

# **Serving a Changing Region: Advancing as a Learning-Centered University**

## **Capacity and Preparatory Review California State University, Northridge**

### **1.0 Introduction**

At 4:31 a.m. on January 17, 1994, an earthquake rolled under Cal State Northridge, causing massive destruction. With its epicenter less than one mile away, the 6.7 tremor did more damage to the 353-acre campus than any event—natural or man-made—has ever done to any American institution of higher education.

At least one of the Review Team members may recognize these words as part of the opening paragraphs of the April 2000 self study prepared for our last reaccreditation by WASC. We used a description of the earthquake and its aftermath to create context for understanding Cal State Northridge at the beginning of the 21st century. As the 2000 WASC review team found, despite the havoc wreaked by the 1994 earthquake—or perhaps because of it—Cal State Northridge emerged from the rubble as a stronger, smarter institution, a community better able to work together to address the challenges we face.

Painfully, it is time for us to set a new catastrophic context, one that may well have longer term consequences than the earthquake, which “merely” destroyed the physical university.

In September 2008, the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers signaled the beginning of a worldwide economic recession, in effect, a man-made disaster causing massive destruction. As is often the case, California felt the impact early and will continue to feel it for some time after the rest of the country begins its economic recovery. The impact of the recession was intensified in California by long-standing, systemic imbalances in the state’s finances. For example, as a result of Proposition 13, California’s General Fund relies disproportionately on income tax and capital gains from stocks and property sales. But, with the collapse of the California real estate market to about half its previous value and with over 12 percent unemployment, the state coffers are near empty and every state agency is facing massive budget cuts. (For additional detail, see [Perishing Republic](#).)

The impact of the state’s budgetary woes has been substantial in the CSU, including Cal State Northridge:

- CSUN’s share of the \$584 million cut to the 2009/10 CSU budget is \$41 million. It is widely believed that additional cuts will be made late this year or in January, following 4<sup>th</sup> quarter state income reporting.
- All employees of the CSU—administrators, faculty and staff—approved/accepted two-day-per-month unpaid furloughs for Academic Year (AY) 2009/10. This is the equivalent of five weeks fewer work days for the year and a salary cut of 9.23 percent.
- Of necessity, departments developed leaner class schedules. Extra efforts by advisors were needed to help students build full-time schedules so as not to imperil their Financial Aid, medical insurance, ability to live in residence halls and satisfactory progress toward graduation. The cuts in course offerings will be even more severe in Spring 2010 and worse still in AY 2010/11.
- Many students who had applied to attend CSUN in Fall were not admitted, part of a decision by the CSU system to decrease enrollment statewide by 20,000 students. More than 1,000 additional transfer students who applied to attend Cal State Northridge beginning in Spring 2010 will not: the University is accepting no undergraduate applications. In 2008/09, CSUN’s FTES (full-time

equivalent students) enrollment was 29,080. For 2010/11, the University will cut resident enrollment by another 10.8 percent, returning us to our 2002/03 FTES of about 24,500. Despite these mandated enrollment cuts, our 2009 freshman class was the third largest in CSUN history (Data Element [1.1](#)).

- The CSU Board of Trustees approved a 20 percent student fee increase less than one month before the start of classes; this was on top of a Spring 2009 increase of 10 percent. It is possible that another increase of 10 percent or more will be put into effect for 2010/11.
- Less easy to quantify, but no less devastating, is the collective *angst* caused by lives—student, staff and faculty—disrupted.

As the adage goes, context is everything. When we wrote our Institutional Proposal in Fall 2007, we only briefly discussed the “interplay between constraints on public financial support for education and the...needs of our students.” In 2007, California—along with the nation in general—was in a much different frame of mind. In fact, the California State University was experiencing continued enrollment growth to meet increasing demand, and CSUN’s Master Plan anticipated 35,000 FTES by 2035.

Not surprisingly, the optimism which infused our Proposal has suffered a near-knockout punch.

And yet, there are also reasons to be hopeful. In 2008, this country elected a new President who vowed to support education and who is putting money behind his promise. The economy is, as we write this, showing faint signs of resuscitation—although admittedly least in California. As an institution, California State University, Northridge remains committed to the same goals that were operative two years ago. Due to the foresight of campus leaders and good long-term planning, CSUN has weathered the economic storm better than many of her sister campuses.

In her 2009 Convocation Address, President Jolene Koester expressed confidence. “My optimism stems from understanding—knowing—that Cal State Northridge has already made critical changes that allow us to respond effectively to the current fiscal situation and other major issues affecting all U.S. public higher education. While it is difficult—very difficult—at times like these to focus on other than the ‘here and now,’ it is to the future that we must attend.” She went on to affirm CSUN’s commitment to providing access to higher education for students in our region, to being a learning-centered university, to student success and to academic excellence. President Koester closed her address by reminding the campus community that this “...University is familiar with, and has overcome, difficulty. And, we can, will, and must stand together to protect the future” (full [Convocation](#) text).

The optimism expressed by President Koester gives us hope as we prepare this CPR document. Her reaffirmation of our learning-centeredness is supported by the distances we’ve traveled in the last decade, from “Becoming a Learning-Centered University” in 2000 to “Advancing as a Learning-Centered University,” the subtitle of our Institutional Proposal for this reaccreditation cycle. We committed to being a learning-centered university many years ago; you can now find this commitment integrated into most of our practices and programs. Thus, when our 20-member WASC Steering Committee thought about how to approach the reaccreditation process, we again took a learning-centered approach. Working with the University community, we selected and designed the three themes so that all would be addressed as research questions. We saw this process as an opportunity to learn about our institution. As we said in our IP, we believe that “teaching and learning are subjects worthy of sophisticated study.” As a result, you will see that each of the three essays has been written by a Research Team that spent the last 18 months investigating these research questions. You will find that each essay has its own unique voice—although all three voices speak to one another coherently.

The first thematic essay addresses CSUN's commitment to student success. The team addresses how students learn, both in their academic courses and outside the classroom. We examine the processes and structures we have put in place to support student learning—advisement, technology, retention efforts and assessment—and how these have changed over time. As we face mandated cuts in both enrollment and budget, facilitating student graduation becomes ever more important. Our discussion of "Dimensions of Retention" in this first essay (see [section 2.3](#)) will explore how resilient staff and creative policies help students graduate in a timely fashion.

The second thematic essay examines the ways in which the University supports faculty and staff success and the ways in which faculty and staff, in turn, support University success. Aspects of support include University commitment to faculty and student research; faculty and staff development opportunities; recruitment and retention of a diverse employee pool; and University efforts to generate external support for faculty, staff and student success. This discussion occurs within the context of mandatory furloughs for staff and faculty alike. We remain committed to furthering faculty and staff success despite the loss of approximately 9 percent of work hours in 2009/10—hours that otherwise could have been devoted to teaching, mentoring, research, outreach and a host of other campus activities.

Our third thematic essay is particularly important in light of the current state budget crisis. This essay focuses on how we learn as an institution by examining three major initiatives undertaken by CSUN over the last decade to understand what factors contributed to their success and how that success can become a model for future endeavors. How did we move from a post-earthquake disaster mode to a culture of "resilient pragmatism" that has enabled us to survive and thrive thus far? Including graduate students on the Research Team for this theme enabled the WASC process itself to become a learning opportunity for all involved.

The current reaccreditation process provides CSUN the opportunity to reflect on the critiques (as well as the commendations) that came from the 2000 WASC Visiting Team as we plan for the next decade. In 2000, identified concerns included our use of technology, our lack of coordinated assessment activities, a lack of coherence in our GE program and an overabundance of new initiatives that appeared disconnected ([Appendix A](#)). As a campus, we took these concerns seriously and address many of them in this CPR. Clearly, these concerns speak to issues of capacity and we are gratified with the answers this report provides.

Despite the dark cloud of economic uncertainty, we remain committed to learning-centeredness as a campus priority: You will find this principle interwoven through all we do. Additionally, we are clear about our priority to serve this changing region. As President Koester is fond of reminding all of us, California State University, Northridge is the "intellectual, economic, and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond." Over 80 percent of CSUN graduates remain in the region, becoming part of the workforce and contributing to this vibrant community. Academic degree programs such as the Ed.D., B.S. in Nursing, B.S. in Construction Management, B.S. in Accounting, MSW and the program in Spanish Language Journalism prepare students to serve the needs of our community. The Teachers for a New Era Initiative has established CSUN as a leader in teacher preparation, providing better educational experiences for future generations. When completed in 2011, the Performing Arts Center will offer a wealth of cultural and artistic opportunities to the region.

When CSUN reopened after the 1994 earthquake, there were banners all over campus proclaiming, "Not just back, better!" Perhaps now our motto should be, "In spite of everything, still here and better than ever!"

## **OUR THREE THEMES**

### **2.0 Student Success through Engagement in Learning (Theme #1)**

CSUN's Institutional Proposal (IP) for Theme #1 laid out four areas of inquiry: Student Advisement and Communication, Learning in General Education and the Major, Learning Outside the Classroom and Dimensions of Retention. During the CPR process it became clear that in our learning-centered university the dichotomy between learning in the classroom and learning outside the classroom had become outdated, so those aspects are combined in the second section of this essay. Throughout, we consider how technology and the campus' learning-centered university initiative facilitate student learning.

#### **2.1 Student Advisement and Communication**

After the 2000 site visit and review, WASC recommended that the University pay closer attention to graduation and retention rates. In response, a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF) was formed, presenting its report to President Koester in 2003. (See [Section 4.4](#), for further discussion of the work of the GRTF.) The report identified advising as an area of concern. As a result, CSUN has moved towards continuous improvement of student advisement as well as communication about advising policies and procedures through coordinated efforts across divisions of the University. [WASC Criteria For Review (CFR) 4.1]

Advising is decentralized at CSUN. Each of the eight academic Colleges has its own Student Service Center/Equal Opportunity Program satellite (SSC/EOP). In addition, a central Advising Resource Center (ARC/EOP) advises students who are undecided about a major. Colleges vary in how they advise the categories of students they serve, but as a general rule, there are two levels of advisement. Lower division students and students in academic jeopardy are advised primarily in the SSC/EOP and ARC/EOP offices, while upper division students in good academic standing are advised primarily by faculty or staff specialists in their majors. This decentralized, tiered model provides several advantages: proximity to academic departments; heightened levels of collaboration between faculty and staff advisors; more focused and deeper relationships between advisors and advisees; and specialized advising geared to students' class level, academic standing and desired career paths. All Colleges share the common mission of assisting students in forming intentional partnerships that connect their needs, values, abilities and goals to CSUN's educational program. All Colleges view academic advising as an on-going relationship and a collaborative process that helps students identify and reach their academic goals.

Even with improvements, the model initially led to some confusion among students, faculty and staff advisors about the "who, what, when and where" of advising and support services. The University responded to this challenge in 2005 by convening the Academic Advising Reconciliation Committee (AARC), comprised of representatives from the Office of Undergraduate Studies (UGS), Student Affairs (SA) and EOP. The AARC collaborated with advisors in setting university-wide standards for levels and types of services, communicating these standards to students in a clear manner, developing technology tools for use by advisors and students, conducting professional development workshops for both staff and faculty advisors and creating and implementing an advising assessment plan. Beginning in late 2006, the advising leadership began developing the "Baseline Services" grids ([Appendix C](#)). In an easy-to-read format, the document relates what every student at CSUN, regardless of major or class level, can expect to receive in terms of academic advising and other holistic support services delivered by the SSC/EOP and ARC/EOP offices. The document reflects a minimum level of service that is supported by all areas. The creation of the document involved not just a cataloging of services, but also negotiated definitions of what those services should be and what level of service can be supported by all areas. Cumbersome policies were reviewed and improved with the approval of faculty governance. Throughout, technology

was harnessed to enable students to take ownership of their academic progress and to reduce workload on advisors. Consistent procedures and forms are now used by all Colleges. Following the creation of the Baseline Services Grids, a group of SSC/EOP directors, advisors and administrators began to develop an assessment plan for academic advisement. Learning outcomes were developed for students in all stages of matriculation. The collection of data relating to the new assessment plan was begun in Fall 2009. A *Student Guide to Academic Advisement at California State University* was developed, partially in response to requests from Associated Students (AS), CSUN's student government. [CFR 1.2, 1.7, 2.10, 2.3, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 4.2, 4.4]

In support of these efforts, the associate deans have taken responsibility for assuring the quality of advisement in their own Colleges and achieving consistency across all Colleges. Associate deans make or approve all decisions regarding advisement services and the academic standing of students. They meet regularly to discuss policies, coordinate responses and assure consistency through mechanisms such as the Appeals Board, which meets to review contested decisions on student petitions.

In response to advisement and registration problems that often occurred in summer, several new programs for First Time Freshmen (FTF) are offered, including accelerated timetables for testing and registration and expanded night and weekend advisement. Transfer students, too, receive special attention to improve their orientation and advisement. For example, six sections of popular upper division General Education courses are reserved for new transfer students; these classes combine traditional course materials with information about campus resources, services and expectations. In addition, Student Outreach and Recruitment Services (SOARS) has begun an aggressive program of outreach to provide advisement to transfer students at the local community college they attend.

The majority of advisement at the upper division occurs in the major and is provided by faculty. UGS holds two training sessions each semester for faculty advisors and many Colleges supplement these sessions with their own professional development workshops run by College advisors. A Faculty Colloquium on Advising, co-sponsored by the Faculty Senate and UGS, was held during 2007/08 to emphasize the importance of this activity. In addition, because informal advising occurs throughout the University, UGS prepares policy guides and conducts workshops each year for newly hired faculty, department chairs, new student orientation leaders and the staff of Admissions & Records (A&R), among others. Finally, there are numerous collaborative efforts across divisions to improve websites, printed material and electronic communications.

Graduate advisement is primarily provided by faculty in the student's home department. These advisors are assisted by a departmental graduate coordinator, who is the liaison with the Graduate Studies office, in order to ensure that students regularly receive up-to-date information about policies and procedures. [CFR 2.2b, 2.12, 2.13]

To address concerns raised by AS about advisement, including students' desire for online advising, the University developed an interactive online tool, "[Ask Matty](#)" based on the University's mascot. This service is offered collaboratively through SOARS and UGS, and is intended for prospective and current students. Users address questions to the system's extensive database which includes more than 600 answers. Common questions include: "Where do I go for academic advisement?"; "How do I change majors?"; "Who can I talk to about getting an internship?" If Matty's answer does not meet the student's need, the student is directed to email the "Ask Matty" staff, who respond within three business days. New answers are constantly added to the data bank. CSUN's "Ask Matty" is becoming a model for universities across the nation and its production team was selected to present at a national conference this year. Since its launch in October 2008, "Ask Matty" has received over 50,000 hits from current students and over 30,000 hits from prospective students. [CFR 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14]

The University also has developed procedures to insure that new freshmen and transfer students receive critical advising information at strategic points of contact. A&R, SSC/EOP centers and SOARS coordinate the development and distribution of a variety of print, electronic and web communications that explain necessary registration components and actions including placement testing, Financial Aid, housing, initial academic advising, new student orientation and [Freshman](#) and [Transfer](#) Student Checklists. [CFR 1.7, 2.3, 2.12, 2.13]

Various campus units regularly assess the efficacy of campus communications with students at co-curricular events such as New Student Orientation, as well as through online surveys following a variety of written communication to students and parents. [CFR 1.7, 2.3, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13]

The University has developed three additional user-friendly advisement tools that use technology to help promote progress towards graduation.

- Four-Year Degree Plan - Every academic department has detailed, semester-by-semester plans of what courses students need to pass to complete the major, options and specializations. Four-year plans were developed for incoming [freshmen](#) and two-year plans for incoming [transfer students](#). [2.2a]
- Degree Progress Report (DPR) - DPRs facilitate student program planning by providing detailed and comprehensive real-time evaluation of all courses and requirements that have been and need to be completed in order to attain a degree. The system gives students the ability to run “what if” scenarios if they are considering a change of major. [CFR 2.12, 2.14]
- “My Academic Planner” (MAP) – MAP allows students to enter courses planned for future semesters into an online planner and then check to see if their choices will complete all graduation requirements. In the future, it is anticipated that academic departments could utilize the information entered by students in MAPs to plan course offerings to better meet demand. [CFR 2.11, 2.13, 2.14] Click here for a [demonstration](#).

For the EER we plan to examine the relationship between improvements in retention, time to graduation and units at graduation during the last decade and the introduction of the new campus advising practices.

## **2.2 Student Learning**

### **2.2(a) Learning in General Education**

In its 2000 report granting re-accreditation, WASC recommended that the University replace its menu-driven GE program with one that supports student learning outcomes. In response, faculty leadership and the provost convened the General Education Task Force (GETF). While the GETF carefully investigated a thematic approach to GE, it concluded that such an approach would not serve our student population. The GETF did, however, recommend changes. (For more information about the work of the GETF see [Section 4.5](#).)

The [new GE package](#) approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2005 and implemented in Fall 2006 was designed to reduce time to degree and units required for graduation and to give students greater flexibility in pursuing additional studies such as minors. This package reduced the number of GE units from 58 to 48 and identified student learning outcomes (SLOs) for each area of GE. It also created a plan for certifying/recertifying GE courses during a multi-year process through the use of course portfolios prepared by departments to ensure that objectives and learning activities are aligned with GE SLOs. The University is in the process of developing a plan to assess GE as a whole. The Faculty Senate will decide whether a new standing committee should be formed to deal with issues surrounding GE. [CFR 2.2, 2.4]

Written communication and information competency constitute two key literacy skills. They are embedded in multiple aspects of the curriculum with associated SLOs. Students are required to demonstrate proficiency in writing skills at multiple points, starting with a freshman composition course featuring agreed-upon competencies. They gain further practice in upper division GE classes, all of which require writing assignments totaling a minimum of 2,500 words. Students also are required to pass an Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam (UDWPE). Timely completion of the UDWPE has been a challenge. Some Colleges have addressed it successfully by making passage of the UDWPE a prerequisite for registration into 400-level courses in the major; the University is considering making this a universal requirement.

Information competency skills have been recognized as basic to all student learning as evidenced by the CSU Information Competence Initiative. The ability to identify and select appropriate research tools by which to satisfy an information need is critical to all levels of thinking and learning, and to the practical application of knowledge. The Oviatt Library, which has a stated strategic direction as a teaching library engaged in the development of the information research skills of our students, has one of the nation's largest programs of information competence with 27,771 students attending 994 sessions last year alone. To date, pre- and post-tests of students in the Freshman Seminar program have demonstrated the need for serious efforts targeted at establishing, developing and maintaining the levels of information competence that are identified in national standards. Student learning is assessed by participant statistics, pre- and post-tests and satisfaction surveys (additional detail available on the [Library's](#) Website). [CFR 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13]

The University revamped its GE Honors Program in Fall 2006, offering seven GE Honors sections annually, including the first upper division GE Honors course in Fall 2009. The program has grown to nearly 200 students. Supported by a faculty director, the program is expanding a Faculty Mentor program to offer a mentor to every first time freshman in Honors.

## **2.2 (b) Learning in the Major**

CSUN's 58 academic departments/programs offer a range of majors, minors and options. All academic degree programs have SLOs. Starting last year, two Colleges began identifying college-level SLOs to reflect the common and unique skills and knowledge sets appropriate for and expected of their graduates. For example, the College of Health and Human Development identifies SLOs for five ethical and professional codes and is at the beginning stages of program alignment and assessment.

Graduate and undergraduate research opportunities provide structured environments for the practical application of individual and team learning. CSUN variants of highly successful grant programs such as Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC), Minority Biomedical Research Support (MBRS), Career Opportunities in Research (COR) and Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) have a long tradition of matching students with professionals who train and guide them as they are introduced to real life work and learn to navigate complex circumstances, transferring knowledge to new situations and contexts. CSUN students find that they are well prepared for graduate school. CSUN is consistently ranked by the National Science Foundation in the top ten (sometimes first or second) out of over 500 similar Master's level universities in numbers of graduates who achieve doctoral degrees in the sciences and social sciences.

Internships, community engagement programs and hands-on practice in private and public K-12 institutions available at CSUN provide experience in using the kinds of problem solving and effective thinking required for future success. Information competence and technology skills are applied to projects and research activities and evolve into practical competence for lifelong learning. Graduate and

undergraduate students mentored by faculty and staff apply newly-acquired knowledge and practical competence as they compete in such events as the Model United Nations, Nutrition Bowl, public speaking contests, solar car design and journalism competitions.

At CSUN, students also support faculty research and other creative and scholarly work. Over the past decade, the AS has supported faculty-supervised student research through its Academically Related Reserve with more than \$50,000 per year in grants. These grants support original student research or travel to present research findings or other scholarly or creative works. This support will increase to \$200,000 per year by 2013. [CFR 2.2, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13]

CSUN offers 44 master's degree programs enrolling, 4,259 students in Fall 2009 (Data Element [2.1](#)). In addition, the [Tseng](#) College of Extended Learning offers nine master's degrees. Our second cohort of 24 students began coursework on their [Ed.D.](#) degree in Fall 2009. Plans are underway to add applied doctoral programs in audiology and physical therapy to meet the needs of the region.

From the beginning of their CSUN careers, graduate students are made aware of the services provided by the Office of Graduate Studies, Research and International Programs (GRIP). New students receive an orientation covering the rules and regulations of their programs. They also receive information on special events and programs which can enhance their learning experiences on campus. Some of the programs offered by GRIP for graduate students are:

- *Graduate Equity Fellowship Program*-The annual program supports eligible graduate students, students with disabilities and women enrolled in graduate programs where they are underrepresented. Special focus is on M.A./M.S. students who wish to go on for Ph.D.s. In 2007/08, 42 students were funded.
- *Thesis Support Program*-Selected students who are working on a thesis/project or performance may apply for up to \$1,000. About 50 graduate students are funded each year (\$40,000 total support).
- *Graduate Student Travel Awards*-Over the last decade, \$125,000 has been used to fund travel for 375 graduate students presenting at peer-reviewed professional conferences.
- *California Pre-Doctoral Program*-The program is designed to increase the diversity of the pool from which the California State University draws its faculty by supporting the doctoral aspirations of CSU students who have experienced economic and educational disadvantages.

Three programs of particular importance to student learning in GE and the major (described below) are not department based and in some cases serve special populations. The effect of these programs on student learning will be investigated in time for the EER.

*The Learning Resource Center ([LRC](#))* provides academic support which enables students to sharpen critical thinking skills, strengthen writing skills, improve performance in subject matter classes and develop study strategies. The LRC supports student learning through workshops, one-on-one and group tutoring, supplemental instruction (SI) and interactive subject area computer programs and videos. During 2008/09, the LRC recorded over 16,000 visits. Additionally, 1,349 students were enrolled in SI classes for Freshman Writing, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology and Economics. Complementing this resource is a developing program, [WRAD](#) (Writing and Reading Across Disciplines), which uses advanced student peer mentors in specific disciplines to work with students on reading as well as writing challenges in selected classes within their majors. We hope to have some results of the effectiveness of this intervention for the EER.

*Community Engagement and Service Learning:* In 2008/09, the number of service-learning courses reached 171 with 11 new courses developed during the year. Enrollment in the courses was 3,850; 77,000 student hours were spent in the community at some 200 sites. The Office of [Community Engagement](#) assesses the experiences through online surveys, pre- and post- service evaluations of experiences and attitudes toward engagement, faculty assessment of workshops and program services and community assessment of their relationship with CSUN and the students' work with their agency.

*Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES):* The [Disability Resources](#) and Educational Services department serves over 950 students with learning, mental health, visual, mobility and communication disabilities. Support services are designed to empower students, foster independence, promote achievement of career and educational goals and assist students in discovering their full potential. The department also serves as a resource for faculty, providing information related to best practices that support a learning-centered environment for students with disabilities. [CFR 1.5, 2.10]

## **2.2 (c) Learning Outside the Classroom**

Faculty, administrators and staff at CSUN gradually have come to believe that much student learning occurs outside the classroom. Therefore we look at students' development and success as people, not just as students.

Many, if not most, co-curricular experiences are centered in departments within Student Affairs (SA), although they often collaborate with other University divisions. Since the last WASC review, SA has replaced a service-oriented delivery model with a learning-centered model in which student learning is supported by those delivering services. In doing so, SA enacted President Koester's call for a more learning-focused University through discussion and careful development of Common [Learning Themes and Outcomes](#). Purposeful programs and activities that occur outside the classroom reinforce, supplement and complement learning inside the classroom. This emphasis on learning has become ubiquitous and the learning environment has become one of collaboration and integration. In the EER we will use recently developed tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs described below.

*Living and Learning Communities (LLCs)* bring together students in a supportive and academically focused living and learning environment defined by the students' shared department or program. LLC students work with faculty to apply classroom learning to projects and report greater engagement with learning and both student-faculty and student-student interaction. The program supports SA's Common Learning Themes and Outcomes. [CFR 2.2, 2.10, 2.11]

*Campus Involvement:* Students can participate in leadership opportunities and civic engagement in such activities and programs as student senate, University Student Union Board, community service/volunteer experiences, as University Ambassadors, new student orientation leaders and through over 240 student clubs and organizations. A major component of these programs is student learning. Students develop effective thinking and research skills, recognize the value and necessity of effective interpersonal relationships and sharpen their information competence and technology skills. In addition, student leaders form relationships in work groups drawn from CSUN's ethnically and economically diverse student body as they benefit themselves and others through respect for others. Students select from various levels of participation that require them to identify and develop leadership skills appropriate to and necessary for success. [CFR 2.2, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11]

*Peer Education:* Programs offered by University Counseling Services and the Klotz Student Health Center train peer educators to provide classroom presentations on a variety of topics including depression, body image, sexual assault and health. [Peer educators](#) also learn how to do outreach to the campus

community and engage in conversations about health promotion and awareness. The Student Health Center collaborates with the College of Science and Math Student Service Center and with the College of Health and Human Development to provide students interested in medical or health science/administration with hands-on experiences. Changes in student capacity and behavior are measured by such assessment tools as observation, self-report, pre- and post-skill/capacity testing and satisfaction surveys. [CFR 2.2, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13]

## **2.2 (d) Technology in Support of Student Learning**

During the last decade the Oviatt Library has become a campus leader in advancing student learning through the use of technology. It now houses three instructional computer labs used as classrooms, with a total of 95 terminals. Throughout the Library, an additional 325 computer terminals are available to Library patrons and visitors. In 2008/09, Library faculty taught 994 sessions on information competency to 27,771 students. An additional 1,968 local high school students attended 66 sessions. To support access by students to the latest research, the Library subscribes to 34,500 online journals, over 200 online databases and 154,000 ebooks. An array of electronic databases provides access to indexing (and in many cases texts) on a 24/7 basis from on or off campus. The Library is also home to the San Fernando Valley History [Digital Library](#), an image database of historically significant documents, manuscripts, photographs and related graphic materials from public and private collections in the Valley. It provides full access to materials demonstrating the socio-economic changes and cultural evolution of the San Fernando Valley from the early 19th century through the end of the 20th century.

In the past, the gateway business math course, Math 103, was characterized by high DFU rates, in part because students often attempt the course underprepared. Where previously we might have added another course to get students up to speed, mathematics faculty with support from the CSU Chancellor's Office re-designed the course, using online "just in time" remediation to improve student learning. The "just in time" remediation works as follows: Students are tested before the term starts using the campus Math Placement Test. If they pass, they place out of the online "just in time" remedial portion of the course. If they don't, they register for hybrid labs. The online part of the lab is a self-paced commercial course that is tailored to the prerequisite knowledge necessary to succeed in Math 103. Students are given incentives to finish the online program within the first eight weeks of the term. Progress is monitored online by graduate assistants who provide feedback in the group work labs and via email. Students work on their online homework independently, receive automated feedback about their work and have the opportunity to redo exercises, email questions to the instructor and view "hints." The program allows students to assess their own learning throughout. Data on improvement in students' learning has been collected since 2007. Preliminary analysis indicates that the program leads to improvement in success rates in Math 103.

During the 2007/08 and 2008/09 academic years, over 200 sections of more than 100 courses, many of them in GE, were offered online, as were close to 200 hybrid course sections. The online or hybrid format has proved to be most attractive to upper division undergraduate students and graduate students.

In Fall 2010, the University will open its version of a "math emporium" in the Satellite Student Union. This large lab space, equipped with 125-150 computer terminals, will be used in developmental mathematics courses, in introductory mathematics courses and for general mathematics tutoring.

## **2.2 (e) Assessment**

Every department/program has well-established assessment plans which specify Goals and Student Learning Outcomes with aligned Course Objectives. (For more detail, see the Assessment Activities and

SLO sections of the [Program Profiles](#) in the Electronic Inventory.) Assessment of SLOs is ongoing. Many programs have longitudinal assessment studies within majors. The department feedback loop often results in curricular or pedagogical modifications, refinement of assessment tools and/or affirmations that students are successful in achieving the assessed SLOs. Annual department assessment reports are collected at the college level for review. Summaries and analyses of assessment reports are sent to the Office of Academic Assessment for university level review.

Annual Program Assessment reports show that many programs specify similar goals and student learning outcomes. Because SLOs are assessed using a variety of instruments in different departments, the University was unable to develop a global signature of our students' strengths and opportunities for growth. The lack of uniformity thus far across program assessment became the impetus for development of a University assessment plan during Spring 2008. [CFR 2.4, 2.6]

The University Assessment Task Force was charged with developing a model of those skills, knowledge and abilities that every baccalaureate degree-earning CSUN graduate should have ([list of members](#)). Such an assessment plan for Fundamental Learning Competencies (FLCs) would reduce program assessment redundancy and allow academic programs to focus on the distinctive knowledge and abilities which are the goals of their programs. Such competencies could serve as the basis for assessment of the General Education program, as mandated by CSU Executive Order 1033. These competencies also relate well to the assessment plans developed by SA to evaluate contributions to student learning made through co-curricular activities. [CFR 2.4]

The FLCs developed by the Assessment Task Force draw on the LEAP Outcomes of the American Association of Colleges and Universities and from a conceptual framework that connects the wide range of learning opportunities provided at CSUN. The FLCs provide the basis for answering two key questions: What matters about college? What will students know and be able to do upon completing their degrees? Undergraduates will find FLC goals embedded and inter-connected throughout the curriculum, in General Education and majors, and in the many co-curricular opportunities the campus provides. These are Cal State Northridge's FLCs:

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World: Graduates understand the history and scope of human knowledge in the natural and social sciences and appreciate the diversity of aesthetic and cultural achievements throughout the world.
- Intellectual and Practical Skills: Graduates can effectively engage in inquiry and problem-solving, critical analysis, and creative thinking; they have quantitative literacy, are information competent and appreciate the role of these as life-long learning skills.
- Communication Skills: Graduates can communicate effectively through written, signed or spoken languages, through visual and audio media using text, video, graphics, and quantitative data, both individually and as a member of a team.
- Personal and Social Responsibility: Graduates are actively engaged in diverse local and global communities, have multi-cultural knowledge, and use ethical principles in reasoning and action when solving real-world challenges.

In improving Program Review, faculty have re-designed the self study portion of our campus's five-year cycle. Under the new model, assessment of student learning has a central place in a department's self-study and forms the basis for strategic planning and resource requests. Each self study is reviewed on campus and by two outside reviewers who spend two days on campus to assess the quality of the program and discuss findings in an exit interview with faculty and administrators. They also submit a descriptive final report with commendations and recommendations leading to a memorandum of understanding that identifies the program's challenges and proposes strategies designed to address them. Degree programs

that are accredited by outside agencies usually substitute their accreditation review for program review provided the requirements of the two reviews are congruent. [CFR 2.7]

Student Affairs has a workable and credible assessment instrument with rubrics for its Common Learning Themes and Outcomes. SA created and implemented an assessment scale that encompasses appropriate, measureable degrees of students' development of capabilities, values and beliefs beginning with "rudimentary" to "emergent" and "maturing" and finally to "graduate capacity." Shared and adjunct learning goals for both inside and outside the classroom were identified as some of the barriers to graduation. The assessment rubric encompasses a holistic approach to learning as reflected by measureable levels of student exposure to and participation in a range of campus student development services and programs. We will collect data for these programs for the EER.

As a next step in the University's decade-long commitment to the assessment of student learning, we are in the process of developing a technological support structure to simplify and facilitate assessment at the program level. We plan to roll it out over a two-year period, with a few interested departments taking the lead in testing and refining the new system as it is developed during 2010/11. (For additional detail, see [Appendix F](#).)

### **2.3 Dimensions of Retention**

During the past few years, coordinated efforts have led to the development of programs designed to improve the retention and persistence of our students, particularly those entering as First Time Freshmen (FTF). In keeping with the emphasis, a director of Academic First Year Experiences was appointed in 2007 with the aim of creating a more seamless set of learning experiences for FTF. The director coordinates and oversees the Freshman Seminar (UNIV 100), Early Start, Freshman Connection and the Common Reading Program. These programs support the University's mission to "design programs and activities to help students develop academic competencies, professional skills, critical and creative abilities, and ethical values of learned persons who live in a democratic society, an interdependent world, and in a technological age."

The major First Year Experience programs, which engage students in the classroom and in co-curricular experiences, are outlined below. For the EER, we will focus on assessing the effectiveness of these programs, along with efforts to enhance our already strong retention of transfer students.

*UNIV 100 (Freshman Seminar)* was approved for GE credit in spring 2001. Each [UNIV 100](#) classroom offers students a small academic community and requires them to produce a "Self-Report Card" encouraging them to take ownership of their own academic performance. A notable feature is the intentional partnerships with other campus programs including the college counseling/student services master's program in the Educational Psychology and Counseling department whose students provide one-on-one mentoring; the Oviatt Library and a variety of SA programs including the Career Center, University Counseling Services, Financial Aid and the Klotz Student Health Center. Enrollment in UNIV 100 has grown from 300 students to 1,386 in 2008/09, about one-third of the freshman class. [CFR 1.2, 2.2a, 2.10, 2.11, 2.14]

*Summer Programs for New Students: [EOP Bridge](#)* Transitional Programs focus on low-income freshmen and transfer students who are the first in their families to go to college. Currently, there are four such transitional programs: Bridge Residential for "special-admit" freshmen, Bridge Commuter and Fresh Start for "regular-admit" freshmen and Bridge Transfer for transfer students. In 2008/09, these transitional programs served 564 freshmen and transfer students. While some of the participant students could be regarded as "high-risk" for failure due to entering the University with academic deficiencies, low

high school grades or poor study skills, freshmen participants in recent years have persisted at comparatively high rates after their first year. [CFR 1.2, 2.2a, 2.10, 2.11, 2.14]

*The Early Warning System (TEWS):* TEWS was created as a pilot program in Fall 2005 by EOP. It is a computer-based system which facilitates the interaction of faculty, students, advisors and student service areas. A “TEWS Alert” is typically triggered by events such as excessive student absences, missing assignments, poor test scores or health issues. Faculty members are trained to initiate a “TEWS Alert” to academic advisors or student service personnel as soon as aberrant student behaviors appear. The advisor or other TEWS recipient then contacts the student, provides an intervention or further referral and reports the outcome back to the professor through the TEWS system. In Fall 2006, the TEWS system was integrated with the PeopleSoft student records system on campus allowing faculty members to access the system through their online class roster. The system currently is utilized for first-year students who are enrolled in developmental writing or math classes and/or a Freshman Seminar course. Further expansion, for all students in academic jeopardy, is being explored. [CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.13]

*Developmental Writing and Mathematics:* The developmental writing program has been in existence for 20 years and is housed in four departments: Asian American Studies, Chicana/o Studies, English and Pan African Studies. Writing faculty in those departments and the Central American Studies Interdisciplinary Program have designed a new “stretch” freshman composition program. This will be a two-semester freshman composition sequence, in which the students will receive GE credit for one semester and elective credit for the other. Based on their score on the English Placement Test (EPT), students will be placed into either the one-semester freshman writing course, its two-semester version or a two-semester version with Supplemental Instruction support. A pilot will be in place by Fall 2010, and the entire program should be available to all FTF by Fall 2012.

Placement into developmental mathematics courses is determined by a student’s score on the CSU system-wide Entry Level Mathematics (ELM) exam. The program produces an annual report with student survey data and pass rates. A pilot of a “stretch math” combining remedial mathematics with a college level mathematics course for non-math based majors is being taught in Fall 2009. As is the case for freshmen needing remediation in English, the campus’s Office of Institutional Research tracks student success in becoming proficient in both subjects during their first year at the University. [CFR 1.2, 2.2, 2.10, 2.11, 2.14]

*Early Start Program:* This program is offered the summer before freshman year. Eligibility for Early Start is determined by scores on the ELM and EPT that place students at the lowest level in English and/or either of two developmental levels in mathematics. Students enroll in the appropriate developmental math or English class in addition to a UNIV 100 section and participate in an academic and social immersion experience.

*Freshman Connection:* This one-semester program for first year freshmen offers students the opportunity to register for a block of two or three linked classes (usually GE classes) as part of a learning community. The learning community enables new students to take an active role in their own education. Students work with selected faculty and advisors and participate in exciting academic classes with other freshmen, giving them the opportunity to study together and help each other succeed in their first CSUN semester and beyond. Preliminary data suggest that Freshman Connection students do better academically than comparable students who don't participate in the program.

*Learning Habits Project:* The Office of Institutional Research (IR) has provided leadership and support for collecting evidence of student learning and what makes a successful learner. The Learning Habits Seminar, organized by IR, is an ongoing effort to understand the learning strategies employed by

academically successful CSUN students. In its second year, the group has, through numerous student interviews, begun to uncover information that may prove useful in university-wide efforts to improve teaching and learning. (For an overview of the Project's initial research, see [Year 1 Summary Report](#).) [CFR 2.8, 2.10, 4.5, 4.7]

IR data suggest that students enrolling in UNIV 100 have modestly higher one-year continuation rates than other freshman, while students participating in the Freshman Connection in addition have significantly higher short-term retention rates than everyone else. We are expanding our assessment efforts and by the time of the EER will include first time transfer students in our targeted retention efforts.

*Additional Academic Changes Due to Economic Crisis:* Since our Institutional Proposal, the traditional growth mode of the CSU has been replaced by drastic reductions in enrollment. This has forced the institution to look at practices, policies and procedures that contribute to students delaying graduation. In a series of actions begun last Spring, CSUN changed the course repeat and withdrawal policies, restructured the financial aid academic appeals process and implemented new procedures for readmitting disqualified students. A renewed effort is underway to make sure "super seniors"-- students with more than 130 units--graduate as soon as possible. Maximum units of Financial Aid will be lowered in Fall 2010. These efforts will be discussed in much greater detail in the EER.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In the IP we proposed to study the following questions:

1. To what extent can improved advising and support services reduce time to degree?
2. To what extent is technology helping us in teaching, learning and advising, specifically by making online courses available and by making self-help tutorials and conferences available online?
3. How does special programming contribute to student success?
4. How effective are our initiatives in engaging and retaining students and what evidence do we have of that effectiveness? How can what we learn be applied to other student populations?
5. What are the academic practices and study habits of successful learners, those who persist with at least a 2.5 GPA?

This essay begins to provide compelling evidence that Cal State Northridge has the capacity to make significant change in these directions and to present data to that effect by the EER. (See, for example, Data Element [3.2d](#).) The IP pointed out that the campus considers the WASC examination to be an important complement to planning and assessment processes already in place and which increasingly engage faculty, staff and administrators. Over the last seven years, the institution has developed a high degree of awareness of "what really matters on our campus." Both short-term planning and strategic planning—and the concomitant collection and use of evidence—are rapidly becoming part of the institutional culture. Despite major challenges ahead, the University has the resources in place to answer the above questions in the context of the EER.

## **3.0 Faculty and Staff Support for University Success (Theme #2)**

As CSUN advanced as a learning-centered university, we paid particular attention to the symbiosis of faculty, staff and student success. In the current environment of reduced resources—coupled with increased demand for access to higher education—it is critical that we understand how we can attract, retain and provide support for faculty and staff and how this in turn serves our students and our region.

In the Institutional Proposal we asserted that “roles played by faculty and staff are central to our commitment to student success and therefore essential to University success.” This essay explores this theme in two ways: support *by* faculty and staff and support *for* faculty and staff. In simplest terms, we intend to aggregate data that show how time, money and infrastructure invested in faculty and staff also support student learning.

### **3.1 Research Design and Implementation**

#### **3.1 (a) Background**

The Ford Foundation’s [Pathways to Higher Education](#) project was launched in 2001 to facilitate underserved students’ access to, preparation for and entrance into college. It generated tremendous interest in education-oriented pathway research. Since the inception of this major 10-year global initiative, communities of learning such as the [Pathways to College](#) Network and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education ([WICHE, 2003](#)) have embraced the use of the pathways as an organizing idea for tracing student learning and growth over time.

The adoption of pathway research by the higher education community is not an accident. The roots of this paradigm are in applied developmental psychology which focuses on the integration of cognitive, social and perceptual skills over the life course, in sociocultural context ([Greenfield 2009; Agruwal 2007](#)). It is becoming the norm in student-learning research to study student growth and learning over time using pathway analyses. Here, we are attempting an innovative approach to pathway research by focusing on understanding how on-campus change agents who are deeply involved in student learning traverse their own pathways through work and career at our institution. We believe that a pathway-oriented research approach complements WASC’s encouragement of its institutions to undertake long-term tracking of educational effectiveness.

#### **3.1 (b) Pathway Concept Applications in Theme #2**

We have tentatively identified a series of possible faculty and staff *inputs* that are presumed to impact the course of the CSUN student learning pathway; we have identified *benchmarks* that we think might serve as anchor points for students over the course of the pathway; and we have tapped the expertise of faculty and staff on campus to imagine what the *developmental goals and outcomes* of faculty, staff and student pathways look like. Our CPR process examines how several University resources affect faculty and staff pathways for success, as [Figure 1](#) indicates.

The University devotes numerous resources (inputs) into faculty and staff development in order to support student learning. This research design highlights eight inputs, many of which will be mentioned frequently below because they intersect faculty and staff pathways in multiple ways:

1. *University Research Fellows*: new, university-wide program which should contribute to a more vibrant research focus and provide opportunities to mentor students.
2. *Student Research*: provides students with opportunities for faculty-directed research which should increase student engagement and success.
3. *Oviatt Library*: collections and information literacy activities which support teaching, learning and research.
4. *Staff*: direct services to students and faculty which are essential for smooth business processes.
5. *Technology*: provides academic technology services in the areas of instructional design, teaching and learning technologies, video production and classroom technology.

6. *Center for Innovative & Engaged Learning Opportunities* ([CIELO](#)): offers faculty development in pedagogical skills and techniques through seminars, workshops, conversations and publications. It also includes Academic First-Year Experiences and Community Engagement, demonstrating an integrated approach to student achievement.
7. *Extended Learning*: offers several off-site and online self-support programs which can support campus initiatives and provide faculty with opportunities to teach innovative courses that otherwise might not be feasible in our traditional programs.
8. *Ed.D.*: The new [doctoral program](#) in education should complement and have a positive impact on other programs at the University by enhancing the scholarly climate on campus.

### **3.2 Staff Pathways**

CSUN's numerous staff members (Data Element [4.3a](#)) present a vibrant example of the tenet of synergy: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Student outcomes and achievement are supported by the contributions of staff, who collaborate integrally throughout the organization in faculty-staff and inter-divisional staff partnerships that promote collegial, student and University success. This integration is an important component of staff mission, vision and values. [CFR 2.4]

Staff contribute in traditional ways to University success through collaboration with faculty and other members of our University community. Staff often are the first point of contact for our students, parents, visitors and neighbors--their intimate knowledge of the University and its resources make our staff ideal gate-greeters and triage specialists. Additionally, our diverse and skilled staff are the foundation of the University's infrastructure and operations, facilitating almost every step of a student's transition from college applicant to graduate. Staff:

- coordinate the activities of student applications and admissions;
- provide advisement and administrative support to enrolled students;
- manage educational and medical records;
- provide student services and co-curricular learning opportunities to students in areas such as leadership, student governance, athletics, health care, career selection and disabilities services;
- oversee, maintain and monitor the efficiency, function, safety and security of the campus facilities and grounds;
- support faculty and other staff in their achievement of the University's mission of promoting student success.

Traditionally, staff contribute through University divisions -- including Student Affairs, Administration and Finance, Information Technology, Physical Plant Management, Police Services, Admissions and Records, Cash Services and Academic Affairs -- supporting the efforts of CSUN faculty and management to provide our diverse students with an outstanding education that will facilitate their future success in California's professional workforce. [CFR 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, 3.1]

#### **3.2 (a) Staff Contributions to CSUN Success**

Staff have also been involved in a number of special projects, several of which are discussed below, that have contributed in extraordinary ways to the University's success.

##### *Human Resources*

CSU Northridge recognizes the importance of developing and retaining its best and brightest employees. To prepare the next generation of leaders, the University's Office of Human Resources has instituted a

comprehensive Talent Management Program. The Leadership series contained within the Talent Management Program is designed for managers who have demonstrated high potential for professional growth and are selected by senior administrators. The curriculum includes discussion of leadership issues and practices as well as many opportunities for small group discussion and application. The capstone assignment of this program is a real life leadership-related project chosen by the members of the team and presented to the President and Vice Presidents.

The President and Vice Presidents are actively involved in the program, making one or more presentations at the training sessions. Response from program participants has been overwhelmingly positive. The program reinforces the University's status as an employer of choice in the region (Data Element [4.4b](#)).

In addition, the University offers a wide range of professional development and skills development sessions for faculty and staff. In 2009/10, these include:

- *Building a Game Plan for Tomorrow's Economy:* This series of eight sessions is a pragmatic expression of the University's "culture of caring." Workshops address the financial and emotional concerns of staff during a difficult financial period. Topics include personal finance, paying for college, talking to children about money and stress management.
- *Maximizing Managerial Effectiveness in Today's Work Environment:* As the University responds to budget and environmental realities, it is critical that managers have the tools necessary to be successful. This series of eight sessions is designed to prepare managers to operate effectively in the new environment. Sessions include effective leadership practices, identification of priorities, creating a positive work environment and leading the change process.
- *Skills Building for Staff and Supervisors:* These sessions, open to everyone, are designed to develop skills and provide a venue for discussion of current concerns and issues. This seven-session series includes dynamics for personal success, effective time management and responding positively to organizational change.
- *Leadership Forum on Women's Issues:* The intent of this five-session series is to provide a venue for the discussion of significant issues to women in higher education. Topics include women and stress, personal empowerment and success and role modeling and mentoring.

By developing the capabilities of our staff and administrators, and by reinforcing the culture of caring, respect and excellence, these programs contribute in a meaningful way to the mission of the University. [CFR 3.3, 3.4] See [Appendix D](#) for a list of all workshops offered over the past year.

#### *Student Affairs*

Leadership in the Division of Student Affairs worked together to identify their mission, vision and beliefs, and to develop congruence and alignment with the University mission. Most strikingly, they re-imagined their professional contributions, moving from a "provision of services" perspective to a "promoting student learning" perspective. Departments in Student Affairs redefined their goals and objectives from "we will do/offer..." to learning outcomes: "as a result of our service, students will know or be able to do..." Assessment criteria for each of the learning outcomes were developed and assessment results were entered in a feedback loop to define the learning goals, objectives and outcomes for each subsequent year. Student Affairs [Strategic Priorities](#) were developed that aligned with the [President's Priorities](#) and shared language with similarly aligned Academic Affairs priorities and goals. [CFR 1.8, 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, 3.8]

### *Cross-Divisional Partnerships*

There are numerous partnerships between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, but one example truly exemplifies the implementation of common objectives and strategies designed to benefit our students and enhance their academic careers.

The [Freshman Convocation](#) program, begun in Fall 2007, provides the freshman class with a formal welcome to the traditions and symbols of CSUN. It also offers them a first example of the ways that out-of-classroom learning complements in-class experience. The cross-divisional Convocation Committee (which includes faculty, staff, students and administrators) builds its program around the book chosen for the Freshman [Common Reading](#). The keynote speaker is either the author of the work or a speaker who can illuminate the book topic. The program also introduces the University leadership to the freshman class, and includes a brief speech by President Koester. Students gather about 50 yards away, under the guidance of student orientation leaders and resident assistants. Academic associate deans lead the procession of robed faculty, administrators, alumni, current student leaders and the freshman class down “Matador Walk” to the Oviatt Library grand staircase for the program. University symbols are richly utilized—the mace, university seal and Presidential medallion, as well as academic regalia and the Oviatt Library itself. [CFR 2.3, 2.4, 2.8, 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, 3.4]

### *University Innovation through Staff Initiative*

Support of faculty, staff and students at CSU Northridge includes a commitment to environmental protection and sustainability. A 1 Mega Watt fuel cell plant at CSUN is the world’s largest at a university site. Phase I of the fuel cell project was completed in January 2007 following Physical Plant Management’s (PPM) successful purchase and self-installed high-efficiency 1 MW Direct FuelCell® (DFC®) plant, located south of the University Student Union complex.

Phase II of the fuel cell project, currently underway, recently installed a highly efficient 2,000-ton campus satellite chiller plant (powered by the fuel cell plant) to serve the immediate and growing air conditioning and heating needs of the institution. At its core is a Student Design Project, “Uniting Technology & Nature,” to maximize the sustainable aspect of an already cutting edge technological power and heating/cooling plant. An in-house Student Design Team was charged with analyzing all of the Phase I and Phase II normal waste byproducts and implementing processes that would make this the most sustainable plant possible with a minimal carbon footprint. Ultimately these waste byproducts were determined to optimally support a fast-growing sub-tropical rainforest environment to which the CO<sub>2</sub> exhaust was then delivered, enriching the surrounding plant environment and promoting maximum CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration. (For additional detail, see [Fuel Cell](#).)

The CSUN Greening Project was initiated in the summer of 2008 and a University-wide Institute for Sustainability was chartered in October 2008. The Institute serves as a fulcrum for the Greening Project and has three objectives—assessing the ecological impacts of University operations, better integrating sustainability content into the University curriculum and designing /initiating projects and programs that help to reduce the University’s carbon footprint while providing students with an interdisciplinary perspective on sustainability studies. The Institute engages in fostering interdisciplinary research and pedagogy and provides students with novel opportunities to develop cutting edge thinking on issues of sustainability. The first interdisciplinary Greening Project course was offered in Fall 2009. Information on the CSUN [Greening Project](#) is on the Institute’s website. The Associated Students (AS) has established an Environmental Affairs Committee to coordinate student efforts in research and action around issues of sustainability. The AS commissioned a 2009 study to enhance and expand its campus-

wide recycling program in collaboration with campus administrative and academic departments. [CFR2.3, 2.8, 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, 3.4]

### **3.2 (b) Fostering Successful Staff Pathways**

Staff development and recognition are acknowledged as critical components of supporting staff and promoting professional excellence as well as student and University success. The Office of Human Resources provides excellent programs for staff development and recognition on our campus. Examples of such programs include the Talent Management Program ([noted above](#)) and the [Employee Assistance](#) Program (which in Fall 2009 includes a bi-weekly relaxation group and a walking program).

To recognize and promote the achievement of individual and collaborative staff contributions to the University and our students, the Presidential Award, the Award of Merit and the Team Excellence Award were created. Winners of these awards are recognized at the annual Staff Service and Excellence Recognition event. Additionally, “years of service milestones” are acknowledged at this event.

Recognition programs and focused development programs are only two aspects of the campus efforts to promote staff success and retention. Additionally, staff are provided with the opportunity to study at CSUN at minimal cost through fee-waiver programs that allow employees to complete degrees, re-train, obtain advanced degrees and expand their knowledge and skills.

The Office of Human Resources is responsible for recruiting a qualified and diverse staff who work in all the academic programs of the University. As noted in the Institutional Proposal, Cal State Northridge reflects the rich diversity of the greater Los Angeles area and so do the staff. Over 50 percent of the staff is female (Data Element [4.3a](#)) and close to half stem from minority backgrounds (Data Element [4.3b](#)). We achieve this significant level of diversity through extensive recruiting in both traditional media and through organizations that support specific, historically underrepresented constituencies. The University is known as a good place to work where people are treated with respect and where success is based on competence. This reality provides fertile grounds for referral of candidates by current staff. [CFR 1.5]

The University also has a very active program to provide for the professional development of staff after initial hire. In 2008/09, the campus sponsored a series of nine sessions devoted to women’s issues in the workplace, a program being continued in 2009/10, as noted above. In addition, sessions on topics such as work/life balance, appreciating differences, conflict resolution, personal style discovery and effective communication are offered on a recurring basis ([Appendix D](#)). [CFR 3.1, 3.3, 3.4]

Faculty and staff concerns after the tragedy at Virginia Tech led to the development of a [Workplace Violence Prevention](#) Education Initiative supported by a campus Behavioral Intervention Team and a Workplace Behavioral Consultation Team. The University Police and Human Resources partnered with the Provost’s Office, Faculty Affairs, University Counseling Services, Risk Management and the Klotz Student Health Center to develop an educational outreach to faculty and staff to provide skills and promote staff development in this arena.

### **3.3 Faculty Pathways**

Faculty pathways to success at Northridge are supported by the University mission, values, presidential priorities and institutional planning processes. These, in turn, are aligned with the WASC standards that include, “a clear sense of institutional self-understanding and direction, infrastructure to support learning, core resources and planning processes.” During the last seven years, there have been strategic efforts to align our mission with presidential priorities and these with our planning and assessment. CSUN has

engaged in an annual campus-wide planning process and these efforts result in faculty having a better sense of institutional priorities (e.g., increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree, strengthen internal and external connections, create a more user-friendly campus and improve fundraising) and what they can do to support these priorities. (For additional detail, see section on [Annual Planning](#) in the Electronic Inventory.) At the same time, the campus invested in infrastructure and core resource development (e.g., technological support, faculty development opportunities, library development, etc.). Faculty and staff are integrated at all levels of campus planning and assessment processes and have key roles in determining how the University can support their success and how they, in turn, can impact student learning.

### **3.3 (a) *Recruitment and Retention of Faculty***

#### *Full-time Faculty*

Over the past several years, CSUN has actively recruited a significant number of new faculty across all of the colleges. However, due to budget reductions only six new full-time colleagues joined the faculty in 2009/10 and it is possible we will do no hiring for 2010/11.

A key aspect of building our pathways of success for faculty is our process of retention, tenure and promotion (RTP). In brief, our RTP processes are intended to do more than simply establish the rules under which new faculty can achieve tenure and advance through the ranks to professor. Our campus' RTP process helps the University achieve a campus culture that values and supports teaching effectiveness and learning, research and creative activities and service to the University and the community.

CSUN is especially committed to hiring faculty who will be successful in teaching and working with our diverse student population. All faculty position announcements identify this commitment as a minimum qualification; this must be accounted for in the final search report. All announcements additionally contain this statement: "CSUN is a Learning-Centered University. The successful candidate will be expected to join faculty and staff in a commitment to active learning, to the assessment of learning outcomes, and to multiple pathways that enable students to graduate." The offices of Faculty Affairs and Equity and Diversity work with the Faculty Senate Educational Equity Committee to develop and offer mandatory faculty hiring workshops. These workshops present best practices on recruitment and retention of diverse faculty as well as training for search committee members. The Director of Academic Personnel in the Office of Faculty Affairs has recently begun to conduct "exit interviews" with all tenured and probationary faculty who are leaving the University through resignation, retirement or termination. Included are questions related to their experiences working in an ethnically and culturally diverse environment.

The rules governing RTP are found in [Section 600](#) (the Administrative Manual of Academic Personnel Policies and Procedures), department and college personnel policies and procedures and the Faculty [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#). Under this complex of policies and procedures, 261 faculty were promoted, 193 were tenured and only nine faculty were given a terminal year in the last five years, from Fall 2003 through Spring 2008. The high percentage of success in the RTP process reflects our campus commitment to recruiting, retaining and promoting successfully (Data Element [4.4a](#)).

Mentoring our new tenure-track faculty and their introduction to the formal RTP processes begin before the first day of classes with a day-and-a-half New Faculty Orientation. New tenure-track faculty are introduced to campus, meet campus leadership and learn about available resources in support of faculty (e.g., Library, Office of Research and Grants and a variety of competitive research grants). Also included

is an overview of RTP covering the formal process of recommendations from the department and college levels and the role of the Provost, as well as the role of student evaluations of teaching, peer classroom visits, research, creative activities and other contributions to the field of study. Additionally, workshops for first- and second-year probationary faculty are presented by the Office of Faculty Affairs on preparation of the RTP portfolio (Professional Information File/PIF) and [guidelines for PIFs](#), developed by the Personnel Planning and Review Committee, are provided to faculty each year. The personnel committee, the Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs and the Provost offer RTP “road shows” about the evaluation process to the reviewing agencies in each college each year. [CFR 1.3, 2.1]

As faculty move through the normal six-year process to tenure, they frequently are reviewed in the classroom by student evaluations of teaching and through class visits from tenured colleagues in their department and the department chair. In instances where potential problems are identified, a variety of means to improve teaching are employed, including faculty and chair mentoring in the department and CIELO programs to improve teaching. The emphasis on ongoing classroom review, formal and informal mentoring, development opportunities available through CIELO, formal letters of recommendation from the various parties and the RTP letter from the Provost all serve an environment where excellence in teaching is emphasized and valued. [CFR 2.3, 2.4, 2.8, 2.9, 2.11]

In working to create a campus culture that supports and encourages excellence in teaching, research and service, the University provides tangible financial support and recognition. Especially noteworthy is our newest campus award, the University Research Fellow. One faculty research fellow is selected annually in each college and receives one semester of full release to pursue a scholarly research project or creative activity. The purpose of this competitive research award is to facilitate developing a “network of people to catalyze initiatives; launching new collaborations; expanding and strengthening the talent base of researchers; linking researchers with other disciplines and industry; and applying knowledge to relevant area problems.” The [University Research Fellow](#) award highlights the diversity of research activities and the excellence of many of the campus scholars.

Another important aspect of financial support available to many of our faculty is travel and registration funds for participating in academic conferences or events. During the 2008/09 academic year, the campus spent approximately \$830,000 on faculty travel. CSUN also offers a variety of competitive awards in teaching, research and service. [CFR 3.1, 3.2]

#### *Recruitment & Hiring of Part-Time Faculty*

Given the increasing number of part-timers among the faculty, no university can afford not to train these valuable contributors. Since Fall 2000, the number of part-time or adjunct faculty has exceeded the number of full-time faculty (Data Element [4.1a](#)). At CSUN, part-time faculty play an important role in advancing the University mission and their participation is highly valued. Many of our departments recruit part-time faculty with regional or national recognition in their field or professions, bringing real world expertise to our students and programs. It must be noted, however, that in the current budget climate there certainly will be fewer classes available for part-time faculty; some part-time faculty members will not be rehired in Spring 2010 and 2010/11. Thus our assessment of how we recruit and retain lecturers is tempered by the sobering reality of severely reduced budgets.

CSUN engages part-time faculty in a variety of campus-sponsored programming to help them succeed on our campus. Once part-time faculty are hired, many departments develop specific methods of orienting and integrating them. Some departments conduct workshops, others provide packets of information and some assign senior faculty as mentors. Part-time faculty teaching is evaluated on a regular basis and part-time faculty participate in the University’s Academic Senate and the Statewide Academic Senate.

Retention of part-time faculty is important and an incentive for continued teaching is the University's provision of health benefits to part-time faculty who are teaching six or more units.

The University provides full access to faculty development, technology and library resources, training programs and services to both full- and part-time faculty, including ongoing programming through the Center for Innovative and Engaged Learning Opportunities (CIELO), the University's primary faculty development program (see next subsection). Part-time faculty are eligible for almost all internal and external funding opportunities and may also avail themselves of the services of the university grant writers.

Along with our full-time faculty, part-time faculty teach in "smart" classrooms, have access to computers and participate in University- and College- based technology training offered throughout the year. The University's Information Technology (IT) Division offers faculty guidance and training for redesigning courses for online and hybrid delivery, developing accessible course websites and support for commonly used applications such as Microsoft Office and Adobe. Among the applications available to faculty and supported by IT are learning management systems (Moodle and WebCT), web conferencing (Elluminate), video production, video streaming and smart classrooms. During 2009/10, IT is supporting and facilitating the campus adoption of Moodle as our campus learning management system.

Part-timers have full faculty library privileges which include access to all electronic journals and databases, electronic books, books, CDs, DVDs, special collections and archives and the full spectrum of Library services including Interlibrary loan. Librarians reach out regularly to part-time faculty through the information competence program and also by soliciting their recommendations for purchases for the collection. [CFR 2.3, 2.4, 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3]

### **3.3 (b) *Teaching***

To achieve success at a learning-centered institution such as CSUN, it is important for faculty to excel in the classroom. As noted above, CSUN supports a variety of programming and training to ensure successful classroom practices and continuous faculty development. Assessment data about these programs regularly provide feedback necessary to gauge the effectiveness of programs and to assist in making plans to improve performance.

CIELO is a unique CSUN resource with a mission focused on the development, growth and success of faculty as educators. Using the expertise of our faculty to teach their colleagues, it offers ongoing participation in learning communities related to pedagogy, workshops and seminars that promote effective teaching and effective community service, grants programs that promote pedagogical and learning-based research, consultations with faculty and new faculty orientations. CIELO also coordinates internal grants supporting pedagogical innovation to improve students' learning. The Judge Julian Beck Learning-Centered Instructional Improvement grants and, while offered, the Learning-Centered University (LCU) grants support innovative teaching and extend traditional understanding of teaching and learning. Data concerning these grants and their effectiveness will be used during the Educational Effectiveness Review to measure their success.

The office of Academic First Year Experiences (part of CIELO) provides year-round workshops, presentations and brown-bag discussions on topics of particular interest to faculty teaching freshmen. Recent faculty book groups have focused on such titles as *Teaching Unprepared Students* by Kathleen Gabriel and *The Soloist* by Steve Lopez (the current year's Freshman Common Reading). Faculty workshops offered in 2008/2009 included: "Teaching First Generation College Students," "Crash Course

for Faculty Teaching Freshmen" and "Handling Disruption and Distress in the (Freshman) Classroom". (For full event listing, see [AFYE](#).) [CFR 2.11, 3.4]

Student Affairs departments also provide support for faculty teaching through consultation focused on dealing with [disruptive and threatening student behavior](#), coordinating course-related experiences in the City of Los Angeles ([DIGLA](#)), hosting student interns and providing other integrated learning opportunities. Student Affairs coordinates classroom accommodations for students with disabilities and the deaf and hard-of-hearing student population.

The Faculty Senate sponsors the annual [Faculty Retreat](#). This event, open to full- and part-time faculty, offers workshops designed by and for faculty covering issues from developing online courses to dealing with problem students to balancing work and life commitments.

Technology plays an important role in providing modern pedagogical instruction. Course instruction is supported by hardware in "smart" classrooms, a campus computing and multimedia infrastructure, software applications (both desktop and centralized) and training/support programs. The central IT division is responsible for the majority of this technology. An annual IT survey is conducted with faculty, staff and students that measures satisfaction with the different technologies being provided to faculty, measures the demand for these systems, and identifies where faculty obtain support and training. IT collects data on centrally provided workshops and group training such as the *Teaching & Learning Bytes* technology series, using a variety of methods including participation, observation, participant feedback and survey analysis. An emphasis is placed on providing support and training to ensure that teaching/learning technologies and course materials comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Information is also collected about the usage of centrally provided software applications such as Moodle, WebCT, Elluminate, email and data storage. IT assessment work includes financial accounting for these support services and for support provided to faculty for the redesign of courses for online or hybrid formats. In addition to the central IT division, classroom success is supported by dedicated Information Technology staff in each college which also maintain individualized Information Technology groups. These groups are trained and specialized to support the unique technologies used by their colleges. [CFR 2.8, 2.13, 3.7]

The Oviatt Library plays a pivotal role in the support of faculty success. The Library offers workshops specifically for faculty to support teaching and research. Each academic department has a librarian who is the liaison responsible for both the collection and information competence instruction. Routinely, librarians consult with faculty about purchases for the collection related to research or the curriculum. The Library also provides exhibits and programs--often in cooperation with academic departments--which are utilized frequently by the faculty for student assignments. The Library regularly conducts surveys to measure satisfaction and effectiveness of services, including instructional programs. Measurement of [information competence](#) is obtained through pre-test and post-test results. Other measurement data includes statistics on instructional programs and consultation with faculty. This includes assessment of the University Video network (UVN), a multimedia classroom broadcast service of films and documentaries provided by the library's Music and Media unit. [CFR 2.13]

Continued faculty development is necessary to keep pace with ever-changing educational demands and audience. Faculty Affairs and the Faculty Senate provide support. Attendance audits, survey results and statistics from workshops, such as the Provost's Professional Development Series and the Faculty Retreat, are used to improve services for exposing faculty to new pedagogical techniques. Similar data from these offices, and the colleges, are compiled to measure the demand and effectiveness of faculty sabbaticals, University fellowships, reassigned time and University sponsored travel. [CFR 1.8]

### **3.3c Support of Creative/Scholarly Productivity**

The University directly supports research and creative activity at the department, college and University levels. As discussed above, the Provost has initiated a University Research Fellows program that supports eight scholars each year. Additionally, the University Research & Grants Committee awards reassigned time funded by Graduate Studies, Research & International Programs to more than 50 faculty members annually. Each college also supports research with reassigned time, as do some departments. Faculty receive grants and sponsored support for student research projects. Research findings are presented at conferences and accepted in peer-reviewed publications. Faculty may apply for financial support through the Associated Students' Instructionally Related Activity Grants.

In the current climate of budget constraints, reduced enrollment and furloughs it is not surprising that some faculty members express skepticism about the University's commitment to supporting research. Currently, faculty morale is low--particularly evident among newer faculty. Although the University Research Fellows program will continue despite the budget crisis, college-based research time is severely constrained. In response to faculty concerns, the Personnel Planning and Review Committee (PP&R) has revised its "[PIF Guidelines](#)" for faculty in the RTP process. The latest version includes information about the impact of furlough on faculty efforts in areas to be reviewed such as teaching, service to the university and community, and scholarship/creative activity. Nevertheless and not surprisingly, faculty across campus are anxious about the future.

The Library supports faculty research activity through robust collections that provide vital scholarly resources. In addition to the collections described in previous paragraphs, the Library houses [special collections](#) and archives which contain unique and rare materials for research. Librarians collaborate with faculty on collection development for their research agendas. The Library's interlibrary loan service can deliver requests electronically to the desktop. Recently, the Library launched CSUN ScholarWorks, an institutional repository which specifically provides faculty with digital storage space for learning objects and publications.

Currently, 32 faculty from two Colleges are involved with the new [Ed.D.](#) program, just beginning its second year. They are creating research activities, providing seminars and speaker series and advising students beginning their doctoral projects for this program. Despite limited budgetary support, they are involved with community relations, online development and web-based announcements and work with 12 affiliate faculty from outside the University.

Late in 2002, Cal State Northridge was awarded one of four five-year grants as part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York's initial Teachers for a New Era (TNE) initiative. TNE allowed cross-campus partnerships in research, teaching and curriculum redesign. TNE follows three principles:

- *Assessing Evidence:* Improving preparation programs, teaching strategies and teacher support on the basis of valid and reliable evidence mainly of pupil learning.
- *Creating Strong Clinical Practice and Induction:* Insuring that P-12 settings and the University curriculum align and, indeed, overlap so that theory and practice reinforce one another.
- *Engaging the Arts and Sciences with Education:* Making teacher preparation--and pupil learning--everyone's responsibility because teacher candidates must learn not just subject matter but how to make subject matter teachable.

The faculty workgroups and research teams that formed as a result of TNE are ongoing efforts that allow the institution to innovate in research. Additionally, the TNE principles have become part of the CSUN culture, encouraging faculty to collaborate on research and pedagogy across college lines.

In all aspects of faculty pathways, the key is always two-fold success: that the faculty themselves are successful in their service, research and teaching, and that, in turn, the students achieve success through faculty efforts. The Provost is collecting data regarding faculty reassigned time to assess and increase support for faculty engaged in scholarly and creative pursuits. In a time of financial uncertainty it is critically important that we understand how faculty promote educational effectiveness with increasingly limited resources. [CFR 2.4, 2.8, 2.9, 2.11, 2.13, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7]

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Our WASC Research Team drew on evidence-based research on learning “pathways” to conceptualize our work on Theme #2. Long-term tracking of educational effectiveness will result from this approach. The synergy that CSUN hopes to achieve by leveraging faculty and staff growth to serve students and help them grow is our recognized strength. It stands to reason that our *own* pathway to understanding our students’ growth can be forged through an in-depth investigation of how certain key investments that the institution makes *will act as catalysts* for faculty and staff growth—in turn increasing students’ capacity to thrive in our learning community and beyond.

We hope to answer the questions that we raised in the Institutional Proposal. These research questions started with this overarching one: “How do we reliably and with validity measure the effect of our academic programs—the professors, curriculum and culture—on learners?” The Institutional Proposal further broke down that question into discrete parts, including:

1. How does CSUN use technology to support faculty, staff and student success?
2. How do staff contribute in traditional and non-traditional ways to University success? How do we recognize and reward staff accomplishments?
3. What sustained impact results from CIELO activities?
4. How does the Library facilitate faculty and student research and success?
5. What impact does a research experience have on a student's engagement in learning? Assuming that the experience has positive impact, is it feasible to expand opportunities to more students? How can we attract resources to sustain these efforts?
6. To what degree will the Faculty Research Fellows program affect faculty perceptions of the University’s support for their research activities?
7. How will the new Ed.D. program impact other programs?

Finally, we will ask two key questions for each of these areas: What evidence do we have of support and impact? And, where applicable, how are such programs scalable and sustainable?

## **4.0 Learning as an Institution (Theme #3)**

### **4.1 Challenges and Goals of the Learning as an Institution Research Team**

Theme #3 grew out of early conversations in WASC Steering Committee meetings. For those of us who have been at CSUN for many years, it was clear that the campus climate changed after the 1994 earthquake. We agreed in 2006 (when the conversations occurred) that there is more collaboration, better understanding across divisions, a common sense of purpose and a shared vision of the future. How had this happened? What have we learned as an institution and how do we build this into our ongoing planning efforts?

The primary goal of our Research Team, then, is to study past campus initiatives in order to find out why some of them succeeded and others failed. For our purposes, we define success by whether an initiative

was approved and moved forward. In other words, was the *process* successful? Theme #3 is about understanding our processes and using these effectively to plan for the future. To this end, our research addresses the following kinds of questions: Can we identify institutional factors that contributed to success or failure of past initiatives? Can we identify success factors to be implemented in future campus initiatives? How do we learn as an institution?

## **4.2 Using a Case Study Approach to Examine Campus Initiatives**

We are using a case study approach to examine the factors that contributed to the success or failure of several recent initiatives and to identify the processes that would enhance the chances of future campus initiatives succeeding.

In 2008/09, the Learning as an Institution Research Team began case studies of three campuswide initiatives: (1) the Graduation Rates Task Force (2001 – 2003), charged with identifying barriers to graduation; (2) the General Education Task Force (2003 – 2005), charged with reforming the campus GE Program; and (3) the Campus Master Plan (2004 – 2005), charged with creating a 30-year physical Master Plan for the campus. These initiatives were chosen because they are recent (post 2001), well-defined and important. Furthermore, there is a wealth of historical data available. Most importantly, they can be compared with similar less successful past initiatives. This essay includes preliminary insights gleaned during 2008/09.

Case studies are an effective way to organize research into the IP's third theme. They allow us to enhance the capacity of the University as a learning-centered institution by creating an opportunity to reflect on and learn from ourselves. We used graduate research assistants from social science disciplines and gave them experience working with University institutions and collaborating with faculty, staff and administrators from across the campus. Using the graduate research assistants to gather the case study data also provided an objective view of the campus initiatives because none of them were involved in the original initiative processes. [CFR 4.1, 4.3]

Each of the case studies is briefly described below. The preliminary reports submitted by the graduate student researchers can be found in [Appendix E](#).

## **4.3 Graduation Rates Task Force**

### **4.3 (a) *Background***

At the annual Faculty Retreat in January 2001, then-Provost Louanne Kennedy presented information about CSUN's low graduation rates (i.e., the percentage of students who graduate within four, six and eight years from the date they entered as freshmen or within two or four years of the date they entered as transfer students) and announced the formation of a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF). Co-chaired by the Provost and then-Faculty President Diane Schwartz (later by Faculty President Michael Neubauer) and composed of 23 faculty, staff, students and administrators, the Task Force was charged with reviewing retention and graduation data, current academic policies and practices, barriers that might prevent students from graduating in a timely fashion and best practices.

During 2001/02, three Task Force subgroups focused on University policies, advisement and pedagogy and were asked to develop recommendations. A fourth group, the research subgroup, conducted a literature review of 57 articles and several books and reported on the impediments to graduation identified in these.

In January 2002 the draft GRTF recommendations were presented at a plenary session of that year's Faculty Retreat. Using input from this session, the Task Force revised its recommendations and in March 2002 the "Graduation Rates Task Force Preliminary Final Report" was distributed to the campus community for review. After reviewing and incorporating extensive feedback, a revised draft report was distributed to the University in September 2002. For the next five months, the Task Force continued to review data and literature and solicit comments. The Task Force then concluded its work and submitted the [final report](#) with recommendations to President Koester in January 2003. Four years later, in 2007, the Chancellor's Office requested further review of system-wide graduation rates, providing us the opportunity to [review implementation](#) of the GRTF recommendations. [CFR 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, 3.11, 4.6, 4.7]

Members of the GRTF devoted considerable time to this initiative, investing significant human resources. The Task Force and its subgroups met regularly. Time was spent in gathering data and members reviewed literature on best practices. Many of the recommendations of the GRTF are still unfolding; some have been implemented. An analysis of the resources devoted to implementing the recommendations is in progress.

The GRTF "served as a model" for the "first attempt of doing things right" because of its collaboration and partnering, according to some of our case study interviewees. The Task Force included a wide range of campus administrators, staff and faculty who were genuinely interested in improving graduation rates. The collaboration was purposefully established to incorporate all of the different viewpoints across the University community. The GRTF ensured that the student viewpoint was included and that recommendations were directed at practices and policies to help students move effectively and efficiently toward graduation. The GRTF actively sought input from the campus at large, modeling a collaborative effort to bring about change.

#### **4.3 (b) *The Case Study***

We began our study of the GRTF initiative by recording four group interviews and five individual interviews and engaging in an analysis of related documents. Those interviewed included members of the GRTF, and faculty and staff who had experience with the process or outcomes.

Several themes emerged from our conversations. One was the need for and challenges of creating change in the campus culture. Interviews revealed that at the start of the process, the campus did not have a strong culture of support for the need to increase graduation rates or decrease time to degree; neither seemed to cause a great deal of concern. Over time, the work of the GRTF highlighted the need to significantly improve advising and to increase campus awareness about poor graduation rates in order to obtain support and acceptance from faculty and staff to implement recommendations. Along with this, the GRTF emphasized empowering students to be responsible for their own education, through changes in policies, procedures and student advisement. In essence, those interviewed revealed that the Task Force needed to create a cultural change that encouraged all to be involved in increasing graduation rates by shortening the time to degree. In the words of one interviewee, the GRTF brought about a "culture that made changes." It was this paradigm shift involving the campus as a whole that advanced the goal of improving the numbers of students graduating within six years (Data Element [3.2d](#), especially the first three cohorts shown).

Hindering these efforts are the vestiges of a culture that does not support the need for students to graduate in a "timely fashion," as related by some of those interviewed. There also were differences in the interpretation of the graduation rates data and an initial lack of commitment from some departments to act on some of the recommendations.

#### **4.3 (c) Future Work for the Graduation Rates Task Force Case Study Group**

An analysis of the outcomes of GRTF recommendations that have been implemented is needed. In addition, as noted above, a complete investigation of the resources devoted to the work of the Graduation Rates Task Force and to the implementation of the GRTF recommendations will be undertaken, including a more thorough analysis of faculty release time and staff contributions of time. Finally, the case study will be enriched by additional interviews that delve into the use of focus groups by the Graduation Rates Task Force and into the implementation of the recommendations.

### **4.4 General Education Reform Initiative**

#### **4.4 (a) Background**

Spurred by recommendations made in the 2000 WASC Accreditation report, in December 2003 the Faculty Senate established a General Education (GE) Reform Task Force to reconsider the goals and objectives of CSUN's GE program and to develop a new program while reducing the number of required units from 58 to 48. This reduction in the number of units was one of the recommendations of the Graduation Rates Task Force discussed above. The GE Reform Task Force consisted of faculty elected by the colleges and the Library, three faculty from the Educational Policies Committee (EPC), a staff member appointed by the Provost and a student appointed by Associated Students. The Task Force reviewed current national theory in general education and studied the practices and models found throughout California and the nation. It developed several GE models and consulted widely with the campus community to develop the learning objectives. In Fall 2004 several proposed GE models were presented to the Faculty Senate for discussion. After further broad consultation and consensus building, in Spring 2005 the Faculty Senate approved a new 48-unit GE program for CSUN. The [new GE program](#) was implemented in Fall 2006. [CFR 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.4, 3.8, 3.11, 4.1, 4.6, 4.7]

The University gave some faculty reassigned time to work on the Task Force but most of the work was done by faculty as part of their service to the University, as is typically the case in campus curriculum reform. Copying costs were born by the University or department offices. A significant amount of staff time in Admissions and Records was devoted to implementing the new program (computer software had to be revised and new business processes had to be established). Some respondents felt that more resources should have been devoted to the needs of advisors who had to explain the new GE program to students.

Every department and college was well represented in the discussions leading up to the final Senate vote and ample communication was maintained. The Task Force made presentations to all major stakeholder groups, had open campus meetings to discuss GE Reform and established a website where comments could be posted for public discussion. The Task Force consulted all colleges, the Library, the Faculty Senate and its relevant standing committees (EPC and Educational Resources Committee), the Council of Chairs, the Provost's Council, Associated Students and Admissions and Records. Generally, consultation was within the Academic Affairs Division of the University and with Associated Students.

#### **4.4 (b) The Case Study**

The initiative under study was not the first attempt at GE reform at CSUN. Despite good intentions and the investment of countless hours of faculty and staff time, previous efforts failed dismally. In fact, when the 2003 reform effort was launched, it was met with much skepticism; many held little hope for its success. So, how can we account for the fact that, this time, the University was able to successfully reduce the GE package by 10 units and to create a new program that facilitates student success?

The case study data that have been collected so far include 18 recorded interviews with summary transcriptions and a collection of related historical documents. The interviewees included members of the GE Task Force; EPC and the Faculty Senate; and faculty, staff or administrators who participated in some aspect of the initiative process. Preliminary observations based on the interview data follow.

As was the case with the GRTF, cultural change was needed. Not surprisingly, there was resistance in some quarters to any revision of the GE program, often around “turf” battles. The widely agreed-upon lessons of the GRTF process served the campus well from the outset.

- There was broad representation and participation in the process;
- There was extensive communication and transparency;
- Strong faculty leadership was identified and clear goals established;
- Data were used effectively and persuasively to support the need for change;
- There was administrative support to ameliorate any potential negative resource implications of the new GE program;
- There was a perception among many that “the time was right” to move forward with a reduction in the number of GE units.

There was a consensus among the interviewees that broad representation and participation and effective communication were the primary factors contributing to the success of GE Reform.

#### **4.4 (c) Future Work for the GE Reform Case Study Group**

There is a need to conduct more interviews with students, senior administrators, and faculty who were not closely involved with the GE Reform process and who may or may not have agreed with the need to revise the GE in the first place. The plan is to survey or set up focus groups to reach a larger number of faculty and students to gauge current opinions about the success of "the new GE". The case researchers also need to research the previous unsuccessful GE Reform efforts to determine what factors prevented their implementation. By comparing the processes of the successful and unsuccessful reform efforts, we hope to be able to identify key elements that led to success—and failure—in the conduct of initiatives on this campus.

### **4.5 Campus Master Plan Initiative Case Study**

#### **4.5 (a) Background**

In April 2004, President Koester convened a 25-member Master Plan Steering Committee comprised of faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members. With assistance from a consultant planning/design team and Campus Facilities Planning and Design staff, the Steering Committee was charged with developing a major update to the Campus Master Plan that would guide the physical development of California State University, Northridge over the next 30 years. Based on historical student enrollment trends, the Master Plan update was designed to accommodate an increase in the campus student enrollment ceiling from 25,000 to 35,000 FTES. The Master Plan process was designed to improve upon the campus and community outreach efforts of the Campus Master Plan that helped guide the reconstruction of Cal State Northridge after the 1994 earthquake.

The Master Plan committee developed subcommittees to assess current conditions and future needs in key areas: academic plan, instructional and intercollegiate athletics and student recreation, community involvement, commercial services, student and faculty/staff housing, student services and parking and transportation.

The committee responsible for the Envision 2035 process met over 12 months to develop the Master Plan. Four sets of open forums were conducted during which stakeholders were invited to review and comment on the development of the Master Plan. Once the draft was complete, the *Envision 2035* process continued for approximately six months as the Environmental Impact Report was completed. Extensive outreach efforts included the campus community, local residents, the local Los Angeles City-sanctioned neighborhood council and the local Los Angeles City Council office. The campus also maintained a website to give stakeholders convenient access to current information and evolving documents. The resulting [Master Plan](#) was significantly influenced by the involvement and input received from stakeholders.

Campus faculty and staff comprised the majority of the Steering Committee, and each subcommittee was chaired by a campus employee. The committee met formally at least monthly for 12 months, with subcommittee meetings occurring in between. The campus dedicated over 2,000 hours of direct staff time to the Master Plan effort. The campus initiated a mailing campaign to over 23,000 households during the course of the process in addition to maintaining a regularly updated website. [CFR 1.1, 1.7, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3,4.8]

#### **4.5 (b) *The Case Study***

Under the guidance of faculty and staff leadership, a graduate research assistant reviewed the *Envision 2035* documentation and conducted 13 interviews with various committee members and other stakeholders, including faculty and staff members, students, community members and political officials.

Again, the perceived lessons of the Graduation Rates Task Force process were put to good use. The University's campus and external community outreach efforts were instrumental in the development of the plan and its eventual success. Stakeholders generally indicated that the consideration of varying concerns and viewpoints by the Master Plan committee was evident in the process.

Partnerships across the campus and with the external community were a hallmark of this initiative. The success of the effort required close collaboration between faculty and staff within all five divisions of the campus (Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Information Technology, Administration and Finance and University Advancement). The Envision 2035 forums provided a unique opportunity for students to interact with community members, requiring both groups to consider alternative perspectives of the impacts and opportunities associated with the growth of the campus.

Many of the partnerships formed as part of *Envision 2035* have benefited the process of implementing the new Master Plan, which was approved by the CSU Board of Trustees early in 2006. The relationships established between Facilities Planning and Academic Affairs have led to greater understanding of academic needs and usage in the planning of new or redesigned buildings. As the campus has moved forward with the implementation of the Master Plan, CSUN has been able to return to neighborhood groups to enlist input and assistance in making the campus responsive to the needs of the community. A good example of how well these community partnerships worked: When another CSU campus presented its plan at the Chancellor's Office, two busloads of community people came to speak against the plan. Two months later, when the CSUN plan was presented, there was no community opposition. The trust and goodwill that was established during the Master Plan process continues to serve the campus well.

#### **4.5 (c) *Future Work for the Campus Master Plan Case Study Group***

The majority of the interview responses received to date focus specifically on the process leading up to adoption of the Master Plan. The case study group would like to conduct additional interviews to more

fully assess the University's success as a learning organization in its implementation of the plan since March 2006.

#### **4.6 The Four WASC Standards and Research Team Findings**

This section addresses the relationship of the findings of the Learning as an Institution Research Team to the four WASC standards. The issues outlined below will be explored further in the EER.

1. *Based on initial work, the Learning as an Institution Research Group hopes to find that institutional purposes and educational objectives are appropriate, clearly defined and broadly understood.* Has CSUN created the cultural change sought and is the campus community broadly committed to the University mission and goals? In what ways has the Envision 2035 process served to create and maintain new partnerships and collaborations that benefit the campus community? [CFR 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 1.7]
2. *What evidence is there that core functions are operating effectively? How can the campus insure that this will continue into the future?* The GRTF and GE Reform sought to bring CSUN policies in line with national best practices in support of student learning. Have we accomplished this goal? Have we clarified and gained consensus about our mission? What have we learned that will enable us to move effectively into the future? [CFR 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.10, 2.12, 2.13]
3. *Do effective organizational and decision-making structures sustain the institution's operations and support achievement of its educational objectives through its investment in human, physical, fiscal and information resources? What role doe available resources play in a time of economic crisis?* Has the University created structures and processes that honor faculty governance while at the same time recognizing other important stakeholders such as staff, students, administration and community members? What have we learned through the Envision 2035 process about the integration of physical, fiscal and information resources into the academic and administrative planning processes? [CFR 3.5, 3.8, 3.11]
4. *What has been learned about understanding and transforming campus and community culture in our efforts to accomplish our purposes and educational objectives?* Are the GE Reform process, the GRTF and the Envision 2035 initiatives examples of how the campus uses "systematically-gathered and broadly-based evidence to improve existing programs and practices?" While there were mistakes made along the way, these three initiatives achieved unparalleled levels of success. How can we take the lessons learned, both perceived and yet-to-be uncovered by the current research, and institutionalize these in future practice? [CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.8]

#### **4.7 Transition to the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review**

Initial case study findings are based on information gathered from historical documents, interviews and focus groups with faculty, staff and students involved in the initiatives. Each shows preliminary evidence that CSUN has the capacity to learn from the past to make changes in campus practices and policies that foster increased student learning and improve efficiency and collegiality. The case studies begun as part of the CPR form a bridge to the EER for the theme "Learning as an Institution." During this next phase the three case studies will be completed with additional interviews, focus groups and campus-wide surveys and by analyses of the outcomes. For each initiative, the researchers will look both forward and back. For example, what similar initiatives preceded those under study and how did they fare? Did we draw appropriate conclusions from previous initiatives and use this information to structure the next initiatives to better achieve success? We hope to identify factors that contributed to the success or failure of the initiatives' processes. We will examine on-going and current campus initiatives to determine if they are using the successful practices and avoiding the unproductive ones identified in the case studies. For example, there is a new GE Governance Task Force that is reviewing current oversight of the GE program

to make recommendations concerning the structure and conduct of curriculum review, assessment and program review. How has what we learned during earlier GE Reform efforts (and other campus initiatives) influenced how the new GE Governance Task Force was created and is doing its work? [CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3]

The preliminary reports directly addressed the following research questions:

1. Which aspects of the processes used to advance an initiative contributed to its fate?
2. Did the University devote core resources to the initiative? If yes, how were they used?
3. Did the initiative feature committees or partnerships bridging divisions and units? Were these consciously established or unplanned coincidences?
4. What evidence do we have of the relationship between selected common characteristics of initiatives and their success? How has this knowledge been used and how will it be used to increase success and efficiency in the future?

Question 4 requires that we compare and contrast several initiatives and pick out principles that defined their successes or failures. Therefore, we will address this question after the initial case studies and their related expanded studies are completed as part of the EER phase of the WASC self-study.

Our IP included a fifth question: What roles do Program Review and accreditation play in institutional change? In an effort to understand the role of Program Review and accreditation in institutional transformation, we had planned to do an in-depth analysis of selected campus program reviews, such as the review and accreditation of academic programs, the assessment of the Academic First Year Experiences program and possibly the accreditation of the Student Health Center. While we remain committed to understanding how these processes contribute to institutional change, given the current budgetary restrictions, we will not be able to gather sufficient data to address this question in the report we prepare for the EER.

#### **4.8 A Learning Experience at a Learning –Centered University**

The graduate research assistants involved in our work summarized their learning experiences as members of the Learning as an Institution Research Team:

*“Serving as members of a research team, consisting primarily of administrators and faculty members, that was working towards an important institutional goal was a unique and, ultimately, rewarding learning experience. Our research gave us a view of the University that students seldom get to see, and we interacted with administrators and faculty members in ways that students seldom do. Besides the direct learning we received, such as in interview techniques and document analysis, which will be extremely useful to our careers as graduate students, we also came to understand more clearly how the University operates as an institution, how departments and colleges relate to each other, and became much more comfortable working with and approaching individuals who traditionally seem unapproachable to the student.”*

#### **5.0 Conclusion**

The Cal State Northridge community has taken the current reaccreditation process as an opportunity to move the institution forward. As the IP pointed out, the campus considers this examination by WASC to be an important complement to planning and assessment processes already in place and which increasingly engage faculty, staff and administrators. Since the last WASC visit in 2000, the institution has developed a high degree of awareness of “what really matters on our campus.” Both short-term

planning and [strategic planning](#)—and the concomitant collection and use of evidence—are rapidly becoming part of the institutional culture ([Appendix A](#)). Despite major challenges ahead, the University believes it has the resources to focus on the questions posed in the proposal in the context of the EER. The three essays addressing our themes--Student Success through Engagement in Learning, Faculty and Staff Support for University Success and Learning as an Institution--provide compelling evidence that Cal State Northridge has the capacity to answer these questions by the time of the EER.

The first essay provides evidence that student success is the central priority of Cal State Northridge. CSUN is committed to maintaining and developing capacity in support of student success. The campus has been investigating how students learn inside and outside the classroom, how technology supports the student learning process, how advising affects student success and how our efforts around retention contribute. We remain committed to learning-centeredness as a campus priority. The second essay discusses how the institution has the capacity to support faculty and staff success. The University is committed to faculty scholarship, faculty and staff development opportunities and recruitment and retention of a diverse employee pool. The last essay focuses on our capacity to learn as an institution. The lessons derived from the case studies, once completed in time for the EER, will help the University. Maintaining our ability to learn as an institution will be crucial as we move forward in very uncertain times under dark clouds of economic uncertainty.

The success of CSUN and the region it serves are closely intertwined. Throughout its 50-year history, CSUN has served the educational needs of the people in the San Fernando Valley and beyond. The institution remains steadfast in its commitment to serve this changing region. CSUN will remain the “intellectual, economic, and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond.”

## References

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