

## **Section 2: Introduction and Institutional Context**

### **Description of the University**

Founded in 1960 as a teacher education center for the North Bay, Sonoma State University is now provides high-quality undergraduate education and selected professional graduate programs. Centering on the liberal arts and sciences, the SSU educational experience fosters intellectual, cognitive, social and personal growth. The faculty and staff of SSU provide close mentoring relationships for students and an education that fosters ethical exploration, civic engagement, social responsibility, and global awareness combined with a solid foundation in an academic discipline. The university also serves as an educational and cultural resource for the region by offering courses, lectures, workshops and programs that are open to the public and by entering into partnerships with local businesses, industries, and cultural and educational institutions to enhance the quality of life in the North Bay and beyond. SSU has a commitment to graduating students who have the ability to think critically and ethically and can effectively use information technology.

While SSU accepts all qualified students who apply from high schools in its service area, 80 percent of the freshmen and 55 percent of the junior transfer students come from outside the North Bay region. With 35 percent of its student body living on campus, SSU is one of the most residential campuses within the system. The [residential community](#) provides some of the most attractive suite-style housing in the area. Non-dormitory suites are served by a dining hall and are clustered in villages, offering students a similar experience to living off campus.

SSU is comprised of five academic schools: Arts and Humanities, Business and Economics, Education, Social Sciences and Science and Technology. Degrees are offered in 41 majors at the bachelor's level and 14 at the master's level. The University offers a joint doctorate in educational leadership with the University of California, Davis. There are nine credential programs and eight undergraduate and graduate certificate programs. SSU also offers one of the few Wine Business programs in the country. In the spring semester 2009, the university will offer an Executive MBA through its School of Extended Education, under the supervision of the School of Business and Economics.

### **Institutional Context**

Since the Capacity and Preparatory Review Visit (March 2008), SSU's executive, financial, academic, student affairs, and development areas have all remained stable. Two positions, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, continue with interim appointments, filling positions vacated within the past two years. In the area of Research and Sponsored Programs, the position of Director, which was vacant at the time of the CPR, has now been filled.

As highlighted in the CPR Report, The Donald and Maureen Green Music Center (GMC) remains the major construction project currently underway on campus. Financing for the GMC continues to be challenging for the university. The music education building opened classrooms and faculty offices in the fall semester 2008, and the GMC Hospitality Center is scheduled for opening in Fall 2009. The concert and recital halls await additional fundraising before construction resumes. Estimates place final completion of the GMC at an additional eighteen months.

The current fiscal crisis in California warrants discussion in order to provide a context for the WASC EER Visiting Team. The California State University (CSU) anticipates a \$400-700 million in budget reductions in the 2009-2010 fiscal year. This will have significant impacts on the students, faculty and staff of Sonoma State University. CSU Chancellor Charles Reed has affirmed two guiding principles in approaching budget reductions: (1) to serve as many students as possible without sacrificing quality and (2) to preserve as many jobs as possible.

Over the past year, the CSU has implemented several cost-saving measures including a salary freeze for vice president and chancellor-level positions, a hiring freeze, and travel and purchasing restrictions. Currently under discussion as possible ways to close the budget gap without violating Chancellor Reed's guiding principles are furloughs, pay cuts, unpaid holidays, and/or layoffs, as well as additional fee increases beyond the 10% increase approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2009. For the first time in its history, the CSU declared systemwide impactation to limit the number of new students beginning in Fall 2009 and continuing for Fall 2010, due to the state's inability to fully fund enrollment growth and the CSU's operational needs. SSU has additionally declared impactation for first time freshmen and for five of its majors (Hutchins Liberal Studies, Psychology, Communications, Human Development, and Nursing) for Fall 2009 and 2010. Under the most recent budget proposal by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the CSU faces reductions in state support of between 16 and 20 percent.

At SSU, the impact of budget cuts has already been felt as the university has been required to reduce its FTEs targets to Fall 2007 levels and cut its operating budget. This has resulted in fewer course and section offerings, requiring the university to place initial

enrollment limits during first registration to a maximum of 16 units. Summer Orientations for new freshmen (SOARs) were mandatory, and students were limited to a maximum of 14 units. It is anticipated that average unit loads for students will decline slightly and that the overall student faculty ratio (SFR) of the university will increase. As the State of California finalizes the budget in late June and early July, the university anticipates that further measures, such as those outlined above, will be required.