

# Charting Our Campus Future



**WASC** Notes

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California State University, Fullerton

## WASC

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## *Campus Reaccreditation: Background*

All institutions of higher education in the United States must be accredited by a regional agency in order to be eligible for federal financial aid as well as research grants, to provide course and degree portability to other campuses, and to provide a form of public accountability to potential students, taxpayers, and alumni, among others. In the case of Cal State Fullerton, the regional agency is the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

CSUF first received accreditation in 1961 from Western College Association (the precursor of WASC). During the reaffirmation process in 1990, CSUF had demonstrated that meeting the minimum WASC standards was not likely to be a problem; as a result, in 2000 the university was selected by WASC to undertake an alternative and experimental approach to self-study and accreditation which has now become normative. Our current reaffirmation process has followed that general thrust with a thematic approach to our self-study. What has changed, however, is that re-affirmation of accreditation now involves a multi-year, multi-visit process. Our campus is completing the second of three phases at this point, called the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR).

## *The CPR Visit*

The CPR visit was conducted March 10-12, 2010 by the WASC visiting team. The WASC Steering Committee wishes to thank everyone who participated in the sessions, including the participants in open forums, key campus leaders, and members of task forces and standing committees. The WASC Visiting Team was impressed with the number of faculty, staff, and students who took time from their busy schedules to provide input.

Hosting such a complex visit could not have been such a success without the incredible support of the entire campus community. Over 20 student ambassadors under the direction of Larry Martin in Student Affairs staffed the sign-in table, escorted visitors, moved documents and projects, set up special exhibits, signs, and the document room, moved furniture... and did whatever was asked of them.

(Continued on page 2)

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## ***The CPR Visit*** (continued from page 1)

Other myriad levels of support and generosity of time came from over 40 individuals and campus offices, including:

- IT administration, for the WASC website, tech and portal support before and during the visit;
- campus catering, for both the visiting team and the President's reception;
- physical plant, for being sure that all the worksites were impeccably clean;
- Kelly Donovan in FDC for creating all the necessary signage, including WASC/campus logo design, templates, room boards, badges, bookmarks, handouts, special exhibits and document binders;
- Hugh McDonald in the Dean's office, College of Business and Economics, for administrative support on room logistics;
- Paul Miller, who conducted a campus tour using a special transportation cart;
- Torrance Winton, Marriott hotel manager, for WASC team accommodations;
- Kathleen McCarthy for extensive document preparation, ongoing WASC communication, steering committee support, budget procedures, etc.;
- Aaron Thomas Quartet for musical ambiance during President Gordon's WASC reception; and, lastly,
- President Gordon's Office, for preparing and sending invitations, securing parking passes, and arranging other logistics for off-campus guests, etc.

While there have been many people involved in the various Task Forces during the past three years, special recognition is due the current active task forces and their coordinators:

- Campus -Wide Planning: Mike Parker
- Student Learning and its Assessment: John Bock and Lea Jarnagin
- Writing: Lana Dalley
- Promoting Student Engagement and Success: Mark Filowitz (Advising) and Mehmet Akbulut (Student Engagement).

### **Commendations**

The Visiting Team's report praised eight aspects of campus functioning:

- The commitment of faculty and staff to students is very strong;

- People enjoy working at CSUF and students like being here, providing evidence of an outstanding sense of community;
- CSUF is very progressive in its use of technology and library services;
- We have excellent collaboration across divisions, colleges, and departments;
- There is a strong, emerging curricular and co-curricular assessment program;
- We take advantage of opportunities as they arise, such as reviving Nursing, offering an Ed.D. program, etc.;
- The physical plant (buildings) has vastly improved since the last WASC visit;
- We are committed to diversifying the student body; and
- CSUF has accessible statistical and financial data and a largely democratic budget process that promotes transparency and open debate.

### ***Preparing for the Educational Effectiveness Review***

The three campus themes (Campus-Wide Planning, Student Learning and Its Assessment, and Promoting Student Engagement and Success) that were first identified in the Institutional Proposal continue to serve as our framework for the WASC reaffirmation of accreditation. The next several paragraphs summarize progress and plans for each of the themes.

#### **Campus-Wide Planning**

When the WASC visiting team returns to campus for the EER, they will expect to see a long term integrated strategic plan. The strategic plan should be a living document that provides a foundation for what the university hopes to accomplish, to prioritize decisions, and to measure results of decisions made. The plan also will provide a mechanism to identify measures of success and rationale for budget-related decisions. The strategic plan can provide a touchstone to help guide decisions that will affect the future of the university. To be effective, campus constituents must develop general consensus about and understanding of the campus strategic plan and priorities.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, Mike Parker, Interim Director of University Planning, will facilitate campus efforts to develop a long-term integrated university

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strategic plan by building upon efforts underway by the campus planning task forces. Along with the strategic plan, a concept map of all planning processes showing how they contribute to the university strategic plan will be developed. The concept map will help to frame how existing campus planning processes align with the central university strategic plan. The plan will provide the campus with a sense of common direction for the coming years.

### **Student Learning and Its Assessment**

The two strands under this theme are assessment and student writing. The University has made great strides in implementing the assessment of student learning outcomes. In conjunction with all departments on campus, learning goals and learning outcomes for every undergraduate degree granting program are now posted on a University website: (<http://www.fullerton.edu/academicprograms/assessmentedu/>). Additionally, learning goals and outcomes for some master's programs are now posted. This work will continue until learning goals and outcomes are listed for all degree programs.

The Task Force on Assessment is presently engaged in developing university wide student learning goals that will be aligned with the University mission and goals. We recognize that the key goal for assessment is using data/information to inform change and improvement. All departmental assessment plans should begin to demonstrate how gathered information can improve not only student learning but also department effectiveness. We will continue to build capacity by sponsoring workshops and tutorials on assessment strategies, measures and curriculum alignment. One such example of capacity building is the newly acquired and implemented Epsilon E-portfolio project which will allow faculty to archive student work and will be accessible to faculty assessment teams as well as external stakeholders in assessment.

The Writing Task Force has collected information from writing instructors across campus, with a particular focus on the rubrics used to assess student writing. The task force used these resources to generate a document describing the essential features of successful writing. In order to gauge the extent to which this document reflected campus consensus, the task force produced an online survey, which was delivered to

faculty and students. In the spring, the task force members collected and analyzed survey results. Student and faculty responses indicated agreement with the indicators of successful writing, suggesting that the document on student writing assessment does express a campus consensus. Several other survey responses indicated areas of further study for the task force.

In the coming year, the task force will communicate its findings on campus wide learning goals for writing. Task force members will collect resources to assist students with writing and faculty with writing instruction and assessment. Finally, the task force will wrestle with the question of where and how student writing develops over the course of a bachelor's degree.

### **Promoting Student Engagement and Success**

Two task forces on (1) student academic advising and (2) student engagement are continuing their efforts. Following the completion of three former task forces related to academic advising, the newly formulated Academic Advising Task Force began by reviewing the various models of advising across the campus. The most effective model that emerged from that discussion was a blend of well-trained full time advisors, versed in all of the latest procedures, policies, and mechanics of the system, housed in each College, in conjunction with faculty advisement in their respective major and for career counseling based on their knowledge of their fields. This system would complement the existing advisement centers. With the redesign of the GE categories that will be implemented in the near future, the catalog, Titan Degree Audit, and advising information will need to be updated. At least two significant challenges for the Task Force will be the assembly of a much more detailed accounting of all advising activities on campus so that we can quantify the actual costs associated with today's practices and to work towards establishing a permanent Advisor Professional Development Committee.

The Student Academic Life Committee (SALC) was selected to continue the work of two WASC task forces (SE-4 and SE-5) on student engagement and success.

(Continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

Members of SALC reviewed campus and college results from the spring 2009 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This survey measures student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for student learning and personal development. Results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college in comparison to students at other large public nonresidential universities. Based on the patterns of strengths and weaknesses, SALC recommended the following: (1) NSSE results be shared with faculty in each college and student affairs professionals in fall 2010; (2) Each college and the Division of Student Affairs develop a plan for addressing prioritized areas of concern in fall 2010; and (3) SALC review college/division plans in spring 2011 and based on the submitted plans make recommendations to PRBC for needed resources.

Regarding student-faculty research, SALC recommends that the PURE (Promoting the Undergraduate Research Experience) Committee be reconstituted with at least one faculty member from each college. The action plan developed by PURE in 2008 should be revisited and implementation strategies moved ahead.

### **Recommendations from the WASC March 2010 Visit**

In addition to our continuing focus on the three themes included in the Institutional Proposal, the WASC Visiting Team identified the following items to incorporate into our next report.

- **Leadership and Organizational Culture:** New financial realities may require the use of new approaches for effecting meaningful changes. CSUF should examine its structures in light of its mission and goals and determine how well those structures can address competing needs.
- **Planning:** CSUF should be clearer about what its planning is intended to accomplish, prioritize actions and results, and tie goals to performance indicators and the budget allocation process.
- **Research and Development:** CSUF should develop long-term strategies for strengthening areas compromised by short-term exigencies (low overhead grant applications, reductions in released time, and reduced training services).

- **Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes:** CSUF is encouraged to expand our focus on defining and communicating student learning outcomes across all departments and courses, so that these outcomes can be accomplished and reviewed effectively.
- **Advising:** Undergraduate advising is uneven and fragmented. The campus needs to clarify what has been achieved in its efforts to date, prioritize recommendations, complete critical steps, and collect evidence about effectiveness of implementing those changes.
- **Resource Management:** CSUF has staffing gaps and temporary arrangements. Monitor needs in all areas, prioritize continuity of services, and support areas most central to the university's mission.

### **Timeline for Re-Affirmation**

The WASC Commission will make its final decision pertaining to the CPR review in mid-June, and the campus will be notified of this decision in early July. By early August, the campus should receive the action letter and be informed of the next steps.

A follow-up visit by another WASC team, the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER), will take place in 18 to 24 months. If the campus request for an extension is granted, the EER team visit will take place in spring 2012; if not, then the next visit will be in fall 2011.

Assuming the extension of the EER is granted, during AY 2010-2011 the campus will continue working to achieve the outcomes summarized above for the EER phase. In summer 2011, the Steering Committee will draft the EER report. The report will be reviewed by the campus community during early fall 2011; the final EER report will be submitted in late fall, and the EER team visit will be in spring 2012.

The next visiting team will focus on evidence of educational effectiveness at the student and institutional level. We are expected to demonstrate quality assurance processes including how systematic inquiry is used to improve performance in both student achievement and institutional processes.

Questions or comments? Please contact Dorota Huizinga, Accreditation Liaison Officer.