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**Comments concerning the WASC Institutional proposal
for Accreditation Review
*Educating the Whole Student:
sSustaining SSU's Mission in a Time of Change*
with particular reference to SSU's revised Long Range Academic Plan**

Background

The University's Long Range Academic Plan (LRAP, Attachment 1) was developed by a committee of representatives from the administration, faculty, staff and students beginning in 1992. The first draft was adopted by the Vice President for Academic Affairs' Council, May, 1993. It was passed by the Academic Senate in 1995 and underwent minor modifications in 1999-2000. From 1994 to 2000 the Academic Planning Committee (APC) was a subcommittee of EPC; in 2001 it was given status as a standing committee of the Academic Senate. The LRAP was revised, approved and adopted by the Academic Senate in 2003 as the document which would be central to long range planning and growth decisions on campus. The main argument for its incorporation into the fabric of governance was the demonstrated need for long term planning and assessment to ensure the balance and preservation of the character and quality of SSU. Through the work of the APC the Senate sought to avoid ad hoc and reactionary decisions, particularly in times of cultural change and diminishing resources. The APC shaped the LRAP around the mission and character of the institution and addressed a number of strategies later singled out as issues by WASC in the 2004 Report of its visiting team. (Attachment 2) It also included other important issues not cited by WASC. Although the LRAP pre-addressed WASC's concerns in a policy document approved by the faculty with administration accord, its recommendations do not form a part of the campus response to the WASC Visiting Team's Report.

Alignment of Institutional Priorities with Mission

The WASC committee noted that there is a need to connect the mission to institutional activities such as faculty recruitment, curricular development, program review and assessment, and retention and graduation rates. These were integrally tied to allocation of resources and budgeting priorities. Susan McKillop has recently authored a review of the alignment of resources with mission. (Attachment 3) in which she traced the sharp increase of SSU's SFR relative to the CSU and COPLAC; the removal of 54+ FTEF from the classroom between 2002 and 2004; and the anticipated increase in student enrollments (1,830 FTES) over the next five years. These were decisions brought about by

administrative offices in a process that lacked “transparency”. Fiscal constraints and administrative priorities that do not focus on the educational mission of the university have impacted the other areas targeted by WASC including assessment of teaching and learning, diversity and sustained follow up.

The WASC commission letter notes that various segments of the University exert heroic efforts to solve persistent concerns and compensate for funding issues that have clearly eroded the capacity to do everything that needs to be done.” The LRAP lists those needs as excellence in teaching and learning based on modest growth; size commensurate with SSU’s mission (I: 1-5); a commitment by SSU to develop and maintain excellence in teaching including support for classroom instruction (facilities, equipment, class size) student retention and graduation, small class size, excellence and diversity in its faculty, student body and curriculum (II: 1-5); and a commitment to a governance of faculty, administration and staff based on collegiality, joint planning, and accountability in areas regarding human, financial and physical resources. It assigns primary responsibility to the faculty for matters fundamental to educational mission; such as academic programs and curriculum matters. It seeks open lines of communication between the administration, faculty and staff in decisions relating to governance, administration, budget and policy decisions (III: 2, 3). The LRAP document recommends that shared responsibility be enhanced.

These matters, addressed in expanded form in the LRAP answer the first two major recommendations of the WASC team. (1) “Greater transparency for the entire community including ways in which the missions of academic and student affairs dovetail with budget and infrastructure plans;” (2) “Better coordination and perhaps efficiencies across various planning activities organized within sub units of the university.” Had the administration taken seriously the LRAP guiding document approved by all constituencies within the campus in 1995 (modified in 1999 and 2001) the first two recommendations would have been essentially met.

The third recommendation, “a clearer view as to how the balance among different mission elements (e.g., teaching, and the realization of distinctiveness in liberal education, compared with scholarship and creative endeavors) should be enacted and supported” are covered in LRAP’s Section IV: Commitment to Faculty and V: Student Population. It requests adequate resources, including resources for professional development and participation in faculty governance with attention to teaching load, class size, sufficient permanent faculty, sabbatical leave and travel moneys, support for curricular innovation, etc., and V (1-5) Student Population: the need for a balance between class levels, diversity and seeks enrollment management strategies to achieve these balances.

The LRAP goes on to address staffing policies VI (1-4), timely replacement of vacancies, a full time/part time ratio that approaches ACR 73’s designation of 75%/25% as ideal; an appropriate SFR and a balance between

majors and general education offerings to preserve majors and programs. In Section VII: the LRAP addresses needs for (1-4) excellence, diversity of pedagogy and academic innovation, adequate staffing and funding to insure effective review and assessment, retention and timely graduation, academic flexibility to include new approaches to education; Section VIII (1-5) seeks graduate education in alignment with the SSU's mission that does not compromise the integrity and quality of the undergraduate curriculum.

General Education is a matter of high priority for the LRAP, the Strategic Planning Committee and WASC. The LRAP stresses philosophical coherence, well-defined and addressed goals in classes, developed and taught by permanent faculty which express the basic values of SSU. The LRAP recognizes the need to change ways of teaching and learning as times change. (VII:4; IX: 3; IV:4) These all contribute to a cohesive academic plan, but funding is necessary to achieve the stated goals. In the area of assessment and planning APC is reviewing a more inclusive proposal for program review, assessment of student outcomes and long range planning issues for departments and programs that goes beyond student satisfaction issues. (Attachment 4). Given the growing crisis in faculty workload, de-funding of faculty positions and increasing SFR this is an area for critical review.

The last sections of the LRAP address Physical Resources, Instructional and Student Support and funding from sources outside traditional state resources. These sections are especially important and have not been followed up by the administration.

In conclusion, the LRAP set forth values that the WASC letter cites: transparency, coordination, balance, the need for assessment of the overall design and educational components of GE. It articulates goals for diversity and adjustments to meet the needs of students and faculty of diverse backgrounds. (e.g., IV:4; VII:4; IX:3).

There can be no doubt that SSU can improve its teaching strategies to accommodate a broader segment of the California student population and adapt new learning and teaching styles to it (IX:3). But it is also clear that the administration has presented no viable business plan to support the many recommendations of the LRAP. With recent changes in personnel SSU's administration has decided to scrap the LRAP entirely, even though it is official Senate policy, and substitute a new strategic initiative, still relatively unformed, for which it has offered as yet, no concrete suggestion of a follow up business plan. In fact, all discussion of funding has been deferred at administrative request until the initiative is well developed. Planning without resources is no planning at all, no matter what the rhetoric. As WASC said, resources need to follow mission and the planning for that mission. As of now SSU has neither funding for its established LRAP policy implementation nor developed funding for a new plan for a strategic initiative.