School of Extended Education, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Administration and Finance and the Academic Schools, including Business and Economics, Education, Science and Technology, and Social Sciences.

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

The 2004 WASC Commission letter identified Standard 4, “Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement,” as a particular area of focus for SSU. As the WASC report noted, “...the Commission expects the University to build its capacity to integrate results and actions from program review into the design of academic programs and the development of student learning outcomes.” Within this standard, WASC noted particular concern with CFR’s 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.7. This essay discusses how the university is addressing these concerns.

Sonoma State University uses a variety of indicators to evaluate how well its educational objectives are being met. At the institutional level, the strategic planning process continues its progress, using data from a range of sources. Each division has completed or is in the process of completing its unique division plan, as an integral component of the overall strategic plan. The university’s strategic planning processes have undergone significant development and refinement since the last WASC site visit. Additionally, progress has occurred in assessing and improving student learning outcomes. Two major examples are the program review process and general education reform efforts. (See Reflective Essay for Standard 2 for details.)

#### Strategic Thinking and Planning (CFR 4.2, 4.3)

University Planning Steering Committee (UPSC) members, in consultation with stakeholders across the campus community, have identified strategic goals, objectives, and associated initiatives that provide benchmarks for assessing the university’s progress in meeting the goals of the strategic plan.

The University Strategic Plan is based on the mission of SSU to “prepare students to be learned men and women who have a foundation for lifelong learning, have a broad cultural perspective, have a keen appreciation of intellectual and aesthetic achievements, will be leaders and active citizens, are capable of pursuing fulfilling careers in a changing world, and are concerned with contributing to the health and well-being of the world at large.” The vision of SSU is that it “will be recognized as a center of excellence for its residential, student-centered liberal arts and professional programs that promote social, cultural, and economic progress of the North Bay region and beyond.” Based on values that include academic excellence, student-centeredness, creativity, respect, diversity and sustainability, the Plan has identified the following mission, vision, values, strategic areas/goals, objectives, and initiatives:

### ***Mission***

The mission of Sonoma State University is to prepare students to be learned men and women who:

- have a foundation for life-long learning,
- have a broad cultural perspective,
- have a keen appreciation of intellectual and aesthetic achievements,
- will be active citizens and leaders in society,
- are capable of pursuing fulfilling careers in a changing world, and
- are concerned with contributing to the health and well-being of the world at large.

### ***Vision***

Sonoma State University will be recognized as a center of excellence for its residential, student-centered liberal arts and professional programs that promote social, cultural, and economic progress of the North Bay region and beyond.

### ***Values***

- Academic Excellence
- Student-Centeredness
- Creativity
- Respect
- Diversity

- Sustainability

***Strategic Areas***  
(in alphabetical order)

**I. Academic Programs**

**Strategic Goal:** Sustain and develop challenging, innovative, intellectually rigorous academic programs that engage students and faculty in life-long learning, critical thinking, inquiry, and reflection.

**Objectives:**

1. Provide an excellent teaching and learning environment.
2. Provide a nurturing and supportive environment for faculty scholarship.
3. Strengthen the coherence, effectiveness, and distinctive liberal-arts-and-sciences character of our academic programs.
4. Establish cultural competence as a general learning outcome in baccalaureate and graduate programs.
5. Sustain and develop academic programs with clear career paths that address the economic and social needs of the community.

**II. Community Engagement**

**Strategic Goal:** Enhance collaborative relationships with the local communities and the surrounding region to foster educational, social, cultural, and economic development.

**Objectives:**

1. Identify and strengthen community service and civic engagement opportunities for students in the curriculum and across all university programs.
2. Provide strong leadership in developing, strengthening, and coordinating community-wide partnerships and collaborations.
3. Increase participation and attendance of university and community members at university cultural and athletic events.
4. Strengthen the role of the university as a resource in the economic development of the community.

**III. Diversity**

**Strategic Goal:** Increase student, faculty, and staff diversity and incorporate cultural diversity awareness and competence in all aspects of University operations.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop a comprehensive five year plan for improving diversity awareness and sensitivity in the culture of Sonoma State University.

2. Examine and encourage diversity in the curriculum through the Program Review process.
3. Develop a five-year strategic plan for recruiting and supporting a more diverse student population.
4. Develop a plan to facilitate and coordinate outreach to organizations—including SRJC and community commercial, political, and non-profit organizations—that are currently serving diverse populations that are under-represented at Sonoma State University.

#### **IV. Enrollment Management**

**Strategic Goal:** Manage enrollment to achieve our target and maximize student retention, graduation, and satisfaction.

**Objectives:**

1. Achieve our enrollment targets.
2. Develop a comprehensive enrollment management process and strategy.
3. Develop strategic objectives in diversity, cohort distribution, and distribution of majors to support the mission of SSU.
4. Actively manage the composition of the student body to match University strategic objectives on areas such as growth of majors, lower/upper division balance, and diverse experiences.
5. Increase retention and graduation rates.

#### **V. External Support**

**Strategic Goal:** Increase private and public sector support of the University's mission.

**Objectives:**

1. Meet CSU mandate to raise private funds equal to 15% of our General Fund appropriation.
2. Increase investment in the Development, Alumni and University Affairs operations to bring them in line with appropriate CSU benchmarks in order to raise funds for university educational priorities.
3. Complete the fundraising campaign to open the Green Music Center.
4. Grow the Sonoma State University Endowment by 50%.
5. Prepare for and launch a comprehensive university-wide fundraising campaign to raise the level of excellence in all aspects of academic and campus life.
6. Expand support for research, scholarship and instruction from external sources.

## **VI. Faculty and Staff**

**Strategic goal:** Enhance a supportive environment that will attract and retain faculty and staff and contribute to their professional growth.

**Objectives:**

1. Attract and retain excellent and diverse faculty and staff in sufficient numbers to accommodate enrollment growth.
2. Support comprehensive professional development and training opportunities for our faculty and staff.
3. Develop cultural competence in faculty, staff, and administrators.
4. Develop means to ease the financial strain of living and working in Sonoma County for our faculty and staff.

## **VII. Infrastructure**

**Strategic goal:** Address infrastructure needs and prepare the physical plant for enrollment growth while meeting sustainability objectives.

**Objectives:**

1. Provide needed space capacity for programs, services, and student residences.
2. Provide needed equipment and maintenance for programs, services, and student residences.
3. Open the Green Music Center and the University Center.
4. Address administrative needs in Foundation and Grants and Contracts.
5. Address campus administrative, instructional, and student information technology needs, including continued enhancement of CMS.

## **VIII. Quality of Student Experience**

**Strategic goal:** Provide SSU students with a quality co-curricular experience and a residential environment that leads to enhanced learning and personal growth.

**Objectives:**

1. Enhance and support academic programs through co-curricular activities.
2. Enhance infrastructure and services to support the co-curriculum in an active residential campus.
3. Create communities through activities and programming that develop a sense of belonging and strengthen SSU traditions.
4. Help students become ethical, reflective decision-makers that assume personal responsibility for their decisions.
5. Help students learn to respect and value diversity.

6. Promote and cultivate a healthy campus community.
7. Support student personal growth, social development, and career planning.

## **IX. Sustainability**

**Strategic goal:** Establish sustainability as a key element of Sonoma State University's identity on campus and in the region.

### **Objectives:**

1. Develop one or more sustainability initiatives for each strategic goal of the University Strategic Plan.
2. Coordinate and disseminate information about sustainability initiatives in academics, co-curriculum, infrastructure, and development activities at SSU.
3. Design and implement curricular initiatives focused on sustainability.
4. Seek external and endowment support for sustainability programs and activities.
5. Position SSU as a leader in regional sustainability.

### **New University-wide Funding Initiatives**

#### **AY 2007-08**

1. Devote full growth funding of instruction to add new faculty at funding SFR of 18.9 and consistent with intent of ACR 73 (75%-25% full-time/part-time faculty composition).
2. Allocate an initial \$200,000 of new permanent dollars to faculty development (to reach \$1 million by AY 2012-13).
3. Maintain SFR at CSU average.
4. Make progress in repairing the base budget of the University [metrics?].

#### **AY 2008-09**

1. Provide enhanced support for academic technology from new CSU funding.
2. Continue to devote full growth funding of instruction to add new faculty at funding SFR of 18.9 and consistent with intent of ACR 73 (75%-25% full-time/part-time faculty composition).
3. Allocate a second installment of \$200,000 of new permanent dollars to faculty development.
4. Continue progress in repairing the base budget of the University.

In addition to the UPSC, the Academic Planning Committee (APC), a long-standing committee of the Academic Senate, is charged with articulating academic priorities and examining their alignment with University functions and resources, including periodically assessing the status of the alignment goal. In the spring of 2006, the APC forwarded a report on Core Academic Priorities to the Academic Senate. This report was developed in cooperation with the current and past Academic Senate chairs and identified the following priorities:

1. *Provide an excellent teaching and learning environment* that promotes active learning and “close human and intellectual relationships among students and faculty to foster the open exchange of ideas.”
2. *Provide a nurturing and supportive environment for faculty development* to maintain our record of excellence in teaching, scholarship, public service, and creative activity.
3. *Provide adequate resources for a coherent, effective and distinctive General Education program*, as proposed in the Strategic Initiatives in the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan.
4. *Support a diverse and inclusive University community* and culture, as proposed in the Strategic Initiatives in the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan, reaffirmed in the University Strategic Plan Strategic Areas/Goals, and identified as a critical issue by WASC in its letter to President Armiñana of June 28, 2004.

The Core Academic Priorities were endorsed by the Academic Senate and included several specific initiatives. These priorities were incorporated into the University Planning Steering Committee (UPSC) planning process. APC is also involved in



facilitating communication among the UPSC, the Senate, and the Provost's Office in several areas including:

- UPSC sustainability goal
- GE planning
- Adequate support for upper division majors
- Alignment of the mission statements and priorities of the Academic Senate Long Range Academic Plan, the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan, and the UPSC University Strategic Plan.

The General Education Initiative (see Reflective Essay for Standard 2 for details) is an example of the university's commitment to accurately aligning its educational goals and resources. For example, the First Year Experience pilot project, which spanned the 2006-2007 academic year, is being continued for the 2007-2008 academic year. Assessment of the data from the 2006-2007 year has been reviewed, and the project includes plans for longitudinal assessment of its impact on student retention and graduation rates.

The SSU Library provides another illustration of the university's work on Standard 4, and specifically the alignment of mission with resources. As noted in the Library's strategic plan, *Advancing Student Success: The University Library at Sonoma State University Planning Priorities 2005-2008*, the library has incorporated collaboration, trend analysis, technology development, and assessment as ongoing tools for evaluation and development of library collections and services in relation to the changing needs of the students, faculty, and curriculum. To address collection needs, librarian liaisons work with each department to discern what kinds of resources are

needed to meet the needs of that program, as well as changes in curriculum, particularly as new faculty are hired. Input is solicited from faculty regarding specific titles, journals, films, etc., and items are purchased, as budget allows. Patron services are regularly updated and the instruction program is assessed and changed as necessary on an annual basis. Recently, space was repurposed to accommodate the Learning and Teaching Center where students, faculty, and staff can develop information and technology literacy and explore emerging technologies in a collaborative setting.

Commitment to Learning/Improvement (CFR 4.4, 4.5, and 4.7)

The WASC 5<sup>th</sup> year visit report also noted CFR 4.3, 4.4, and 4.7 for attention; concerns with all three of these criteria for review are being addressed by the means described below.

The Program Review process is the most central example of how the university is moving closer to a culture of evidence-based planning, specifically with regard to student learning. The Reflective Essay for Standard 2 discusses in depth the history and implementation of the new program review policy.

Another major example of the use of both qualitative and quantitative types of data to shape student learning is the university's First Year Experience Pilot (FYE). The FYE Pilot is also discussed in Reflective Essay for Standard 2. The assessment report for the first year of the 2-year pilot is currently being reviewed and discussed in order to determine whether the university will permanently approve the FYE course as a fundamental component of the GE program.

Finally, Institutional Research works closely with the President and Provost to provide appropriate data for decision making. One example of this reflective process is

the examination of the student to faculty ratio (SFR) for each discipline at SSU compared to the mean for the California State University. This has been done for the past 6 years and is used by the Provost in discussing new hires for a department. Institutional Research has also calculated "virtual" school SFRs to look at the efficiency of the schools overall. Another example is the CSU Performance Accountability measures that include retention and graduation rates, remediation success, number of upper-division units taken by native students compared to transfer students, and so forth. An example of data-driven decision making is SSU's new policy on advisement, which was crafted in response to SSU's own measurements of student performance.

In addition to specific requests for data, Institutional Research each year generates an SSU Self-Assessment which includes the reports of all student, faculty, and alumni surveys that have been given during the previous year. Many surveys are given on a regular basis to monitor change over time and to compare ourselves to other CSU and COPLAC institutions. These instruments include the NSSE, CIRP, and Your First College Year (YFCY). This information is shared with the campus community and presented to appropriate Academic Senate committees. This annual review of information allows us to monitor the usefulness of current work and identify areas for growth and development. The assessment of student learning for the institution as a whole is accomplished through various measures such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). A set of data is also provided for each department that is undergoing program review. It includes student enrollment, faculty teaching effort, SFR, and majors by lower-division, upper-division, graduate, and total. The assessment of student learning in General Education and the major is supported by the Associate Vice Provost and the

Faculty Assessment Coordinator. Institutional Research is helping to evaluate the Freshman Year Experience pilot program by providing comparison data between students enrolled in the FYE Pilot and those in other first year programs. Finally, IR will be involved in developing the university profile for the VSA, as described in the Reflective Essay for Standard 2.

The university has demonstrated its ability to develop organizational processes and structures for evidence-based learning and improvement, and continues work on these areas. The university-wide use of assessment of student learning experiences and outcomes to improve educational effectiveness continues, as evidenced in the program review and general education review processes. The scope of changes made by SSU reveals a university proactive in its establishment of strategic goals, attentive to the implications of data from campus-wide data collection projects, and willing to engage in honest, reflective assessment of the degree to which its collective goals have been achieved.

