

Section 8: The Future at SSU:

What We've Learned and Where We're Going

Reflective Essays – What We've Learned

As outlined in the [Institutional Proposal](#), the theme of *Educating the Whole Student* has served as an excellent framework for the selection of areas to be emphasized in the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). This overarching title allowed the university to investigate its two main themes: (1) the distinctive qualities of a Sonoma State University education and (2) curriculum and the roles of general education and the major. Following the recommendations of the CPR Visiting Team, the university chose to expand and add two additional essays: (1) SSU's planning efforts and (2) SSU's diversity efforts.

The first reflective essay on planning efforts provides a frame for the subsequent reflective essay in the document. It clearly demonstrates that the university has given serious attention and considerable time and effort to strategic planning at the university, division, school and department levels. As attested to in the essay, particular attention has been paid to connecting "disparate planning efforts into a single, respected process." With both the USP and AASP strategic plans in operation and aligned with one another, SSU can move forward in particularly difficult circumstances with these plans as guides.

The second reflective essay on the distinctive qualities of an SSU education draws upon the mission and vision of the university and upon the work done on both the university and academic affairs strategic plans. Additionally, the essay substantiates the significant work done on reaching "consensus on a clear definition of the university's complex mission so that planning efforts are informed by this understanding." The essay

closes with a statement from the Provost's white paper, [*A Liberal Arts and Sciences-Based Comprehensive University*](#), which both acknowledges the challenges remaining and enumerates the strides that the university has made in defining the outcomes of a liberal education and in assessing their achievement.

The reflective essay on General Education articulates the significant work done by the General Education Subcommittee on defining learning objectives and the Program Review of GE, as well as continued efforts to revision and to reform the GE program and its curriculum by the GE Subcommittee and the Academic Schools. "Demonstrable progress" has been made in general education, and the action plan derived from the GE Program Review and the report of the external reviewer will provide timelines to achieve progress in GE assessment and revision.

The essay on Academic Program Review provides evidence that the university has prioritized the task of completing a program review cycle of all major programs, utilizing the new program review policy that calls for assessment of student learning in pursuit of educational effectiveness. The university will now take what it has learned from the process and improve and refine program review even as it moves forward in making programmatic changes that improve its academic offerings. SSU is now more actively engaged in evaluation of learning in order to enhance student success.

Finally, the reflective essay on diversity was added at the urging of the CPR visiting team for the university to "extend its diversity efforts through pragmatic strategies to reach its goals." The substantive work of the PDC, the Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Diversity, the CFA Affirmative Action Committee, and the MDA all point

to the university's commitments to increased demographic diversity at SSU and to the building of a campus community defined by inclusive excellence.

The Future at SSU – Where We're Going

Three important initiatives warrant mention at the close of the Educational Effectiveness Review Report as they illustrate the university's commitment to continuous improvement and educational effectiveness:

- **Academic Transformation Initiative:** The Joint Council on Academic Planning ended the academic year with a retreat to take up the following objective: to develop a shared vision for transformative change at SSU so we can thrive in the new environment for education. Led by the Co-Chairs of JCAP, the Provost and the faculty chair of the Academic Planning Committee, the all day retreat allowed members to discuss a vision of transformational change in the context of the economy, the state budget, technology innovations, and the digital generation. JCAP members were provided with a set of articles that provided background for the retreat. A virtual conversation will continue throughout the summer with a follow-up meeting before the beginning of the fall semester.
- **Shared Governance Retreat:** Prior to the beginning of the Fall semester the Provost and his academic leadership team will meet with the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate to discuss the principles and values of shared governance to continue the important work articulated by the CPR Visiting Team of strengthening "the sense of community and enabling the accomplishment of other critical aspirations."

- Retention and Graduation Task Force: At the President's request, the Provost created a task force to investigate the many factors that go into retaining our students from year to year and to make recommendations for improving retention and graduations rates of our first-time freshmen. During the spring semester the Task Force conducted a student survey and analyzed retention and graduation data in order to develop a plan for improved retention and graduation.

Finally, there is no question that Sonoma State University – and the entire California State University System – faces considerable challenges in the near and long-term future. Given the current budget issues of the state of California and the uncertainty of what funding cuts will mean for the CSU and SSU, we would be remiss in ending this report without acknowledging that significant difficulties are facing the university. It might be perceived that conducting an accreditation review during such a crisis would be a formidable challenge. However, this EER Report reveals that the university is well-positioned to meet those challenges, having further defined its core commitments to institutional capacity and educational effectiveness via clear purpose, appropriate educational objectives, organizational structures and processes that fulfill its mission and achieve its vision, strategic planning structures, high levels of integrity, and committed faculty, staff, and leadership.