

**Comments concerning the WASC Institutional Proposal for Accreditation Review  
*Educating the Whole Student: Sustaining SSU's Mission in a Time of Change.***

General Observation

The SSU WASC proposal applies the pedagogical and assessment models forwarded by the AACU and the CAE subdivision of the Rand Corporation. In this approach it is congruent with CSU's Cornerstones Report, which grew out of CAE assistance in the early nineties to a small committee of educators and businessmen that included both Barry Munitz and Charles B. Reed. For that committee the Rand Corporation developed a report later transformed nearly word for word into a new version, assigned to an alias authorship of leading California educators and college presidents. The goal, one fears, was to guarantee a two-tiered college outcome: one of enhanced content intended for students from upper-class families and students of extraordinary intellectual abilities to take leading roles in society, and another of reduced content aimed to produce appropriate workers for middle level jobs in the work force. SSU is designated one of the latter. A first class liberal arts institution such as Pomona or Reed or Wesleyan addresses the former, but they are heavily endowed and provide SFRs that cannot be approached by institutions under CSU restraints. Even among the public COPLAC institutions with which we compare ourselves, nearly all are smaller and have favorable ratios between faculty and students (the COPLAC average is around 15 SFR). SSU with an SFR of 24.7 is brave to aspire to the top, but sustaining these aspirations is an awesomely difficult financial task.

These remarks made, I would like to address elements of the proposal that in my mind have been passed over too lightly. A recurrent theme in WASC accreditation critiques has been Alignment of Institutional Priorities with Mission. It was recognized as the first priority of strategic initiatives cited in the March 26, 2004 draft report of the Academic Affairs strategic planning committee: "Priority 1: Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for resource generation and allocation that ties together academic, fiscal and infrastructure planning and acknowledges the educational mission of Academic Affairs as the central funding priority of the University." Academic Affairs is struggling to regain the portion of the budget that it lost in the interim years preceding the arrival of Provost Eduardo Ochoa. Nothing of this struggle is indicated in SSU's response to the WASC letter of evaluation dated June 28, 2004. There, referring as well to the concern previously outlined in the 1999 accreditation report, the evaluation letter states that "the team did not find evidence that fiscal and physical resources were clearly aligned with purposes . . . or that organizational planning in the whole supports effective decision making."

The current WASC proposal extracts the bulleted portions of SSU's Mission Statement describing the values it hopes to provide to each of its graduates, but it does not reference the portion of the Mission Statement addressing university offerings in a wide range of traditional disciplines as well as interdisciplinary programs or the values it seeks to provide to students participating in them. Similarly it does not address the range and quality of professional and graduate programs.

These matters become fundamental in light of the Academic Affairs' commendable efforts to develop a rich freshman or lower division General Education program composed of small (and expensive) cohorts of students. Nor does the proposal offer a business plan to sustain these efforts and avoid a massive shift of resources from the majors, perhaps to a point beyond repair.

Indeed the 1999 concern about the alignment of mission to enrollment, academic planning, student support and facilities development cited by President Ruben Armñana in his January 20, 2004 WASC special visit report (p. 20 in the December 1, 2003 draft) included a table of Student-Faculty Ratios for SSU and the CSU in Fall 2000 and for SSU in Fall 2003 (Attachment 1). He was concerned that in 2000 SSU had the highest lower-division SFR in the CSU (SSU 29.7, CSU

25.8), but noted that upper division and graduate SFRs were lower than those of CSU. At the time comparative CSU figures for 2003 were not available.

Subsequent figures from the same database—the Course Section component of the CSU's official Academic Planning Database (APDB)—show clearly that SSU is proceeding in precisely the wrong direction. In Fall 2000 SSU's total SFR exceeded the System average by 1.2 (SSU 21.2, CSU 20). In Fall 2004 its SFR exceeded the System by 2.8 SFR (SSU 24.7, CSU 21.9). Moreover it was second highest in the System in both total SFR and lower division SFR, where it exceeded the System average by 5 SFR (SSU 33, CSU 28). It was exactly at the mean in upper division SFR and one full SFR above the System average at the graduate level (Attachments 2 and 3). These figures do not suggest ease of the close student faculty interaction for which the institution prides itself.

Most egregious was the *loss* of 54+ FTEF from the classroom between 2002 and 2004 (Attachment 4) at a cost of some \$3 million taken from instruction—that is, somewhere between 216 and 270 actual classes, depending on the permanent faculty/lecturer mix. These changes have much affected the ability of departments to serve the increasing proportion of freshman, while they struggle to maintain healthy and attractive upper division offerings. Moreover, President Armiñana anticipates an increase in student enrollments of 1,830 FTES over the next five years. This works out to an accompanying increase of between 25 and 30 *new* faculty positions, in addition to replacements and the repair of the faculty shortfall encountered between 2002 and 2004 (16% of the total faculty FTEF). It would require further adjustment to bring SSU's SFR down to the mean SFR of the CSU.

The WASC letter posed another critical question: what are the unique characteristics associated with an education at Sonoma State University? SSU's response does not address the changes necessitated by CSU's annual growth of 2.5% mandated in the budget agreement with the State, or by the target raised by SSU's agreement with the Chancellor to achieve a 5% annual growth. These anticipate a shift from SSU's long-standing self-definition as a small institution devoted especially to the undergraduate liberal arts and sciences, toward a mid-sized comprehensive university assigned a more general character (as indicated to the SSU Academic Senate by chief administrators in the Spring of 2005).

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September 10, 2005.