



November 1, 2007

To: Trustee Roberta Achtenberg, Chair, Access to Excellence Steering Committee
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Executive Committee, CSU Academic Senate
Campus Senate Chairs
Executive Committee, California Faculty Association
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From: Diana Guerin, Chair
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Subject: Campus Senate Response to *Access to Excellence* Draft

The Academic Senate discussed the *Access to Excellence* (hereafter referred to as *A2E*) draft dated September 2007 at its meeting on October 18, 2007. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the strategic plan during the drafting phase and the process used to solicit input last year. We are hopeful that these comments and suggestions will contribute to a final *A2E* plan that will serve as a roadmap to the high-quality, affordable, and accessible higher education that is our mission. The synthesis of our Senate discussion follows.

Voice/Tone

We understand that *A2E* has multiple audiences, both internal and external to the CSU. As members of the internal audience, we find the vision depicted in *A2E* for the future of the CSU neither inspiring nor motivating. Indeed, the frequent reference to expanding access without a similarly strong advocacy for matching resources gives the impression that quality will be sacrificed for access, whereas the repeated references to increasing student fees force us to conclude that affordability will also be compromised for access: quality and affordability are sacrificed for access.

For external audiences, we believe the tone of this draft of *A2E* fails to convey the significant and ongoing accomplishments of the CSU and instead insinuates that the CSU is part of a failed educational system. Higher education is very different from primary and secondary education, and we find the use of the terms “P-16” and “P-20” inappropriate. We are concerned about language such as “educational pipeline,” which dehumanizes students and frames them as a commodity.

Frequent references to both assessment and accountability throughout the document give the impression that CSU faculty, staff, and administrators do not currently use evidence to improve student learning or campus productivity. Additionally, statements such as the following challenge the quality of our work without providing evidence to support the inference:

- *Page 6:* ...More than 1.2 million CSU students have engaged in a variety of community service activities since 1999. Yet these successes have yet to be translated to education for effective political participation, in government and in other forms of civic life that is so critical to the health of our democracy...This is a national issue, not confined to California and the CSU...
- *Page 9:* ...Concern about the quality of skills and learning of graduates is growing—and not only in the CSU: the issue is a national one...
- *Page 10:* ...Additionally, the few available national assessments of college-level learning results unfortunately suggest that basic literacy and numeracy skills for college graduates have declined over the last decade. Surveys and focus group work around the country show that employers want more than the knowledge and skill levels of recent college graduates...

What is lacking in this document is a strong voice for higher education in California: a voice that can create a sense of mission internally and that can mobilize the public to turn out in droves to support higher education. The CSU is the country's largest university system, and it contributes in innumerable ways not only to the state of California and its citizens, but also beyond California's borders. The teaching, scholarly/creative work, and service generated on its 23 campuses and the work of its two million alumni stand as testament to the extraordinary vision of those who created the CSU in the Master Plan for Higher Education in 1961. We concur that there are urgent and critical issues facing the CSU, but we also believe that the impressive contributions and accomplishments of the students, faculty, staff, and administrators in the CSU are not reflected in *A2E*.

Funding

We think that funding is the most critical issue facing the CSU, and the "dwindling share of state resources" for higher education is acknowledged on page 7 in *A2E*. However, we believe this challenge should be more prominently stated. We are concerned that the compact (page 8), rather than a "welcome baseline," has placed the system in jeopardy. Indeed, an article recently published in the *Los Angeles Times* notes that the compact did not provide adequate funding to preserve, much less increase, academic excellence (Richard C. Paddock "Less to bank on at state universities," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2007).

Adequate funding will require a comprehensive effort that mobilizes the entire CSU constituency to persuade the state of the importance of higher education. The strategies to address funding shortfalls listed on page 16 (developing a communications plan, preparing a long-term plan for modest growth in student fees, and holding public officials and CSU leadership accountable for success in meeting funding goals) are reasonable starting points. However, the accountability indicators seem too nebulous to be useful:

- “Funding adequacy sufficient to grow enrollments and degree attainment to meet state needs for civic and economic growth” fails to mention access to quality programs. What is the level of funding that is sufficient to meet our state’s needs and provide access to quality programs? Is there a benchmark or metric that can be used to ascertain what adequate funding is? Later, we suggest considering using student-faculty ratio (SFR) as a metric to reflect quality.
- “Increasing state funding through marginal funding increases for all enrollment growth attained” is an improvement to our current situation, but results in the CSU continuing to take in more students than it is funded to handle. Although this indicator is measurable, marginal funding is not sufficient to provide a quality educational experience.
- *A2E* is vague in terms of describing increases in student fees (“modest,” “moderate” vs. specific percentage, for example). We concur that any increases in student fees, if needed, must be predictable. We are concerned that the fee increases coupled with the other expenses students and families pay for higher education may have a detrimental impact on middle class families whose students are ineligible for financial aid.
- Finally, what is meant by “reducing unmet financial need” among all student groups? How would attainment of this indicator be determined?

Adequate funding will require a comprehensive effort that mobilizes the entire CSU constituency to persuade the state of the importance of higher education, perhaps via a ballot initiative or other tax increase, but CSU leadership on these sorts of strategies is not mentioned. Given the many initiatives cited in *A2E* (growth, assessment, technology, recruitment/retention of faculty and staff, etc.), the strategies for improving funding appear scant and too vague to assess.

As will be addressed below, on our campus and many others, full-time faculty face heavy workloads because of the failure to replace faculty who have left the CSU or because of the rapid enrollment growth in recent years. The hiring of staff has also failed to keep pace with enrollments. We are aware that taking on new initiatives, such as CMS, without eliminating other activities creates both financial and environmental pressures on an already stressed system.

Research/Scholarly and Creative Activities

The role of scholarly and creative activities by faculty and students in the CSU is mentioned in *A2E*, and we agree that these activities are central to our mission. Additionally, we concur that expanding CSU research efforts can increase funds to our campuses through overhead. However, campuses need appropriate laboratory space, instrumentation, start-up funds, and seed money to be successful. Aside from the potential to bring funding to campuses, scholarly and creative activities contribute to improved teaching in our faculty and increased retention of students. Student involvement in research projects provides them with opportunities that contribute to their personal and professional development. We are concerned, however, that applied research seems to be valued more highly than basic research in the *A2E* document (pages 6 and 13). Applied research does not come about

without the fundamental front end called basic research. Support of scholarly research and creative activities is essential to a high-quality learning environment for all students, including those in the STEM disciplines, and contributes to the CSU and California.

Growth and Quality

A central theme of the *A2E* is growth: CSU enrollments are projected to grow by 10,000 new students per year due to demographic trends. Also, California needs to double its current rate of degree production (an increase of 130,000 over the next 15 years) to meet workforce needs. Yet, in spite of these compelling data, there is no mention in *A2E* of how this growth will be met with existing campuses or of the need for new campuses. Failing to plan for predictable growth is detrimental to a quality educational experience. Campus infrastructure is stressed by constant growth. Heavy faculty and staff workloads threaten quality. Failing to advocate for reducing the student-faculty ratio (as outlined in the response to ACR 73 jointly formulated by the CSU, CFA, and ASCSU) is also a major omission in *A2E*.

Although not explicitly stated, it appears that technology is the central strategy to handle growth in the CSU:

- *Page 7*: “...Advances in technology have also helped to redefine traditional understandings of campus “space,” which is no longer confined to the physical parameters and buildings of a campus...In the future, effective use of technology will be central to the CSU’s capacity to increase learning effectiveness while at the same time meeting growing demand despite capacity limits on campus-based enrollments...”
- *Page 9*: “...CSU faculty, whatever their terms of employment, will need to be recruited, and trained, for willingness to experiment with new modes of teaching and learning...”

Expanding the use of non-traditional instructional delivery methods will require professional development for faculty and enhanced technology support, perhaps available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, for both students and faculty.

Related to growth and quality, the *A2E* draft places too much attention on the classroom (the 40 courses with well defined learning outcomes) while ignoring the other needs for a quality educational experience. For example, we concur with the strategy of “stronger advisement” (Goal 1). It is not clear what the strategy is to strengthen advisement, nor is there mention of the resources required to implement the strategy.

Campuses need to provide the physical environment to learn and study outside of the classroom: library space, eating spaces, informal meeting spaces, spaces to work in groups etc. We know that we need to strengthen students’ engagement with the campus, the other students, and the faculty to improve learning outcomes, but this is challenging to do without the physical environment to support these activities; some campuses simply do not provide the environment to keep students on campus where they can interact with other students who are undergoing similar experiences. If we do not have those spaces, then we become little different from our for-profit competitors: classrooms and offices.

Faculty and Staff

The recognition that faculty and staff are CSU's "most important strategic asset" is appreciated (page 9). However, we believe that the failure of the system to reinvest in faculty and professional development (page 1) called for in Cornerstones is a continuing threat to academic quality in the CSU. The CSU has a high proportion of temporary faculty, troubled labor relationships, and salaries and workloads that undermine its attractiveness as a workplace not only to faculty, but also to many employee groups. As accountability indicators relating to faculty and staff, we note that in Cornerstones the goal was to close compensation gaps, whereas in *A2E* the goal is merely to reduce them. We encourage a "laser focus" on replenishing tenured and tenure-track faculty and suggest the accountability indicators must include a specific goal to move the proportion of tenured/tenure-track faculty to 75% over a short period of years, such as the plan formulated in response to ACR 73 (http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/docs/ACR73_07222002.pdf; see also the ASCSU resolution, "Monitoring and Supporting Progress in the Implementation of ACR 73," at <http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Resolutions/2006-2007/2780.shtml>).

Although recruitment is specifically mentioned in *A2E*, improving retention is an additional strategy. Obviously the need to hire is lessened if retention is increased. The building of faculty and staff development programs is one strategy cited, and accountability indicators with specific targets (such as funding for sabbaticals, scholarly and creative activities, etc.) are important metrics to consider. The university needs to be a place where an academic community can thrive. It needs a physical and social environment that supports and enriches that community in order to promote academic excellence, which will not occur in a vacuum. The work environment for faculty, staff, and administration is directly related to the learning environment for students. Strategies for providing competitive salaries, status and recognition to employees, and a culture that communicates a clear and purposeful mission for the organization are essential for retaining a quality workforce, and yet they are woefully absent in this document.

Assessment

The repeated references to assessment and accountability make measurement the driving force behind *A2E*. Rather than offer a clear and ringing voice for higher education and what it does, the impression is that *A2E* seeks to address the accountability critics, playing a defensive rather than offensive game.

As mentioned above, we believe that the emphasis on assessment and accountability leads readers to infer mistakenly that these activities are not already taking place. What *A2E* fails to address is the high cost of increasing our implementation of assessment and accountability processes. One need only look at the amount of money spent by school systems on the accountability measures in response to the No Child Left Behind federal legislation to understand how much money is diverted from other functions of the institution. Quality assessment for continuous improvement requires additional resources in terms of assessment instruments as well as faculty and staff to administer, analyze, maintain records, and act upon the results. The increased costs associated with these activities are evident in our many programs with external accreditation by organizations such as the

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education or the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, for example.

Aside from the expense of both assessment and accountability processes, we have grave concerns about accountability measures mentioned in *A2E* as “value-added assessments” or “assessment-driven accountability for results.” We are concerned that the simplistic assessment approaches of the “one size fits all” nature will lead to (1) the narrowing of the curriculum; (2) standards that must be set to the lowest common denominator so as to allow for acceptable retention and graduation rates; (3) a focus on outcomes that can be easily measured (Gresham’s Law at work: “Work that produces measurable outcomes tends to drive out work that produces unmeasurable outcomes” [James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, Basic Books, 1989, p. 161].) This could reduce education to mere training. *Indeed, we believe the liberal arts are underemphasized in A2E and are concerned that mission of the CSU is being too narrowly cast as workforce preparation.*

Additional Concerns about Accountability Indicators

As noted above, we have concerns that some of the accountability indicators are too nebulous to be useful. Questions were raised as to the selection of some of accountability indicators, for example:

Goal 1

- Increase high school graduation rates: Is this really a key metric of the CSU mission?
- Increase proportion of population with college degrees: This is an indicator that is affected by not only the work of the CSU, but also the (far greater number of) colleges and universities that California students attend. It also overlaps with indicators focusing on increasing the number of community college transfer students and number of degrees we award.
- Improve level of academic preparation among CSU entering freshmen: Again, is this an indicator over which we have primary control, or one that is controlled by others?
- Increase retention, reduce excess credits: We are concerned about how “excess” credits are defined. Some degree programs require more than 120 units to complete. Related to this, what is meant by “removing barriers to degree completion” in the strategies for Goal 1?
- Strengthen CCC-CSU transfer transition: This seems a strategy rather than an outcome indicator.
- All campuses participate in VSA: Does participation equate to successful accomplishment of this indicator?
- Conduct regular assessments of employer satisfaction with CSU graduates: There are other ways to try to judge the success of our enterprise. Surveys of alumni satisfaction and monitoring alumni accomplishments would also be important indicators of quality. The *New York Times* recently surveyed alumni five years after they left their institutions: 93% described their undergraduate experiences good or excellent (Jacques Steinberg: “Don’t Worry. Be Students.” *The New York Times Magazine*. September 30, 2007 p73ff. Also at nytimes.com/magazine).

- Refresh general education learning goals to incorporate goals for international literacy, civic capacity, and improved workforce skills: How were these particular outcomes selected?

Goal 2

- Increase enrollments in STEM fields: There is not a clear strategy linking to this indicator; perhaps it is another of the accountability indicators: incorporate STEM goals into early outreach goals? Additional strategies? As one of our STEM faculty members stated: “The objective is to produce students who are scientifically literate and skilled, who can deal with STEM in the broader sense, whether they go post-baccalaureate, biomedical, pharmaceutical, law, government, whatever. The goal here is more to resurrect the kind of education and training push the US implemented post-Sputnik, from which many of us benefitted.”
- Conduct regular assessments of employer needs and incorporate these assessments into curriculum planning: We must keep in mind, with respect to workforce development, that we are preparing students for a workforce of the future. To focus on current workforce needs without regard for future workforce needs is short sighted.
- Identify opportunities for student placements in government roles: That seems to be the strategy; the indicator is how many students were placed in what kinds of roles.
- Environmental sustainability: Is articulating the policy the strategy, whereas the results of the policy (courses, institutional practices, dollars saved, etc.) would be the measurable outcomes?
- Expand funding for research and development: the accountability indicators listed seem to be strategies; the accountability indicator would be the amount of funding, grants, projects funded, etc.

Goal 3

(Many of these indicators were addressed above.)

- Build faculty and staff development programs: Measurable indicators?
- Develop CSU leadership program: Number of individuals trained? Satisfaction with training? Satisfaction with performance of those trained?
- Strengthening message and documenting cost-effectiveness seem to be strategies rather than outcomes. Conducting assessments of public opinion (also policymakers?) might be an important indicator.
- Under enhancing the image of the CSU, both accountability indicators seem to be strategies rather than outcomes.

In sum, as is clear from our comments synthesized above, we are disappointed in the initial draft of *A2E* for the following reasons:

- This document does not read like a strategic plan. A true strategic plan has a vision with creative strategies linked to measurable desired outcomes (see, for example, the strategic plan for Boston University, <http://www.bu.edu/president/strategic-plan/>).
- This document does not have engaging vision. It is a response (at times with a defensive tone) to chronic problems and criticisms of which we are all too painfully aware.
- It falls short of offering a real plan to resolve these problems, and it does not identify what we already do well.

A2E should be a visionary document with clear goals for excellence, a roadmap of how to get there, and benchmarks to determine our success. As such, it could provide a rallying point to mobilize our constituencies and the electorate to help us out of the current funding crisis.