

NOTES ON SSU'S MISSION
A Liberal Arts and Sciences University in a Comprehensive University System
August 20, 2008

[This document was developed jointly by the Deans Council and the Senate Academic Planning Committee. Its purpose is to serve as a basis for campus-wide dialogue on the complex nature of our University's mission during Fall 2008. The aim of those conversations is to establish the campus consensus on our mission in preparation for the WASC Educational Effectiveness review in October 2009.]

SSU's Complex Character

The California State University is one of three components of California's Master Plan for Higher Education. As the largest system of higher education in the nation, it has a comprehensive mission to provide a wide variety of educational programs to Californians in "...the liberal arts and sciences, the applied fields, and the professions..."¹ This broad mission has been pursued through twenty-three universities with highly distinct identities, ranging from polytechnics such as San Luis Obispo and Pomona, to education-oriented campuses such as Dominguez Hills, to large urban multiversities like Fullerton, Northridge, and Long Beach, and to smaller residential campuses like Sonoma.

Within the CSU family, Sonoma State originated as a small campus emphasizing the liberal arts and sciences and close student-faculty relationships. Over time, the campus has recruited an increasingly traditional-age student body drawn from across the state to compensate for the small population of its service area. The statewide student population thus drove its transition to a strong residential character. As part of the CSU, the campus has been designated a master-plan capacity of 10,000 FTES, which has led to continuing growth so that at this time SSU is a medium-sized campus of nearly 8,000 FTES.

As a CSU campus, Sonoma State University is also responsible for "Offer[ing] degree programs in academic and applied areas that are responsive to the needs of the citizens of this state..."² and to serve its "...communit[y] as [an] educational, public service, cultural, and artistic center... in ways appropriate to [its] location and emphas[i]s."³ Accordingly, SSU has developed a number of undergraduate and post-baccalaureate professional programs in business, engineering, counseling, education and other areas in response to local community needs. It has done this while retaining the CSU commitment to "the liberal arts and sciences as the indispensable foundation of the baccalaureate degree."⁴

The dual character of Sonoma State University as both a liberal arts and sciences and a comprehensive university is reflected in its membership in COPLAC and its status as a CSU campus⁵. It is also captured in its mission statement, which includes the following paragraph:

Sonoma State University recognizes that its first obligation is to develop and maintain excellent programs of undergraduate instruction grounded in the liberal

¹ *The Mission of the California State University*, November 1985 revision.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Appendix A for an analysis of SSU's fit with the aggregate profile of COPLAC member institutions.

*arts and sciences. Instructional programs are designed to challenge students not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop the skills of critical analysis, careful reasoning, creativity, and self-expression. Excellence in undergraduate education requires that students participate in a well-planned program that provides both a liberal education and opportunities for specific career preparation.*⁶

The dual character is also present in the aspirational goal of the Vision statement that is a part of the draft University Strategic Plan:

*Sonoma State University will be recognized as a center of excellence for its residential, student-centered liberal arts and professional programs that promote the social, cultural, and economic progress of the North Bay region and beyond.*⁷

SSU's liberal arts and sciences character is particularly evidenced in the baccalaureate, with its emphasis on the full development of the student in both the curricular and co-curricular dimensions. SSU recognizes the need for a smooth and effective transition into university life with such programs as EMT, FYE, and the co-curricular activities in Residential Life, Associated Students, and the Student Union. The curriculum includes a General Education core as well as rigorous academic work in a major field of study. To facilitate the transition to the world of work and to prepare our graduates for citizenship, service learning is emphasized and many majors include a capstone experience. There are also plans to identify general educational outcomes for the latter, with the possibility of developing dedicated general-education capstone courses for those majors who do not currently have such a course.

SSU's Identity-driven Changes and Remaining Challenges

As Sonoma State University's student body has included growing numbers of first-time freshmen living on campus, the university responded with several initiatives to address their distinct needs:

1. Residential Life Programs

The mission of the Office of Residential Life is to encourage the development of an environment that supports the academic mission of the University, and provides services which promotes the retention of and advocates the graduation of students.

This is accomplished through the following objectives:

- to provide personal support for the individual student in transitioning to the University environment and to provide academic advising and related services.
- to provide a sense of belonging in the Residential Community and the University through providing and supporting social, recreational, athletic and cultural programming.
- to maintain community and an academic supportive environment by establishing limits and enforcing policies which follow University regulations, and limits damage to property.

⁶ Sonoma State University Mission (<http://www.sonoma.edu/University/mission.shtml>).

⁷ Sonoma State University Strategic Plan, February 2008.

- to promote an atmosphere that is conducive to creating an appreciation, understanding, and acceptance of individual differences and lifestyles regardless of physical abilities, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, gender or political affiliation.
- to encourage the retention of residents and to facilitate the student growth and development through Residential Life services and educational programs and through support of selected University programs.

2. Educational Mentoring Teams/First Year Experience

The Educational Mentoring Team Program (EMT) began at SSU in 1994. It was developed in part to address an increasingly lower division, residential student population needing a smooth transition from high school to college and stronger connections among the students and the university community. It also serves as an advising tool and an early warning system for “at risk” students and currently enrolls between 60-70% of the freshman class in its University 102, Freshman Year Experience course. Each section enrolls no more than 25 students.

The EMT Program consists of three different levels of student immersion:

- EOP Academy, which serves economically and educationally disadvantaged students, is a one year program that serves approximately 100 students. Students take groups of courses together both semesters including a General Education area course, an English course, and a University 102.
- Freshman Interest Group (FIG) is a year long living/learning community where students live in the residence halls together grouped by field of study. Students take University 102, a core course in the field of study, and an English course together during both fall and spring semesters. This program serves approximately 180 students; and
- University 102 (Freshman Year Experience), can be taken as a stand alone course in the fall semester. Students can choose to enroll in either themed sections or those of more general interest. Approximately 700 first time freshmen enroll in these classes.

3. University 150 – First-Year Experience/Identity and Global Challenges

UNIV 150 (First-Year Experience: Identity and Global Challenges) is a 9-unit interdisciplinary course that fulfills two freshmen General Education requirements—Critical Thinking (Area A3), and Oral & Written Communication (Area A1)—while at the same time highlighting the range of academic fields available to SSU students. Through an examination of social, philosophical, political, scientific, and personal aspects of identity (fall semester) and our global connections and responsibilities (spring semester), the course explores different ways in which people construct their individual and collective identity, and helps students connect these ideas with their own experience as they transition into college life. In the context of these issues, students practice essential analysis, research, and communication skills through writing, research, and creative assignments.

The course consists of one 50-minute lecture per week—each delivered by an expert in a different field of study, but related to the themes addressed in the assigned readings—plus two 2-hour seminars during which students discuss the issues covered in the lectures, connect them to their own experience and transition to university life, and build critical thinking and communication (written and oral analysis) skills. Students in all UNIV 150 sections attend the plenary lecture together, while individual seminar sections, led by a faculty instructor, are small (approximately 17 students per section), fostering a sense of community and connection among the participants. This sense of community is further enhanced by Peer Mentors who work with faculty and students to facilitate students' initiation into campus life. In addition, almost all UNIV 150 students live together in the residential community with a Residential Life Coordinator and Faculty-in-Residence who provide ongoing support for students and organize a variety of activities designed to strengthen the connection between academic and residential life.

4. Service Learning and the Center for Community Engagement

The Center for Community Engagement advances community-based programs on the Sonoma State University campus. CCE supports faculty in developing community-based teaching that integrates academic theory with community service and research that is inclusive of community partners and students to address local problems. By incorporating these projects into the curriculum, we teach students to be active citizens and that the theories taught in the classroom do apply to real-world issues.

Special emphasis is placed on providing opportunities to the growing numbers of first-time freshmen living on campus. Many of these students need to gain exposure to the diversity of the region, bond with classmates, and be provided with relevance and clear connections in and among their coursework to their civic lives and career plans. Because service-learning and other engaged pedagogies are powerful tools to deepen the learning experience of these students while addressing these development and academic goals, they are utilized in many sections of the freshman seminar and throughout the FIG program. Additionally, efforts are underway to intentionally integrate engaged pedagogies to address our civic mission into the reformed General Education curriculum.

As a liberal arts and sciences university, SSU has traditionally had strong representation in the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences disciplines in terms of number of disciplines, enrollment levels, and majors. Its growing size and number and diversity of programs (including a number of professional programs such as business, nursing, engineering, and more) has given it a scope that is fittingly described as comprehensive.

However, SSU faces a challenge common to many liberal arts and sciences institutions: how to continually strengthen and change the character of a liberal education to best meet the challenges of today: globalization, cross-cultural collaboration, a fast-changing, information-based economic landscape, creativity as the basis for economic growth. As the continuing conversation in the Association of American Colleges and Universities indicates,⁸ institutions of

⁸ *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, (<http://www.greaterexpectations.org>); *College Learning for the New Global Century*, AACU Publications, 2007 (<http://www.aacu.org/resources/liberaleducation/index.cfm>).

higher education need to strengthen traditional liberal arts and sciences education in the following ways:

- insure that general educational outcomes provide students with the values, skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to thrive as citizens and professionals in the 21st century, consistent with the new CSU guidelines for general education in Executive Order 1033;⁹
- insure that such learning outcomes are achieved across the baccalaureate;
- develop, assess, and continually improve pedagogies best suited to succeed with today's generation of students.

SSU is making significant progress in these fronts in a variety of ways, including:

- Adoption by the Senate of general education outcomes;
- Development of detailed learning outcomes by the General Education Subcommittee for each of the distinct coverage areas of our General Education program;
- A Program Review process that includes assessment of learning outcomes and development of goals and objectives for continuous improvement based on the results of such assessment;
- Enhanced programs in the Center for Teaching and Professional Development to support development and adoption of new pedagogies;
- Proposed strategies for global awareness, sustainability, and diversity in the University Strategic Plan.¹⁰

In conclusion, Sonoma State University is successfully combining the achievement of key learning outcomes of a liberal education with the breadth of coverage of academic disciplines and professional programs of a comprehensive university. There is no conflict between these two objectives: indeed the new century demands that we provide both for today's students.

⁹ "General Education Breadth Requirements," June 18, 2008 (<http://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-1033.html>).

¹⁰ University Strategic Plan, March 3, 2008 (<http://www.sonoma.edu/uaffairs/strategicplan/>).

APPENDIX A

SSU and COPLAC: Carnegie Classifications

The question of the fit of Sonoma State University—a medium-sized university—to COPLAC can be illuminated by a review of the characteristics of its members. The Carnegie Foundation has a well-established classification scheme for institutions of higher education (IHEs) which can serve this purpose.

The Carnegie classification scheme has undergone periodic revisions. Under earlier versions, the term “comprehensive university” was used to identify institutions with significant numbers of post-baccalaureate programs, but few if any doctoral programs. The current classification scheme has a series of nested categories, with the highest level sorting institutions into the categories of Associate’s Colleges, Master’s Colleges and Universities, and Doctorate-granting Universities. Within the Master’s category, there is the subcategory “comprehensive,” defined as

awarding at least one master’s degree in each of the following disciplinary domains: humanities, social sciences, and STEM* fields, and one or more professional fields (such as business, education, engineering, health professions, public policy, or social work).
(<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp?key=794>)

In recognition of the multi-dimensional character of the mission of many IHEs, the Carnegie scheme categorizes each IHE by other features such as character of undergraduate program, size and setting, etc. The full characterization of Sonoma State University by Carnegie’s present scheme is as follows:

Sonoma State University

Rohnert Park, California

Level:	4-year or above
Control:	Public
Enrollment (Fall 2004):	7,977
Classification	Category
Undergraduate Instructional Program:	A&S+Prof/SGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, some graduate coexistence
Graduate Instructional Program:	Postbac-Comp: Postbaccalaureate comprehensive
Enrollment Profile:	HU: High undergraduate
Undergraduate Profile:	FT4/S/HTI: Full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in
Size and Setting:	M4/R: Medium four-year, primarily residential
Basic:	Master’s L: Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs)

The categories within each of the classifications have specific quantitative criteria for selection.¹¹ For example, SSU’s enrollment profile is designated HU because its graduate enrollment is above 10 % but below 24% of total enrollment.

Table 1 below shows how all COPLAC institutions cluster around a subset of categories for these classifications (categories outside the range populated by COPLAC members are not shown for brevity). A review of the table yields some interesting observations:

The majority of COPLAC members are Master’s Colleges and Universities, and of those the majority have medium-sized programs, while SSU has a larger program;

Eighteen of twenty-three COPLAC members have professional programs, a number with less of an emphasis on arts and sciences than SSU;

Most COPLAC members with graduate programs have education as their dominant or single program (9 of 16), with SSU as one of four members with “comprehensive” graduate programs;

SSU’s undergraduate profile matches the mode for COPLAC (full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer in);

SSU’s High Undergraduate enrollment profile is lower than COPLAC’s mode of Very High Undergraduate;

SSU’s size and setting classification as Medium four-year, primarily residential matches the COPLAC mode.

The picture that emerges from the COPLAC Carnegie profiles is one of SSU as an institution that is squarely within the mainstream of the organization. There is a certain amount of heterogeneity in COPLAC, and like most members SSU does not match the mode of every classification. However, in most of the categories SSU does match the majority of its peers.

TABLE 1
Carnegie Classifications of COPLAC Member Institutions

Variable	Value	SSU	Count	Label
Basic2005 Basic Classification	18	SSU	3	Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
	19		8	Master's M: Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)
	20		3	Master's S: Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)
	21		7	Bac/A&S: Baccalaureate Colleges--Arts & Sciences
	22		2	Bac/Diverse: Baccalaureate Colleges--Diverse Fields
	ipug2005 Undergraduate Program Classification	3		4
4			1	A&S-F/SGC: Arts & sciences focus, some graduate coexistence
5				A&S-F/HGC: Arts & sciences focus, high graduate coexistence
6			2	A&S+Prof/NGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, no graduate coexistence
7		SSU	8	A&S+Prof/SGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, some graduate coexistence

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the classifications and a complete definition of the categories within each classification, see <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp?key=785> .

Variable	Value	SSU	Count	Label
	8			A&S+Prof/HGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, high graduate coexistence
	9		1	Bal/NGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, no graduate coexistence
	10		4	Bal/SGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, some graduate coexistence
	11			Bal/HGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence
	12		1	Prof+A&S/NGC: Professions plus arts & sciences, no graduate coexistence
	13		2	Prof+A&S/SGC: Professions plus arts & sciences, some graduate coexistence
ipgrad2005 Graduate Program Classification	-1		7	(Not applicable)
	0			(Not classified)
	1		2	S-Postbac/Ed: Single postbaccalaureate (education)
	2			S-Postbac/Bus: Single postbaccalaureate (business)
	3		1	S-Postbac/Other: Single postbaccalaureate (other field)
	4	SSU	4	Postbac-Comp: Postbaccalaureate comprehensive
	5			Postbac-A&S: Postbaccalaureate, arts & sciences dominant
	6		7	Postbac-A&S/Ed: Postbaccalaureate with arts & sciences (education dominant)
	7			Postbac-A&S/Bus: Postbaccalaureate with arts & sciences (business dominant)
	8			Postbac-A&S/Other: Postbaccalaureate with arts & sciences (other dominant fields)
	9		2	Postbac-Prof/Ed: Postbaccalaureate professional (education dominant)
ugprofile2005 Undergraduate Profile Classification	0		1	(Not classified)
	8		1	MFT4/S/HTI: Medium full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in
	9			FT4/I: Full-time four-year, inclusive
	10		3	FT4/S/LTI: Full-time four-year, selective, lower transfer-in
	11	SSU	9	FT4/S/HTI: Full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in
	12		4	FT4/MS/LTI: Full-time four-year, more selective, lower transfer-in
	13		5	FT4/MS/HTI: Full-time four-year, more selective, higher transfer-in
enrprofile2005 Enrollment Profile Classification	2		7	ExU4: Exclusively undergraduate four-year
	3		11	VHU: Very high undergraduate
	4	SSU	5	HU: High undergraduate
sizeset2005 Size and Setting Classification	8		1	VS4/HR: Very small four-year, highly residential
	9		1	S4/NR: Small four-year, primarily nonresidential
	10		5	S4/R: Small four-year, primarily residential
	11		2	S4/HR: Small four-year, highly residential
	12		3	M4/NR: Medium four-year, primarily nonresidential
	13	SSU	7	M4/R: Medium four-year, primarily residential
	14		3	M4/HR: Medium four-year, highly residential
	15			L4/NR: Large four-year, primarily nonresidential
	16		1	L4/R: Large four-year, primarily residential