

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

Educational Effectiveness Review

Introduction

We opened our 2009 Capacity and Preparatory Review by reflecting back on the 1994 Northridge earthquake, comparing it to the “catastrophic context” of the economic crisis California faces and the implications for California State University, Northridge. At the time, we were hopeful that California was beginning to show faint signs of recovery and that we could face the future with optimism. In some respects, these hopes were premature: The state economy remains stagnant and the Legislature is at a stalemate. As we write this, the CSU is facing a 2011/12 budget reduction of somewhere between \$500 million and \$1 billion. The Board of Trustees is debating raising student fees once again, perhaps by as much as 42 percent in the next academic year. There is every reason to believe the Trustees will do so if the budget reduction is \$1 billion. Faculty and staff were furloughed in 2009/10 and while another round of furloughs seems unlikely, the anxiety this produced has not fully dissipated. On May 9, 2011, President Jolene Koester announced that she will retire at the end of 2011, setting the stage for a transition in leadership.

At the same time, however, CSU Northridge is conducting more than 100 faculty searches; these new faculty members will join the campus for the 2011/12 academic year. In January 2011, we opened the new Valley Performing Arts Center, further securing CSUN’s place as the cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond. In 2012 we will open a new Student Recreation Center. Enrollments remain robust as we serve the needs of increasing numbers of freshmen, transfer students and international students. So, despite the very real issues facing higher education, California State University, Northridge continues to meet the challenge of our mission: To enable students to realize their educational goals.

The success of this University is measured by the success of our students. Through this Educational Effectiveness Review we intend to demonstrate how we contribute to this success, how we measure it and how we build on it for the future. In addition, our students’ success is demonstrated by their ability to serve the needs of the region; 80 percent of our students remain in the area after graduation, becoming part of the regional workforce. The last of our essays will briefly discuss our response to regional needs, which include the creation of new post-baccalaureate degrees—offered at diverse sites—that prepare our graduates to meet changing workplace demand.

Our CPR was organized around three main themes and this EER study follows this same organizing principle. However, as we assembled the EER we recognized the logic of beginning with Theme 3, *Learning as an Institution*, because it provides the context within which Themes 1 and 2 were developed and addressed. What we learned as an institution powered the changes and accomplishments described in Themes 1 and 2 (*Faculty and Staff Support for University Success* and *Student Success Through Engagement in Learning*).

As we began the work of the EER, we focused on those aspects of our Institutional Proposal and CPR for which we have solid data supporting our substantive claims—a recommendation of the CPR Visiting Team. In this process, we eliminated some research questions that we found uninformative and refocused others, which you will see in the individual theme essays. We also pay particular attention to the CPR Team’s recommendations as endorsed by the Commission in its [June 2010 letter](#). The link includes the Commission’s letter correcting misstatements). These were:

- That we “aggressively” continue to use resources and processes to provide student access to needed courses and assess the transfer student experience;
- That we continue to make progress in improving six-year graduation rates and expand retention strategies;
- That we work to align institutional and financial planning in the areas of information technology systems and university advancement.

We believe that the Visiting Team will find the first and second recommendations are fully addressed throughout the EER. Our progress on the third recommendation can be found just prior to our conclusion with a discussion of the new campus [digital master plan](#) and progress made in our [advancement](#) efforts.

Learning as an Institution

Introduction

Since 2001, CSUN has undertaken several high-stakes, campus-wide initiatives that have been successful when attempts prior to 2001 failed to address some of the same issues. Members of the WASC Theme 3 Group (listed in [Appendix B](#)) conducted case studies of three post-2001 initiatives as discussed in our CPR report. They are:

- Graduation Rates Task Force
- General Education Task Force
- *Envision 2035*: Campus Master Plan

We chose to examine these specific initiatives because of their centrality to the University, its mission and the efficacy of student learning and achievement. We compared these successful initiatives to a failed attempt at GE reform in 1994. Furthermore, we examine how we used our knowledge of what makes an initiative successful in subsequent initiatives, focusing on the General Education Governance Task Force and the MyNorthridge Student Portal Initiative 2.0, both in 2009.

As the CPR Visiting Team noted, it is important to define an initiative as successful if the process produces a set of recommendations or policies that are broadly accepted as beneficial to the University and subsequently implemented and if this implementation leads to measureable improvements. However, in the case of “Learning as an Institution,” equally important is the analysis we present of the process and Cal State Northridge’s ability to adapt what we learned to solving subsequent problems and addressing important issues.

This study of how the University learns and acts is part of President Koester’s legacy; the legacy can sustain us through change. Under her leadership, we have developed a visionary pragmatism. We plan after consulting widely. We implement collaboratively after planning. And we assess, using multiple measures, during and after implementation—with focus on student learning and graduation. She leaves us; but she leaves us this process integrated into all we do.

Case Study Methodology

A case study approach was used 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 success for future campus initiatives. Case studies provided the opportunity to reflect on and learn from ourselves. Graduate research assistants from social science disciplines conducted focus groups and individual interviews. The interviewees were members of the campus and surrounding community who were involved in the initiatives discussed in this essay (see [Appendix A](#) for more detailed discussion of the methods used).

Analysis of the Case Studies

Graduation Rates Task Force

The introduction to the Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF) report of February 2003 notes that this working group was called together to “address the problems of low graduation rates and a lack of timeliness to degree at California State University, Northridge and to propose recommendations for what the University can do to assist our students to graduation in a timely manner.” The GRTF is widely viewed as a successful initiative because after the report went through an extensive campus-wide review, most of its recommendations were implemented or are in the process of being implemented (see [Table 1](#) in Appendix C for an overview). Furthermore, as we discuss later in this self study, implementation led to an increase in graduation rates.

The oldest of the initiatives studied, the GRTF, was a major turning point in how CSUN approaches solving major campus issues. At the time of the formation of the Task Force, the campus was largely unaware of the problem and/or had little interest in decreasing the time to graduation. Yet, by the time the GRTF finished its [final report](#), the entire campus community was keenly aware of the problem and campus groups across all divisions were engaged in action plans to solve it. Our Theme 1, “Student Success Through Engagement in Learning,” as well as Institutional Research (IR) data in the compilation appendices of the EER, show a significant decrease over the last decade in time to graduation and an increase in the number of First Time Freshmen who graduate within six years (see [Appendix D](#)). Our third essay will provide evidence of the success of the GRTF implementation in detail.

Factors Contributing to the Success of the Graduation Rates Task Force

The GRTF Case Study Group investigated why this initiative was so widely accepted and successfully implemented. This group determined that the following factors were most important:

- The goal was clearly defined and addressed as an identified campus priority.
- The Task Force met on a regular and frequent basis to maintain momentum and continuity of purpose.
- The process was collaborative, involving administrators, faculty and staff from several divisions, creating trust and helping to alleviate tensions within the campus community. Knowing that one's division had a voice in the process created a receptive climate for implementation of the recommendations.
- The process was consultative, with input sought from an array of stakeholders, a critical element in getting information on the broad spectrum of issues that affect students' progress toward graduation.
- The GRTF provided timely, widely circulated progress reports. These increased campus awareness about the long time to degree and what could be done to address this problem.
- University leadership supported the GRTF both with resources and by sending a consistent message about its importance. The Task Force was initiated by the Provost and co-chaired by the Faculty President. Furthermore, the vice presidents of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs championed implementation of the recommendations and provided resources for implementation. This enabled the process to be vibrant and effective from start to finish.

These six factors created a cultural change. The process has become the norm for how CSUN does things, so it stands as a landmark of learning as an institution. One person interviewed noted that when people believe they are included in the design and that their work will be supported at the highest level, they become engaged and the process works. One senior administrator who was involved in the GRTF spoke of its impact on her professionally, noting that "collaboration really has become the way we do things," and she indicated that it has changed her outlook about accomplishing goals. She now asks herself, "If I have to get it done, whom should I involve?"

The change in campus culture to work collaboratively to improve graduation rates is still strong, continuing to have direct and tangible impacts on student success. The process of academic advisement has been revolutionized in terms of faculty-staff-student interaction and use of technology, such as the creation of My Academic Planner (see Student Success essay). Implementation of ideas beyond those originally identified by the GRTF, such as commitment of considerable resources to add sections of bottleneck courses, continues to mark the University's awareness of the problem and willingness to respond with solutions.

General Education Reform: A Tale of Initiatives

In 1994, then-Provost Louanne Kennedy established a General Education Steering Committee (GESG), with the charge of coordinating a campus dialogue on general education (GE) both to

address how it conformed to recently revised CSU requirements and to examine general concerns about its size and learning outcomes. No comprehensive reform resulted before the GESC was disbanded in Fall 1996, although some of its recommendations were pursued and implemented by the Educational Policies Committee of the University between 1996 and 1999. The attempt was widely considered a failure for reasons discussed below.

Nearly a decade later, in December 2003, the Faculty Senate established a General Education Reform Task Force in direct response to a GRTF recommendation. Its charge was to develop a new GE program that was 10 units smaller but still met the campus' GE learning goals and objectives, which ensure that students are exposed to the rich cultural diversity of the state, nation and world. This effort led to [comprehensive reform](#) approved by Faculty Senate in Spring 2005 and implemented in Fall 2006. Important reforms created through this initiative included:

- simplification of the complex GE program, primarily through the elimination of subcategories within most of the main sections;
- reduction in total required units from 58 to 48 to help decrease the time to graduation, make room in student programs for minors or for the pursuit of advanced knowledge in a field of interest, and eliminate the inequity that native students take nine more units of GE than GE-certified community college transfer students;
- requirement for the recertification and assessment of GE. Approved in the late 1990s by EPC but never implemented, both were successfully initiated in Fall 2006;
- recommendation that student learning outcomes for GE be revised, an undertaking completed the following summer.

Factors Contributing to the Success/Failure of GE Reform Initiatives Studied

The GE reform efforts from 1994 to 1999 were not successful. No single individual or group was selected to lead the efforts from beginning to end. Over the years, the work passed from the GE Steering Committee to the Educational Policies Committee and then to various faculty subcommittees; there was no direction of what needed to be done or any real sense why GE reform was necessary. The process was drawn out and, at times, contentious. Two different agendas seemed to be at work, one to streamline GE and have fewer, focused and/or themed offerings and the other to develop GE student learning outcomes and an assessment plan at a time when few faculty understood or accepted the idea of assessment. Rumors of streamlining GE created fear that the elimination of course offerings would have a serious impact on departmental resources boosted by full-time equivalent student (FTES) numbers. The Administration did not address these fears, furthering the perception by some that the University was making a top-down push to shrink GE offerings in order to get rid of programs. In short, lack of strong leadership and clear vision allowed campus discussion of changes to the GE program to become political and territorial, resulting in an atmosphere averse to making substantive changes.

In stark contrast, the 2003–2005 reform effort resulted in approval of a new GE program in less than 18 months. The most important factors that contributed to the initiative's success were:

- clear goals and objectives;
- strong and fair faculty leadership on the GE Task Force;

- buy-in for the goals and objectives from faculty governance at the beginning of the process;
- an open and transparent campus-wide consultation process; and
- support from the Administration to hold departments “harmless” for a minimum of two years from potential FTES losses due to changes in the GE program.

The Fall 2009 faculty survey undertaken by the Theme 3 Task Force showed general satisfaction with both the GE reform process and the revised GE program (see [Appendix E](#)). A large majority (75 percent) of the faculty respondents were very or moderately aware of the GE reform process during 2003–2005. Furthermore, they felt that they were given an opportunity to participate in the process, and those who did participate found their comments and input well received.

Initial analysis of data of the first cohorts of students to graduate with the new GE plan indicates that the reform is successfully meeting its goals. It is difficult to determine how much the simplification of the GE program contributes because of other concurrent efforts to improve graduation rates, such as improved advisement and first-year experience programs. However, simplification of the program, as well as elimination of 10 required units, certainly must be contributing factors to the improvement (see Tables 1 and 2 in [Appendix H](#) for preliminary data relating to this issue).

Finally, the biology professor who chaired the GE reform effort was subsequently elected Faculty President, another indication that the process was perceived as fair and successful by the campus community.

Envision 2035: Campus Master Plan Case Study

Background

In April 2004, the University embarked on a major update to its physical master plan. While the first two case studies examined initiatives related to campus internal issues, the master plan process needed to reach beyond the campus and involve immediate campus neighbors, the larger local community, elected officials and city agencies. *Envision 2035* was led by a 25-member master plan steering committee composed of faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members. The [completed plan](#) would guide the physical development of California State University, Northridge for 30 years and support a gradual increase in student enrollment from the then-existing 25,000 FTES to a new ceiling of 35,000. Additionally, *Envision 2035* was designed to improve upon the campus and community outreach efforts of the 1998 campus master plan, which helped guide reconstruction of the campus after the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

Prior to 2000, relationships with immediate neighbors and with members of various broader community organizations were strained. Various initiatives that had been proposed by the University had been met with objection, agitation, protest and efforts to obstruct. These included, for example, a proposal to build a retail and entertainment production center on the North Campus and efforts to site and build a football stadium. Several neighbors agitated about

the University's plans and current users of facilities regularly complained to the CSU Chancellor, to Chancellor's Office staff and to individual members of the CSU Board of Trustees. The letters were so numerous and contentious that Chancellor Charles Reed told Interim President Louanne Kennedy to address these strained relationships.

After her arrival in 2000, one of President Koester's original and ongoing priorities for the campus was to "continue to strengthen the connections between the University and the community...." The University adopted a mindset of being willing to adapt when plans or activities could have undue negative consequences for the community. The *Envision 2035* process was crucial in proving that the University's new mindset would be understood and accepted by the community.

During the 12-month master plan process, the University conducted multiple open forums at which stakeholders were invited to comment on the developing master plan. This phase was followed by a six-month period during which the associated environmental impact study was completed. The process included extensive outreach within the campus community as well as with external community stakeholders and city agencies. The [resulting plan](#) was significantly influenced by the involvement of these stakeholders.

Factors Contributing to the Success of the Campus Master Plan

The case study examined feedback that was primarily focused on the process, which culminated with adoption of the campus master plan by the CSU Board of Trustees in March 2006. The process did not result in any formal opposition from the community, and the Trustees commended the President and campus leadership for their roles in carrying out the project. Case study interviews indicated that internal and external community outreach efforts were instrumental in the development of the plan and its eventual success. Stakeholders generally said that consideration of various concerns and viewpoints was evident throughout the process and in the final documents. Partnerships across the campus and the community were noted as a hallmark of this initiative.

Although the initial CPR case study showed that these partnerships were instrumental in the subsequent master plan implementation, it was clear that richer data were required to analyze the success of the implementation phase. Therefore, additional interviews were conducted during the EER, which focused on assessing the University's development as a learning organization since 2006. The research questions were structured to assess how the University's development of master plan projects has changed as a result of lessons learned through the *Envision 2035* process. Comparisons were sought between the current implementation process and previous eras of major campus development (specifically the post-Northridge earthquake reconstruction from 1994 to 2003) in order to identify the extent to which the campus has used institutional experience to improve its programs and support its mission.

Was the Campus Master Plan a Success?

Analysis of the supplementary interview data clearly indicates that success of the process is defined primarily by the journey, rather than the destination. Respondents routinely commented

on the quality of the master plan itself as well as technical aspects of project implementation. Success, however, seemed to be recognized and measured primarily through perceptions of outreach, engagement and collaboration with stakeholders. This was nearly universal, regardless of whether stakeholders were members of the campus community, surrounding community or governmental agencies. Where capabilities and competence of campus personnel were praised, specific mention was made of how the approach to master plan implementation changed over the decade; there were several references to a shift in the campus culture as an essential element in recent success. Faculty and staff often attribute this to the shared commitment to teamwork and *esprit de corps* that emerged during the difficult 1994 Northridge earthquake recovery. Several respondents referred to the existence of “silos” between Academic Affairs and other administrative units prior to 1994. They suggested that the need to pull together in unprecedented ways following the disaster developed a lasting trust between faculty and staff members that had not existed previously. This was coupled with a clear shift by the University’s leadership toward a more collaborative governance approach.

However, some respondents also identified a significant difference between the 1998 and 2006 master plans. The 1998 plan was very “physical” in nature; its primary purpose was to site several new structures and plan pedestrian circulation improvements that needed to occur in a relatively short timeframe as part of the recovery effort. Conversely, the 2006 master plan was designed to analyze the necessary campus growth over 30 years and—more importantly—to plan a physical environment supporting the shared values of the campus and surrounding community to the maximum extent possible. The collaborative process of the 2006 master plan suggests that the University learned from the experience of the earthquake reconstruction effort and was able to translate some of the advancements in campus community-building into similar improvements in its relationship with off-campus stakeholders.

The master plan was generally successful in terms of defined, measurable outcomes. Several major campus projects have been completed since its approval, and stakeholders report that these were a) well planned and executed, b) consistent with master plan goals and objectives, c) completed in a transparent manner with improved stakeholder communication and input and d) forthright in consideration of environmental impacts. All respondents seem to concur that the University has improved in these areas over the past decade.

One of the key observations emerging from our data is that stakeholders see *Envision 2035* less as a document or roadmap and more as a living, breathing initiative. In this regard, its success is defined in how it survives as a work in progress. What is clear is that master plan implementation is one of the primary administrative functions that can have profound effects—positive or negative—on both the perceptions and realities of collaboration, shared vision, transparency and institutional efficacy, both within and beyond the campus borders.

The following table lists significant developments since approval of the master plan in March 2006. All projects were completed within budget and according to the phasing timelines assumed in the campus master plan study. During this period the University has completed over \$250 million in new facilities.

Project Name	Size	Value	Completion Date
Major Projects:			
Valley Performing Arts Center	166,000 sf	\$125 million	December 2010
Chaparral Hall	90,000 sf	\$ 56 million	July 2009
Student Housing Phase 1	90,000 sf	\$ 30 million	June 2009
Parking Structure G3	1,450 spaces	\$ 22 million	January 2009
Student Recreation Center	120,000 sf	\$ 60 million	in construction, completion Jan. '12
Small High-Profile Projects:			
East Campus Roads		\$ 4 million	March 2011
Academic/Athletic Field Lighting		\$ 1 million	July 2010

Several of these projects were high profile from a community interest standpoint because of concerns with potential traffic, parking and noise. In addition, campus constituents were concerned with operational impacts associated with construction as well as space/programmatic concessions required of particular units to meet overall master plan goals. The increased engagement and collaboration with city, community and campus stakeholders created a different environment. Specific campus building projects are more typically considered by stakeholders within the context of master plan goals rather than as individual development efforts. As a result, the University's initiatives have greater credibility from the outset and stakeholders are able to openly discuss and resolve potential hurdles. This synergy was instrumental in the multi-divisional effort to develop the funding strategies and financial plans supporting each project.

The two smaller projects, East Campus Roads and Academic/Athletic Field Lighting, should be singled out as possibly the best examples of the success of the 2006 campus master plan. These initiatives had been considered for many years. However, prior to *Envision 2035*, they were considered too politically sensitive to warrant a concerted effort by the campus. Following the *Envision 2035* process, the University was much more comfortable engaging in open dialogue with stakeholders, including those with strong reservations.

In the case of the East Roads project, the City of Los Angeles ultimately agreed to vacate existing city roadways within the campus boundaries in order to allow the University to develop a new formal campus entry and improve traffic flow on the major streets surrounding campus. The process required involvement and consensus among the University, the L.A. City Bureau of Engineering, the local City Council Office, the local Neighborhood Council and the Mayor's Office. The resulting improvements ultimately benefited all of these constituents. The field lighting project required the University to engage with its neighbors regarding visual impacts from the lighting and operational impacts from extended hours of use and potentially larger spectator crowds for events. In addition, encroachment into existing instructional fields needed to be resolved between the College of Health and Human Development and Intercollegiate Athletics.

Success Factors Common to the Three Initiatives Studied

There are six striking characteristics common to the success of all three initiatives that summarize what we have learned as an institution about successful initiative processes:

- Begin with a clear objective that can be accomplished in a clearly defined time frame, preferably one or two academic years.
- Select experienced, interested and committed faculty, staff, administrative and student leaders (as appropriate) to organize and guide the effort.
- Engage all stakeholders in the process, ensuring that there is cross-divisional representation and that those with diverse viewpoints are encouraged to contribute.
- Ensure the support of the Administration, both in terms of visibly supporting the initiative across campus and in providing appropriate human and financial resources to accomplish the goal.
- Communicate widely and often with the campus community to secure trust and approval of the process and its objectives.
- Establish a structure that allows participants to manage the process efficiently and keep good records.

What Have We Learned? More Recent Campus Initiatives

The original three case studies document fundamental changes in the way the campus initiates, develops and implements large-scale transformation. We believe these documented changes resulted from intentional study of our institutional practices to develop best practices. To substantiate this hypothesis, the Theme 3 Task Force examined two recent campus-wide initiatives to determine if the identified success factors were employed subsequently. The initiatives studied were the General Education Governance Task Force and MyNorthridge Student Portal 2.0. Two or three members of each initiative were interviewed to gain insight into how the process was structured and developed.

General Education Governance Task Force (2009/10)

The goal of the GE Governance Task Force was to determine how the general education program—particularly curriculum, program review and assessment—would be governed at CSUN. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee initiated the Task Force, composed of faculty members from multiple disciplines and one administrator, to address these issues. The Task Force recommended formation of a GE Council; specified its governance structure, membership and responsibilities; and recommended the appointment of a faculty GE Director. The Task Force began work in February 2009, bringing the final resolutions to Faculty Senate one year later. All were passed unanimously. The initiative was viewed as highly successful by all interviewees. Factors that led to success included:

- clear goals that were achievable within a two-year time frame;
- a collegial task force with the range of expertise needed to achieve the goal, effective leadership to move the process forward and equally shared tasks among all members;
- support of the process by faculty governance and Academic Affairs leadership; and

- a process that was genuinely collaborative and transparent, with campus-wide consultation and incorporation of suggestions into the planning.

The chair of the GE Governance Task Force, a member of the earlier GE Task Force, stated that she intentionally modeled much of the process of the later body on what she learned worked well on the GETF. Another member said the process worked because it used the existing faculty governance structure, particularly frequent progress reports to the Senate Executive Committee, Educational Policies Committee and Faculty Senate, which provided transparency of process and gained the trust of the campus community.

MyNorthridge Student Portal Initiative 2.0 (2009)

The MyNorthridge Student Portal 2.0 project was launched in 2009 to make the University's student portal more user-friendly. The portal, which utilizes Web 2.0 technology, was redesigned to provide [prospective](#) and [admitted](#) students with meaningful content in a visually pleasing manner. It is intended to be easy to navigate, allowing students to locate content in an intuitive manner. The initiative team consisted of administrators, staff and faculty representing an array of units within Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and Information Technology. The project's vision was expressed in measurable goals and was crafted to allow broad input from the campus, while remaining flexible and adaptable. Members of the team viewed the project as an initial success, having met its preliminary Phase I goals. Factors contributing to its success include:

- creation of a multidisciplinary team of technical and content specialists, business process experts, faculty and staff committed to designing a user-friendly product that would foster student success in addition to being cost-effective;
- empowerment of the team to determine the management structure of the process;
- creation of a collaborative environment of mutual respect and expectation of contribution;
- administrative support for the project;
- provision of adequate financial and human resources; and
- regular feedback from students to ensure the developing product was able to meet user needs.

Interviewees stated that delegation of decision making and collaboration in developing effective management structure were essential in creating trust in the competence and judgment among team members. They noted that the number of decisions that had to be made each week in order to keep the project on track could not have been made in a traditional "hierarchical" model. Success depended upon frequent, focused meetings and empowering staff at the most appropriate functional level to make decisions. In short, the MyNorthridge Portal project worked because the right diversity of people were selected and provided with resources and time. At the 2010 CSUN Staff Service Awards, the MyNorthridge Portal team was recognized with the Team Award.

Institutional Learning

These case studies elucidate a fundamental change in the way the University approaches initiating, conducting and implementing major campus reforms, a change that was applied routinely to subsequent endeavors. The transformation began in the process and practices used by the Graduation Rates Task Force and continued through the process pioneered by the General Education Task Force, including positive feedback mechanisms and participation across divisions and divides. The widespread use of technology such as email and listservs, websites and shared drives has facilitated communication.

The steadfast commitment of the President and vice presidents to cross-divisional collaboration contributed enormously to this cultural shift. The development of collaborative process was not without conflicts and growing pains, but administrators, staff and faculty acknowledge that efforts have been rewarded by improved learning opportunities and services for students. People describe themselves as better informed across divisional lines and less “self-focused.” After reviewing the literature (see page 11 of [Appendix A](#)) and reflecting on what we have learned, we offer the following recommendations on core organizational principles for successful initiatives:

- **Set a clear objective:** Prepare and assess to make sure that the “time is right” for the initiative. Use data as evidence of the need for the initiative and to suggest directions to pursue. Clear objectives allow participants to focus on specific issues and find potential solutions faster. A short time frame means team members will be more likely to maintain their enthusiasm and there will be decreased turnover of personnel.
- **Seek support from University leadership:** Appoint a core team whose members are empowered by the University to define objectives, determine deliverables and make decisions from inception through implementation. Experienced leaders understand the campus and know how to navigate through it. They know which practices lead to probable success and which to failure. Initiative goals often are accomplished effectively and expediently when University leadership is seen to support the goal and process. It is important, where appropriate, that the Administration delegate to the committee, trust its work and support the results.
- **Require collaboration:** Create teams that include stakeholders across units and divisions, as appropriate to the goal. Cross-campus initiatives are difficult to organize and carry through to the implementation stage. Better solutions are devised when there is a diverse group of people thinking about the problem. The team gets a better understanding of the issues when all stakeholder perspectives are understood because they are represented in the discussions. Engaging all stakeholders encourages solutions that work for multiple and changing circumstances.
- **Establish process management:** Establish clear goals, a timeline and strong project management. Provide orientation to team members. Managing the initiative process must be deliberate, not ad-hoc. Successful initiatives set up regular team meeting times, create subcommittees with clear tasks and reporting timelines and have a completion date for the whole process. Good records of team discussions maintain clear communication within the task force and facilitate presentation of the results. Set up a well-designed and focused process that uses members’ time and expertise wisely. The GE Reform initiative was confined to matters of curriculum and so was led by faculty. The Graduation Rates

and master plan initiatives impacted all divisions on campus and so included co-leaders from administration and faculty.

- **Provide resources:** Provide adequate resources of time, human capital and financing.
- **Communicate and seek feedback:** Communicate widely and frequently with stakeholders. Solicit and consider input received. Acceptance of the results depends on buy-in, so the campus needs to believe that the goals are important and believe that their voices have been heard.
- **Disseminate results through an iterative process:** Broadcast recommendations to maintain transparency and secure support. A transparent initiative process that updates the campus and solicits regular input is critical. Widespread two-way communication also allows for greater stakeholder input.

To a very large extent these principles guided our reaccreditation process itself:

- Reaccreditation by WASC has been a clearly identified campus priority for four years.
- The Proposal, CPR and EER Steering Committees are co-chaired by a faculty member and an administrator; the same is true for the three Task Forces.
- Membership on the Steering Committee and the Task Forces is cross-divisional and includes students.
- The Steering Committee and the Task Forces have regularly scheduled meetings. Clear timelines are established for deliverables.
- The Task Forces were empowered to define their work within the parameters of the reaccreditation effort.
- Faculty leaders are supported with reassigned time to allow them to concentrate on the effort.
- The University's reaccreditation website provides updates on the process and opportunity for feedback, as did multiple open forums and iterative visits to administrative and faculty governance bodies.

Faculty and Staff Support for University Success

Introduction

Demonstrating the causal relationship between the University's support for faculty and staff development and University success is not simple. The evidence is often anecdotal and qualitative. But we truly believe it is valid nevertheless.

As a result, this essay begins with a set of assumptions. We assume that if we create a climate in which faculty and staff feel valued and supported, they will be motivated to excel in their work. We further assume that if faculty and staff excel, the University will thrive, our students will succeed and we will continue to serve the needs of the region, even as both those needs and the region change. Data in the form of quantitative measures such as the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) surveys of students and faculty and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) give weight to our assumptions.

As we noted on Page 1, we often measure the success of this University by the success of our students. So what evidence have we gathered on the support we provide faculty and staff and the impact of our efforts? Does our investment in faculty and staff contribute to student success? Additionally, are these programs—insofar as they are successful—scalable and sustainable?

Support for Faculty Development and Success

California State University, Northridge is committed to the development of our faculty—as teachers, as scholars and as citizens of the University. In our Institutional Proposal we argued that if the University provides support *for* the faculty (e.g., time, money, development opportunities), faculty will, in return, support the University mission. In this first part of the essay we provide evidence of University support *for* the faculty.

Library Support for Faculty Research and Success

The Oviatt Library provides information resources and services to faculty, including rich and useful research [collections](#) (both print and electronic) and [archives](#) of importance for research. Services include those that facilitate access to materials in all formats as well as those that complement the University's teaching and learning mission.

Subject liaison librarians work closely with faculty in these two areas—support for faculty research and support for the curriculum and teaching. In support of research, specialists work with faculty on such topics as collection and development of primary and secondary sources, preparing bibliographies, workshops and support for proper use of citations, copyright issues, scholarly communication issues and support of accreditation reviews. Services such as [Interlibrary Loan](#) support research when existing collections do not cover their fields. The Oviatt has over 1.4 million volumes and over 54,000 periodicals (both print and electronic) to support faculty research. In [2009/10](#), over 400,000 books were checked out, renewed, used in-house or circulated as reserves.

The Oviatt recently initiated CSUN [ScholarWorks](#), part of **CSU ScholarWorks**, a component of the strategic plan of the CSU Council of Library Directors. ScholarWorks is an institutional repository, created to capture, organize, preserve and make widely available the intellectual output of a community in digital format. It can archive finished materials, or finished iterations of materials, and provides permanent, secure storage and access. It is especially useful for organizing and preserving documents and data one would want to refer to later—such as assessment materials. Unlike a folder on a server, documents in ScholarWorks are openly accessible. Originals are preserved without fear of alteration and can be searched by keyword, author, title or full text. Their location is permanent, marked by a handle registered with the national handle registration. Additionally, in Spring 2011, the Library announced the ScholarWorks Digital Learning Objects Grants (DLOGs), providing \$1,000 grants to each college to create and share reusable digital learning materials in the CSUN environment.

Faculty also make use of a variety of services to facilitate and augment classroom instruction, including print and electronic [reserves](#), a University-wide video network which can be used to watch video in classrooms, a Library website that provides online access to the rich resources available, a [Teacher Curriculum Center](#) to support teacher education, and support for online

classes. Following a decision by the primary all-University curriculum committee several years ago, all new curriculum proposals are prepared in consultation with the Library. Subject specialists also collaborate with faculty to design [instructional sessions](#) (held in Library computer labs) to better prepare students to conduct research and use Library resources. In 2010/11, 23,325 students participated in such sessions at the request of 799 faculty members.

Technology in Support of Faculty Success

Smart Room Technology

All open lecture rooms (about 200 in 2011) are “[smart](#),” following completion of a multi-year conversion project. The current extension of this work will supply these now-smart rooms with computers, eliminating the need for faculty to carry laptops into the rooms each time they teach. Over half of the open lecture rooms will be upgraded to include thin clients before the end of 2010/11, based on the known advantages of the thin platform: 1) purchase price savings, 2) ability to drive common desktop images to all classroom computers, 3) reduced electrical power consumption and 4) decreased maintenance. Once all lecture classrooms have computers, lab classrooms with computers will be modified to access the client-server environment. The common desktop image is friendlier to faculty teaching in multiple classrooms as the look and feel will be the same in any open lecture room.

Academic Technology

The office of [Academic Technology](#) (Division of Information Technology) was established in 2008, unique in that staff are drawn from Academic Affairs as well as Information Technology (IT). The office and its Help Desk operations support teaching and learning technologies such as learning management systems, web conferencing applications, lecture capture systems and student response systems. Academic Technology also provides instructional design support for faculty seeking to redesign courses for online and hybrid delivery. The department maintains a video production studio, offering in-studio and on-location production of instructional videos, as well as media conversion services to digitize archival media content.

Approximately one-third of all courses make active use of the University’s learning management system, [Moodle](#), a 50 percent increase in use since the change from WebCT during the 2009/10 academic year. Our web conferencing system, [Elluminate](#), is used to add a synchronous element. Since Elluminate was fully integrated into Moodle to create a more seamless virtual learning environment there has been more than a five-fold increase in the number of requests for instructional web conferencing sessions. Among the faculty whom Academic Technology has assisted in the redesign of courses for online and hybrid delivery are a number of high enrollment courses in the College of Business and Economics and the College of Science and Mathematics.

Academic Technology’s front door is the Faculty Technology Center ([FTC](#)). In collaboration with IT Training, the FTC offers support and training through workshops and documentation. In collaboration with Faculty Development, the FTC offers a range of programming, including the Teaching and Learning Bytes series, a Moodle Faculty Learning Community and programs on

faculty use of Web 2.0 technologies. The FTC maintains the Faculty Technology Lab in which faculty work with staff and student assistants to solve their instructional technology needs.

The FTC offers workshops on the principal technologies supported, including Moodle, Elluminate, TurnItIn, and Turning Point student response systems. Over the past two years the FTC has offered an average 77 workshops per year with 374 enrollments. In December 2008 the FTC initiated [Teaching and Learning Bytes](#), which provides a forum for faculty to share ways in which they use technology in their teaching. The sessions are webcast using Elluminate so that faculty can attend online or in person. In the past three years, 36 sessions have been held with more than 500 participants. Starting in 2010/11, all sessions are captioned and archived for on-demand viewing.

The FTC also has a number of more intensive projects with individual or teams of faculty being assisted in course redesign, supported financially with stipends or reassigned time. There are typically four to eight such intensive projects each year, focusing on high enrollment and “bottleneck” courses. The FTC’s Faculty Associates program offers reassigned time to three to five faculty members each year to participate in Center activities. Faculty Associates work with FTC staff on course redesign projects, training and faculty development programs and other special projects. Since the program began in 2008, there have been [11 associates from seven colleges](#).

The Center for Innovative and Engaged Learning Opportunities

Through workshops, faculty learning communities, discussion forums, grant opportunities and New Faculty Orientation, the Center for Innovative and Engaged Learning Opportunities ([CIELO](#)) supports faculty professional development and success, focused in the area of teaching and learning. CIELO invites all part-time and full-time faculty to participate in opportunities to enhance teaching strategies, consider innovative approaches and gain support in resolving challenges they encounter in teaching.

CIELO has offered 75 Faculty Development sessions (all-University workshops, presentations and discussion forums) and 24 Faculty Learning Communities in the last five and a half years. On average, 15 faculty participated in each all-University workshop, representing all eight colleges. In 2009/10, Faculty Development programs drew over 300 faculty participants to investigate subjects ranging from “Developing and Assessing Students’ Critical Thinking Skills” to “Engaging Students from the Classroom Stage” and “Pop Quiz Makeover: Encouraging Students’ Preparation for Class.” Many topics result from faculty suggestions about what they want to discuss. Faculty Learning Communities include book groups on such diverse titles as Phyllis Blumberg’s *Developing Learner-Centered Teaching* (2009/2010) and James E. Zull’s *The Art of Changing the Brain* (2011).

The Office of [Academic First Year Experiences](#) (also a part of CIELO) offers three additional programs for faculty who teach CSUN’s freshman students, each supported by an actively maintained website:

- The Freshman Faculty Series offers workshops and presentations throughout the year. Recent topics included a [crash course](#) for faculty teaching freshmen for the first time (or

the first time in a long time), teaching first generation students, and providing a more inclusive campus environment for LGBTIQQ students. The nearly 600 faculty who teach freshmen at CSUN are connected through a listserv where information is shared about events such as Freshman Convocation.

- Faculty-staff book groups and workshops are offered each spring and summer in advance of the coming year's Freshman [Common Reading](#) to help faculty incorporate the book into classes, no matter their discipline.
- A series of workshops help faculty who teach [University 100](#), the Freshman Seminar. Each year's cycle includes a day-long Saturday meeting in late spring to introduce new and continuing faculty to one another and to discuss the course goals, assignments, texts and learning outcomes. Pedagogy appropriate to teaching freshmen is a key part of this meeting. Smaller meetings through the summer focus more intensively on particular aspects of the course, such as building the syllabus or working in Moodle. Fall meetings bring "rookie" and "veteran" U100 faculty together to promote a continuing exchange of best practices, to troubleshoot and to collaborate in support of student success.

The Office of Community Engagement

CIELO also houses the Office of [Community Engagement](#), providing support for faculty and students engaged in community-based research and service. For the fourth time, California State University, Northridge was admitted to the 2010 U.S. President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. To be named to the Honor Roll, a school must demonstrate that its students, faculty and staff are engaged in meaningful service that achieves measurable results in the community. Academically, Community Engagement at CSUN supports more than 4,000 students in 180 service learning courses; last year students and faculty dedicated 87,500 hours of service with the community.

Grant Recipients and Dissemination of Results

The Judge Julian Beck Learning-Centered [Instructional Project grants](#) provide faculty with financial support to engage in teaching innovation. Over 200 grants have been awarded in the last 10 years. One of the important aspects of this program is the requirement that grant recipients disseminate their results at the department, college and/or University level and make themselves available to interested colleagues. CIELO offers two platforms for dissemination: an all-University session and [IdeaShare](#), available through the Faculty Development website, which expands the reach of development by allowing faculty to be informed about their colleagues' learning improvement strategies and share their own. Finally, if a project is not selected for Beck funding, the CIELO office endeavors to help faculty find funding elsewhere. For example, of the 39 unsuccessful 2011/12 Beck Grant proposals, nine were identified as potentially appropriate for funding from other CSUN sources, and their authors were offered the opportunity to have their proposal redirected.

Provost's Professional Development Series

Since 2006, the Office of the Provost has sponsored the Provost's Professional Development Series ([PPDS](#)). Each year, over 100 faculty and administrators have participated in multiple sessions that have explored issues such as how to effectively leverage limited resources, how

Academic Affairs should respond to various crises to ensure effective recovery and delivery of instruction, and effectively using evidence and assessment data. Through participation in the PPDS we have developed a common vision and learned to speak a common language.

Teachers for a New Era

In 2002, CSUN was one of four universities selected to participate in the Teachers for a New Era ([TNE](#)) initiative, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (along with the Annenberg, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations). TNE followed three principles: 1) Assessing Evidence to improve preparation programs, teaching strategies, and teacher support on the basis of valid and reliable evidence mainly of pupil learning; 2) Creating Strong Clinical Practice and Induction to ensure that the P-12 setting and the university curriculum align and overlap so that theory and practice reinforce one another; and 3) Engaging the Arts and Sciences with Education to make teacher preparation—and pupil learning—everyone’s responsibility, because teacher candidates must learn not just subject matter but how to make subject matter teachable. When the TNE grant ended, CSUN continued to fund the work of the grant and developed a statistical model that could be used to evaluate the effects of various teacher preparation programs on student learning. The result was a value-added model that measures the impact of teacher preparation programs on K-12 pupil achievement in reading and math. In addition to the development of the statistical model, the study reveals the strong need for universities to have access to K-12 pupil achievement data in order to replicate and refine statistical models that will allow researchers to determine what are the key variables in teacher preparation that affect pupil learning and achievement.

Investment in Faculty Scholarship

In addition to the programs detailed above, CSUN has made a deliberate investment of significant resources in faculty scholarship and development over the last 10 years. For example, a snapshot of AY 2009/10 shows that Academic Affairs invested \$615,420 in grant/research support, \$834,000 in faculty sabbaticals, \$181,000 in reassigned time for research and approximately \$20,000 in leadership development programs. Each college invested additional resources, resulting in over \$800,000 spent on grant/research support, over \$2 million on research reassigned time, \$58,000 on leadership development and close to \$330,000 to support faculty travel for development and conferences.

A special investment in faculty scholarship is the University [Research Fellows Program](#), initiated by the Provost in 2007 after wide consultation with faculty. The colleges and Oviatt Library each select one research fellow a year who is supported with full reassignment from teaching for one semester plus an additional \$5,000 in research support (travel, equipment, books, etc.) for the purpose of pursuing research or a creative activity. Benefits to both the University and the selected faculty include creating a network of people to catalyze initiatives, launching new collaborations, expanding and strengthening the talent base of researchers and linking researchers with other disciplines and industry; and applying knowledge to relevant area problems. Additionally, the Fellows program has initiated a more vibrant research focus for the campus and mentors new scholars. In 2009/10, the University invested \$223,884 in the Faculty

Research Fellows program—\$89,442 coming from the Office of the Provost and \$134,442 coming from the colleges.

All told, in this single year, the University invested over \$3.5 million in faculty development through grants and research support.

These investments enhance and reflect the CSUN faculty's unusual commitment to research and scholarship. According to findings emerging from the most recent HERI faculty survey (see [Appendix F](#) for a full report of survey findings), CSUN respondents are typical in their personal commitment to teaching and service, but unusual in their strong commitment to research. Thus, they are more likely than respondents at the comparison institutions to say that research is essential or very important to them (80 percent vs. 68 percent). In addition, the CSUN respondents are disproportionately likely to have received institutional grants for research and to have been granted sabbatical leaves.

Faculty Recognition and Reward

Each year, the Faculty Senate sponsors an awards ceremony that recognizes [faculty achievement](#) and provides campus-wide awareness of the depth and breadth of faculty scholarship, excellence in teaching, mentoring, service and community involvement. Up to nine awards are given, carrying monetary prizes between \$1,200 and \$1,700 and recognizing distinguished teaching, counseling or librarianship; preeminent scholarly publication; exceptional creative accomplishments; extraordinary service and community service-learning. All faculty (both full-time and part-time) are eligible and nominations may come from almost any source. As you will see later in this essay, five of the Spring 2011 recipients were recognized for their work with students, underscoring the relationship between faculty and student success.

Finally, at the end of each academic year, President Koester hosts a reception for Faculty Governance Leadership at University House, celebrating the campus culture in which faculty and administration work collaboratively for the good of the University.

Support for Staff Development and Success

The financial environment in public higher education in California has been challenging, yet our 1,373 staff members are asked to maintain excellent customer service with a positive attitude in support of our academic mission, even when faced with decreased fiscal resources, fewer people and constant change. Amazingly, they do, and Cal State Northridge is committed to providing programs that support and nurture faculty and staff as people, understanding that such initiatives impact morale and commitment. Human Resources leads the way in creating a “culture of caring” on the campus, seeking to provide intrinsic rewards in the absence of raises and despite furloughs.

Programs for Staff Development

Human Resources (HR) provides dozens of programs annually in [support of faculty and staff](#):

Here is a sampler:

- *[Leadership Development Series](#)*: Over the past four years, nearly half of the academic and administrative leadership (deans, department chairs, directors and managers) have completed a semester-long program designed to build leadership, enhance community and collaborative problem-solving and develop an understanding and appreciation of differences among divisions. Participants hear directly from the President about her values and expectations for leaders. A side benefit of this cross-divisional series is that participants develop business relationships and friendships with people they otherwise would not meet.
- *Employee Assistance Program*: Since January 2008, [EAP](#) offers programs that appeal to a broad audience and meet the needs of a diverse community, including individual consultation with a licensed clinical psychologist who helps identify needs and suggest community professional resources for treatment and/or consultation. Most programming is presented by faculty, staff and administrators giving of their own time and talents for the benefit of the campus. For example, in 2010/11, an associate dean facilitated a popular Book Club; a staff registered nutritionist conducted a Diet and Nutrition Series; a faculty member conducted an exercise program; and a vice president co-led a Financial Planning Workshop with a dean.
- *Customized Training & Learning Experiences*: HR maintains a portfolio of formal training sessions for various employee classifications and skill levels and designs training to promote team building, performance management and customer service for units. Over the past two years, 539 staff members have participated in at least one of the 27 Professional Development [courses](#) offered.

For the past several years, HR has worked towards enriching the lives of its employees personally and professionally through the Culture of Caring program, the goal of which is to demonstrate to individual employees that they are valued and respected. It also means doing things to make work life more efficient, less complicated and less cumbersome by simplifying and streamlining processes. It shows the University cares about their work life, their home life, and their health and well-being.

A good example of this evolving culture and increased sense of community is seen in the recently completed year-long [Wellness Project](#), co-hosted by Kaiser Permanente and CalPERS. Supported by a \$250,000 grant from Kaiser, the project consisted of a large kickoff event followed by numerous health and wellness programs. Faculty and staff from 18 separate departments and divisions collaborated in planning and execution. It allowed the campus to discover previously unknown talent. CSUN was pleased when in May 2011, Kaiser asked to provide services on campus for another year, stating that CSUN has “demonstrated leadership support, experience in wellness, and offered a range of wellness programming.”

Finally, Information Technology offers a variety of ongoing [training opportunities](#) that contribute to a highly skilled workforce. Staff members have the chance to develop their technological skill sets, supporting not only their personal development but also University success.

We believe the success of these programs is evident in the growing number of staff and faculty who dedicate time and expertise to plan, facilitate and evaluate programs that are open to all employees. We also see a steady increase in the number of faculty who are attending workshops and seminars that previously had drawn the interest of staff members only.

In addition to programs offered by Human Resources, individual colleges and other academic units provide opportunities for staff members to attend professional conferences where they present workshops or simply benefit from participation. For example, in 2010/11 staff members from Disability Resources presented at the Association for the Tutoring Profession conference and staff from the College of Humanities were provided the opportunity to attend the CSU Academic Resources Conference. Each year CSUN supports the attendance many of our professional advising staff at the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) conference, assuring that the campus is up-to-date on best advising practices. Opportunities for staff professional development such as these support staff development, improving our student services and enhancing the campus environment.

Staff Recognition and Reward

For the past five years, HR has sponsored an annual [Recognition of Excellence](#) Awards ceremony to acknowledge the critical role of staff in meeting the University's mission and goals. This program includes a Presidential Award, 10 awards of merit and one team award, all of which are presented at a University-wide breakfast attended by hundreds of celebrants each June.

Additionally, HR publishes a guide, "[Recognition During Tough Economic Times](#)," to help academic and administrative leaders devise meaningful ways of rewarding employee performance in the current financial circumstances, when a raise is not often an option.

The University supports formal education for faculty and staff through the CSU [Fee Waiver](#) program. In Fall 2010, 826 faculty and staff participated in Fee Waiver; 79 were enrolled in graduate programs, while others were pursuing their bachelor's degrees or were taking courses for sheer enjoyment, from water aerobics to painting to tennis. A total of 142 employees have achieved degrees since their hire dates; of that number, 99 received degrees from a CSU. Of the total number, 79 received a promotion or salary increase; 57 received an increase/promotion in the Northridge specific group (almost 60 percent). While many use Fee Waiver to advance in their careers at CSUN, others use the program to support the college aspirations of spouses, significant others and children. HR estimates that in 2009/10 the Fee Waiver Program saved faculty and staff \$501,698; including dependants raises that figure to \$544,448.

How Staff and Faculty Support Student Success

Staff are often the "first face" students see in department and program offices and are relied on to provide accurate information, be supportive, welcoming and help students navigate the

sometimes confusing aspects of the campus. Cal State Northridge's investment in providing staff with appropriate training, development opportunities and support contributes to the degree of student satisfaction and success that will be more fully explored in the next essay.

Professional Advising Staff

Our staff advisors are highly trained professionals who take an holistic approach to student learning and success. They can provide intrusive advising and follow-up with students to ensure they remain on track. These positions require them to remain current on campus policies and procedures that impact students, an extremely difficult task in an ever-changing universe. Advisors are fluent in the use of electronic degree planning tools (DARS and MAP, described in our third essay) and effectively teach students how to use these resources. As a result, students receive accurate and timely guidance that often plays a role in their retention and success.

Advisors help students with an array of information-gathering and problem-solving activities including degree requirements, career counseling, graduate school advising, Financial Aid, campus service referrals, skills development, personal issues and referrals to faculty who share their areas of academic interest. While many advisors have specialized knowledge linked to the college/department for which they advise, overall they need to be generalists who can discuss multiple academic opportunities and help students consider their options. This creates a supportive environment for students where they can ask questions and be confident in the answers and referrals they receive.

Most of the professional staff advisors are housed and provide student services in the academic colleges, but many also are department-based. All are involved extensively in events and activities sponsored by Student Affairs, such as new student orientation. This places staff advisors in a unique position to help students transition successfully into the University by helping them draw connections between their academic and co-curricular experiences. Since 2008, the advising community has been engaged in assessment to ensure the quality and effectiveness of services (see discussion in next essay).

Department and college staff advisors serve as an important resource for faculty who advise students in their major and disseminate information to their classes. A number of the colleges (e.g., Humanities; Arts, Media, and Communication) offer training to faculty who are new to the advising arena and/or new to Cal State Northridge.

Department-based programs are of two types. The first, more traditional programs offer advising support in academic departments which supplements or replaces faculty advising in the major. The second lives primarily in Student Affairs and offers possibilities for staff to mentor and support students. One example is the "Clinical Access Shadowing Experience" program of the Klotz Student Health Center, in which clinical support staff (usually medical assistants or licensed vocational nurses) serve as mentors in an entry-level, co-curricular experience to better prepare students for upper-division courses, for advanced service learning opportunities and for research opportunities. One support staff member said, "Once students learn the routine, they are very helpful. I'm happy to work with them." This [CASE](#) program was selected as a poster

presentation for the 2011 Annual Meeting of the American College Health Association in Phoenix.

A second example is found in the Office of Student Development and International Programs, which is committed to mentoring and developing talent among student paraprofessional staff who exhibit interest in the field of higher education. Such students are provided the opportunity to shadow senior staff members and are given increasing responsibilities that allow them to develop leadership skills. Many of these students have gone on to assume senior staff positions at CSUN, mentoring other students in return, in the offices of Alumni Relations, Student Marketing and Communications, Commencement and Orientation, International Students, the University Student Union and in academic departments as part-time faculty.

Library Support for Student Research and Success

As noted above, Oviatt Library staff and faculty librarians support students through the hundreds of hours of mini-courses they teach each year at the request of faculty who want their students to become familiar with the Library and research. In addition, the Library provides services to support classroom instruction, including in-person and online reference services, computer workstations throughout the Library, in-Library and remote access to collections and databases, reserve services, interlibrary loan and a large building with numerous study spaces. During final exams each semester (excluding summer), the Library extends its hours and is open an average of 167 hours per week (compared to 83.25 hours per week during the semester), with librarians available to assist students with their end-of-semester assignments in person and through email, chat or text reference. This program was begun in 2008.

Additionally, the Library is dedicated to a comprehensive [information competence program](#), a core instructional pedagogy in 21st century higher education and a required competency in General Education at CSUN. The Library is key in the development of information competency skills around a set of seven standards:

- Determine the extent of information needed.
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently.
- Evaluate information and its sources critically.
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base.
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information.
- Access and use information ethically and legally.

Faculty Support for Student Research

One of the great strengths of a Cal State Northridge degree is the opportunity for interested students to participate in faculty-directed research. We believe that such experiences not only enrich the educational environment but prepare graduates who are ready to enter graduate programs or the workforce with a head start on their peers. The positive impact of student participation in faculty research has been well documented. These undergraduate research experiences may be one of the reasons why CSUN is first among over 500 master's level universities in the number of graduates who went on to earn Ph.D.s in the social sciences and

psychology. By supporting faculty research and scholarship we create an environment where research is valued and where faculty pass on their love of learning and discovery to their students.

Students are actively engaged in research across campus (see [Appendix G](#) for a partial list). Currently, 166 graduate and 513 undergraduate students are employed by faculty who have external research funding, with the majority employed to conduct research. Both the Spring 2007 and 2009 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) suggest that between one-quarter and one-third of graduating seniors have worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of a course requirement during their college years.¹

It is no surprise that Dr. Stephen Oppenheimer (Biology) was recognized in 2009 for his mentorship of students when he received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring from President Barack Obama. Oppenheimer has co-authored about 200 peer-reviewed papers, abstracts and presentations with more than 700 students—most of them undergrads. He has mentored some 200 long-term student researchers, many of them women and underrepresented minorities. In any given semester, from 50 to 100-plus students work in his lab.

In Fall 2011, Dr. Melanie Williams (Business Law) will offer a new class as part of the CSUN interdisciplinary minor in Sustainability, designed to help students learn about the environmental, equity and economic impacts of their actions and the best practices that should be applied in finding sustainable solutions. In the new class, 25 students will apply their foundational knowledge of sustainability practices to address a field case in the community. The course prepares students to analyze a problem with consideration of social justice, environmental and economic factors, and to apply best practices in sustainability to provide recommendations for solving a problem.

These are only two examples of student research experiences at Cal State Northridge. Other noteworthy instances include:

- Students work on the CSUN-UCLA Bridges to Stem Cell Research Project; to date, 19 students have participated.
- Faculty from the departments of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Math, Kinesiology and Psychology engage students in research, with [two large-scale projects](#), the Minority Access to Research Careers Undergraduate Training in Academic Research (MARC U*STAR, with 73 undergrad participants) and the Minority Biomedical Research Support Research Initiatives for Scientific Enhancement program (MBRS RISE, with 76 undergrad participants and 23 master's students). Both programs provide support for students to engage in research activities housed in laboratories in several different departments on campus. MARC U*STAR has a 100 percent graduation rate for participants, who have higher GPAs than the average CSUN student.

¹ As one might expect, seniors reporting participation in faculty research are disproportionately likely to be majoring in fields housed in the College of Science and Mathematics.

- Math student researchers work through a collaborative Brazilian-USA project and through the National Science Foundation–funded Preparing Undergraduates through Mentoring toward Ph.D.’s program, which offers undergraduate research experiences. Between 2005 and 2011 close to 150 undergraduate students and 15 graduate teaching assistants participated.
- The CSUN Research Infrastructure in Minority Institutions ([RIMI](#)) program, a federally funded initiative designed to help minority-serving institutions conduct research aimed at studying and reducing health disparities, provides students with substantial research experience. Psychology faculty and students form the core of RIMI activity. Psychology students also participate in the CSUN Career Opportunities in Research (COR) program, which provides research training for students from underrepresented groups in preparation for doctoral work.
- Geology faculty and students participate in research through the Robert Noyce Scholarship Program, focused on research to improve science education. Geology students also work on AfricaArray (an NSF/industry partnership) as well as on individual faculty research grants.
- Beginning in 2010/11 the Center for the Digital Humanities ([CDH](#)) began appointing student fellows to participate in faculty-led research projects. CDH fellows function as paid or unpaid assistants, depending on available funds. They are appointed at the discretion of faculty project leaders, but the eventual aim is to secure funding to make appointment a competitive process. The first two CDH student fellows began work in Spring 2011 on the Medieval English Lemmatisation Project.
- Five of the faculty members who were honored at the 2011 Honored Faculty Reception received recognition for their work with students in research and projects. Their efforts have led to student publications in peer-reviewed journals, professional publications and student success in pursuit of graduate education, including a 48 percent acceptance rate for students applying to medical and dental schools.

Success, Scalability and Sustainability

How can we measure the success of these programs which we believe create a synergy of support for and among faculty, staff and students? What data do we have? Insofar as these efforts are successful, how can we continue to build on their success into the future?

One measure of success is Cal State Northridge’s ability to both attract and retain highly qualified faculty and staff. We know, for example, that staff members are staying here longer than they were five years ago. In 2006, 68 percent of CSUN staff had more than five years of service and 43 percent had more than 10 years. In 2011 we find an increase: 73 percent of our employees have worked at the University more than five years and 47 percent more than 10 years. When we consider the impact of furloughs and the lack of pay raises between those years—and the perception that our employees would be driven out—the differences are remarkable: Not only did we retain our experienced workers, our employees in these higher seniority categories actually grew. When we consider the impact of the Fee Waiver program, we know that we have approximately 1,373 staff employees, and that 99 of them have obtained CSUN degrees since they were hired. Of this population, almost 60 percent have received some kind of promotion or salary increase since completing their degrees. Can we state unequivocally

that completion of the degree was the decisive factor in their career advancement? No, but we can be fairly certain that it didn't hurt!

Data from a Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey of CSUN faculty in Spring 2008 found that two-thirds of tenured and tenure-track respondents said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their overall job conditions. About the same percentage found that there is adequate support for faculty development, and even more felt there is adequate support for integrating technology into teaching. The HERI survey showed that faculty members are well engaged in areas of typical activities and responsibilities. For example, they are more likely than peers at similar institutions to publish articles and books on their research. The CSUN respondents are more likely than those at the comparison institutions to have published one or more books, monographs or manuals (44 percent vs. 33 percent), as well as one or more book chapters (58 percent vs. 43 percent) and at least five scholarly articles (58 percent vs. 42 percent). They are actively working to facilitate student engagement through teaching, mentorship and advising. They report being involved in the local community, working actively with students on research and engaging in active, participatory teaching models. For further analysis of the HERI results see [Appendix F](#).

As we assess the success of our efforts, we also must look for creative ways to sustain them, given the current economic environment. Such sustainability may well lie in new approaches to professional development and new definitions of rewards. For example, as demands on faculty increase, continuing to explore asynchronous and synchronous online learning opportunities for faculty is key. One Fall 2010 Faculty Learning Community followed a "hybrid" model, meeting live three times but continuing their discourse between sessions via Moodle, the University's Learning Management System. As noted previously, development opportunities—whether through Faculty Development, Academic First Year Experiences, stretch writing training or Information Technology—are available through websites and electronic versions of live presentations. In 2010/11, CSUN conducted over 100 faculty searches; half funded by President Koester and half by Provost Hellenbrand. This investment in faculty is particularly significant in the current economic climate when most of the CSU campuses are conducting few, if any, faculty searches. The renewal of the faculty is yet another example of the university's commitment to their future success.

As we look to the future, we will have to draw on the resources of creativity, ingenuity and community that have brought Cal State Northridge to its current place. It would be easy to simply throw up our hands and say, "We can't do anything more." That is not the CSUN culture. Just as after the 1994 earthquake we proclaimed, "Not just back, better!" as we move forward we will create processes and systems that better serve faculty, staff and students while—at the same time—make more efficient use of our resources.

Overall, it seems clear that the University is committed to faculty and staff and that faculty and staff are deeply committed to and engaged with the University. It is also clear that both contribute to student success. In times of increasing budget concerns in the state, this commitment by the University's core stakeholders makes what could be a cloudy future look bright.

Student Success through Engagement in Learning

Introduction

In our 2007 Institutional Proposal, both our primary concern and definition of success were reflected in the general research question we posed for Theme 1: What are the most effective approaches for enhancing the learning and engagement of students with our demographic and preparatory characteristics? From this followed a number of more specific tactical questions focusing on the role of improved advising, evolving electronic technologies and new initiatives for fostering student retention and learning, particularly among freshmen. In this third essay, you will find our answers to these questions, presented through an examination of the factors and initiatives that have contributed to a decade-long gain in undergraduate persistence to degree.

The other aspect of student success examined within the context of Theme 1 is CSUN's commitment to developing ever-more effective means of assessing student learning through iterative measurement of student learning outcomes (SLOs) for each of the University's degree programs. This section of the essay includes brief discussions of two ongoing initiatives designed to address—but not yet answer—issues raised in the proposal: the comparative effectiveness of online learning tools in use at CSUN and the study habits of our most successful students.

Finally, this key essay looks at Program Review, not only its current form and efficacy but the new directions it will be moving in over the next decade.

In order to contextualize the following essay, we provide this brief profile of CSUN's undergraduates. Nearly 60 percent of our students are female. We are a racially and culturally diverse campus. Among our Fall 2010 undergraduates, 34 percent are Hispanic, 28 percent are white, 11 percent are Asian American and 8 percent African American. Seven-tenths of our students receive some type of Financial Aid support and most of our students work at least 20 hours a week. The majority of our undergraduate students come from high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District and 70-75 percent of our First Time Freshmen enter needing remediation in Math, English or both.

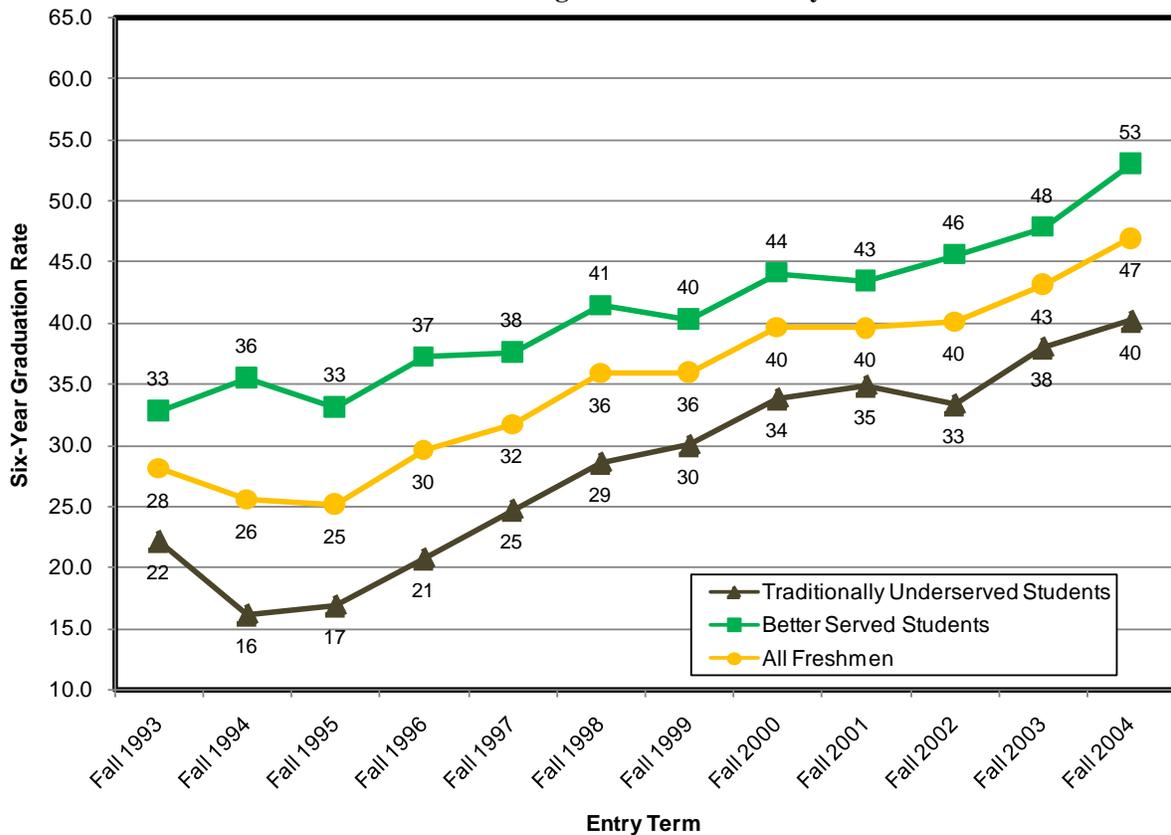
The key evidence of the University's educational effectiveness is the remarkable increase in the graduation rates of First Time Freshmen (FTF) over the last decade. The increase is a reflection of the persistent focus on student success that was initiated by President Koester and sustained by her and her leadership team. We have every confidence that the direction that has been set and followed over the last decade will continue under the leadership of our new President, when he or she arrives.

Undergraduate Retention and Persistence to Graduation

The data presented below in Table 1 and reviewed in more detail in [Appendix D](#) indicate that FTF who graduated from Cal State Northridge during the last decade substantially improved their persistence to degree, with traditionally underserved freshmen making particularly strong

strides.² The six-year graduation rates of the relevant FTF cohorts experienced two phases of strong growth. During the first phase, rates increased from 25 percent for Fall 1995 entrants to 40 percent for the Fall 2000 entrants, a gain of three-fifths. After a three-year period of relative stasis, the six-year graduation rate rose again among the two most recent cohorts for whom relevant data are available, from 40 percent to 47 percent. Furthermore, although the six-year graduation rates of traditionally underserved students lagged those of students from better-served backgrounds throughout the period, their graduation rate grew disproportionately through the early 2000s; the rate for traditionally underserved students in the Fall 2000 cohort is twice that of

Figure 1. Six-Year Graduation Rates of First Time Freshman Entrants by Racial and Ethnic Background and Fall Entry Term



similar students in the Fall 1995 cohort (34 percent vs. 17 percent). As a result, the gap in the rates of the traditionally underserved and better-served groups declined from 16 points for the 1995 cohort to 10 points for the 2000 cohort. A similar, albeit more modest, pattern of disproportionate growth is evident for “likely” graduates (see discussion in [Appendix D](#)).³

² Traditionally underserved students include those stemming from American Indian, Pacific Islander, African American and Latina/o backgrounds. All others are included in the “Better Served” grouping (i.e., Asian American, White, Other and Unknown).

³ “Likely” graduates are those who have graduated within a set period—three years for transfer students and six years for First Time Freshmen—or are still enrolled at the University in the semester following the end of the period in question.

In a recent report released by the [Education Trust](#), Cal State Northridge was identified as a top “gap closer,” meaning that it had substantially improved its six-year graduation rates and cut its graduation-rate gap in half during the 2002–07 period.

Different forces are responsible for the two periods of disproportionate growth outlined above. They are discussed in turn below.

Initiatives to Improve Graduation Rates Launched Early in the Last Decade

The impressive gains in graduation rates are the result of a series of initiatives put in place during the last decade. In the summer of 2000, shortly after Jolene Koester assumed the presidency of Cal State Northridge, the President agreed at the urging of key administrators in Academic Affairs to make “improving graduation rates” a major initiative. Her commitment was articulated in her first Convocation address in Fall 2000 and has been reiterated in each annual address.

...we need to do more to ensure that our students graduate in a timely way. I will tell you quite honestly that we lag far behind comparable institutions in our graduation rates. Students who come here as First Time Freshmen...do not graduate in a timely way. In fact, more than half of our entering freshmen never graduate Likewise, our retention rate—which is similar to that of comparable universities—is not what we hope for or wish.... During the last academic year, more than 2,000 enrolled students had already completed more than 120 units, but were still not ready for graduation.... As much as we should take pride that our students like it here and stick around for a long time, we have to recognize that we are creating barriers that make it difficult for them to get on with their lives.⁴

The consistency of the President’s emphasis on the need to improve graduation rates is of great importance on as large a campus as ours. Such consistency gave the University’s many divisions and departments the necessary impetus and confidence to launch the numerous small initiatives that benefited distinct groups of students during the last decade.

In Spring 2001, President Koester appointed a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF), co-chaired by then-Provost Louanne Kennedy and then-chair of Faculty Senate Michael Neubauer. (See the essay on [Learning as an Institution](#) above, for discussion of the process.) Its work during the following two years culminated in a February 2003 report laying out the parameters for a series of initiatives that subsequently guided campus activities to improve degree completion. The most important of these—those aimed at FTF and new transfer students—are briefly reviewed below. Equally as important as the specific initiatives was the change in campus climate wrought by discussions surrounding the work of the GRTF. This change was marked by a new emphasis on the importance of timely progress to degree.

⁴ As quoted in a keynote address delivered by Koester at the October 6-7, 2010, conference in Baltimore, Md., on “Time to Completion: How States and Systems Are Tackling the Time Dilemma.” The conference was sponsored by Jobs for the Future and the Southern Regional Educational Board.

The full range of policies and practices developed and institutionalized as a direct or indirect result of the GRTF report is summarized in [Table 2](#) in Appendix C. Included is a summary of a number of policy changes resulting from Chancellor's Office mandates since 2000. Some of the changes we feel have had the greatest impact are discussed below.

Revision of Undergraduate Advisement Practices

As discussed in our CPR report, the campus has dramatically improved academic advising services for students since the last WASC review in 2000. The GRTF recommended establishing consistent levels of service across the decentralized advising system, improving communication with students about policies and practices and developing new electronic tools for online advising services. These recommended changes were made with an eye toward improving advising support for new undergraduates, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and from groups traditionally underserved by higher education.

We have continued and improved the implementation of our policy that does not allow FTF to register until they meet with an advisor for an introductory session to discuss academic requirements and sensible class schedules. After initial course enrollment, freshman registration "holds" prevent students from making any schedule changes without first (re)consulting their advisors. The same procedures are followed during registration for the second semester of attendance. These rigid restrictions were instituted for several reasons: to foster students' engagement with academic advisors early in their academic careers, to promote registration in and completion of remedial writing and math courses during the first year and to promote participation in cohorted first-year experience programs, such as the [Living Learning Communities](#) and the [Freshman Connection](#).

Services for new transfer students also were enhanced following the GRTF report. First and foremost, all academic colleges implemented advising programs for new transfer students. Advisement is not mandatory, except for majors in Business and Economics, but must be available to all who wish to take advantage of it. In most cases, advising sessions are offered to new transfer students by college-based student service centers, although two colleges rely on faculty advisors instead. By Fall 2010, approximately 75 percent of incoming transfer students were participating in the advising programs. The University also has been offering [New Student Orientation](#) sessions specifically for transfer students. Participation in these sessions is not mandatory, but is considered valuable by participants.

Given the comprehensiveness of changes in advisement processes, there can be little doubt that they contributed to improvement in graduation rates during the first half of the 2000s. Further evidence of the success of the changes in advising comes from recent administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The 2007 survey found that 75 percent of freshman respondents considered the advising services they had received excellent or good, while 70 percent reported that they had discussed career plans with a faculty member or an advisor during the current school year. The latter is more widespread among senior respondents, with 79 percent reporting that they had talked to a faculty member or an advisor about their career plans within the last year. Seniors' perceptions of the effectiveness of advising were not

quite as positive: 64 percent considered the advising services they received good or excellent. Responses to the 2009 survey yielded similar levels of satisfaction with advising services. Although such findings are encouraging, we recognize that campus advising services continue to fail some students and we strive to remedy existing gaps as we become aware of them. We discuss assessment of advising efforts below.

The Educational Opportunity Program

New initiatives aimed at all incoming undergraduates have long been complemented by the Educational Opportunity Program ([EOP](#)), which provides enhanced holistic support services to selected students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. EOP provides a tiered structure of centrally provided services coupled with EOP-supported staff positions in the college-based Student Service Centers/EOP Satellites and in several critical service areas (e.g., Outreach and Recruitment, Financial Aid and the Learning Resource Center). The enhanced levels of service by these staff include: cohorted transitional programs that begin in the summer prior to first enrollment and continue through the students' second year; individual advising sessions rather than the group sessions provided to most new students; priority access to advising appointments during registration periods; designated staff members in campus support areas; and, most recently, more intrusive advising for students identified as being in academic jeopardy.

The transitional programs were launched in 1985 and are collectively known as [Summer Bridge](#). They are designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to the University, including training in reading, writing and study techniques. Summer Bridge has several options, including a three-semester "Residential" option and a one-semester "Commuter" option, both of which welcome students to campus in the summer before their first semester.⁵ Recent data, which appear in [CSUN by the Numbers](#),⁶ suggest that participation in EOP more generally, and Summer Bridge in particular, assists less prepared students in succeeding at a rate similar to that of better-prepared students. The one-year continuation rate for EOP-Summer Bridge students has fluctuated in recent years, but was 79 percent for the 2009 cohort (322 students). The equivalent rate for all 618 EOP students in the Fall 2009 entry cohort is 76 percent, compared to 74 percent for all freshmen entering in that year.

Technology in Support of Student Progress to Degree

Technology in support of student progress to degree has three components: technology tools in support of advising, in support of online and hybrid courses, and in support of retention efforts.

Roadmaps: Beginning in 2002, the CSU Chancellor's Office strongly recommended that all campuses develop and publish "roadmaps to the degree" in a readily accessible and centrally

⁵ Shorter versions of the program, known as "Fresh Start" and "Transfer Bridge," offer similar, intensive interventions during the summer prior to arrival on campus.

⁶ Once on the [CSUN by the Numbers](#) site, click on Retention Rates, Continuation Rates and By Freshman Experience on the left to find the relevant display.

archived format. This was also a recommendation of the GRTF. Cal State Northridge responded by developing two electronic versions of these course-by-course sequential roadmaps: a four- and five-year sequence of required and elective courses for FTF and two- and three-year graduation plans for First Time Transfer (FTT) students. Updated in 2007, these roadmaps are now posted on departmental websites as well as on a centrally maintained site for all [Degree Planning Guides](#). They are routinely utilized in advisement sessions.

Online Advisement Tools: Online tools to support advising include the Degree Progress Report (DPR) and My Academic Planner (MAP), designed to help students and advisors track academic progress toward graduation. The DPR provides a full picture of a student's progress. It shows the student's previous course history and how courses completed at other institutions are applicable to General Education and major requirements. Students and advisors are able to run "what if" DPRs in order to explore other majors and determine which major might lead to graduation more quickly. MAP is an interactive DPR that lets students plan courses for future semesters and see how they satisfy degree requirements. Both DPR and MAP undergo constant improvement and expansion through Admissions and Records in collaboration with IT, making them more user-friendly and more valuable to students planning their degrees and courses over time. Both feature [online tutorials](#) for students using them for the first time.

Online Advisement: Increasingly, technology is being used to complement the professional advisement services offered. For example, the College of Business and Economics Student Services Center/EOP Satellite and the Liberal Studies Program in the College of Humanities offer online advisement workshops. These workshops offer a convenient way of accessing advisement 24/7. They enable students to gain a better understanding of specific major, General Education and University requirements prior to meeting with an advisor. Better-informed students are able to take an active role in the advisement process, while the advisors they consult can serve more students and utilize their time more effectively and efficiently.

The College of Business and Economics offers three online advisement workshops. The Overview Workshop provides information to newly admitted transfer students and those considering changing majors. The Probation and Disqualification Workshops are designed to provide probationary/disqualified students with specific information relevant to their academic status and how to become more successful academically. A quiz is embedded at the end of each workshop to ensure students grasp the concepts presented. The Liberal Studies Program offers two online advisement workshops, one for students planning to become elementary or special education teachers and another for students interested in a liberal arts education.

[Ask Matty](#), the University's online Q&A system, has been serving students for the past three years, following a request from Associated Students for a system to supply quick answers to questions about the University and particularly about advising. This service is offered collaboratively through Student Outreach and Recruitment Services (SOARS) and the Office of Undergraduate Studies, and is intended for both prospective and current students. Users type in questions and the system's extensive database provides answers to around 500 of the most frequently asked questions. Common questions include: "Where do I go for academic advisement?" "How do I change majors?" "How do I get a parking permit?" If Matty's answer does not meet the student's need, the student is directed to email the Ask Matty staff, who

respond within two business days. The question and new answer may be added to the database, if relevant. Since its launch in October 2008, Ask Matty has received around 400,000 hits.

The Early Warning System (TEWS) is a prime example of using technology to foster student success. TEWS, pioneered on our campus by EOP, has expanded to serve additional student populations each year since 2005. It allows instructors to alert advising staff to students who appear to be at risk of failing a course for a variety of reasons (e.g., excessive class absences, missing assignments, poor test scores or health issues). Instructors use an easily accessed online system, linked to their class rosters, to send a “TEWS Alert” to advising staff. Advisers contact students, inquire about their progress and, as appropriate, direct them to on-campus support for further assistance. TEWS allows problems to be addressed speedily while there is still time to resolve them.

TEWS serves courses and programs with a higher number of at-risk students. During the 2010/11 academic year TEWS covered approximately 125 sections of developmental reading/writing courses, 66 sections of developmental mathematics classes and ten sections of the Freshman Seminar (UNIV 100). Plans are in place to expand TEWS to cover lower division courses in which more than 30 percent of the students receive a grade of “D” or below. Expansion of the program is limited by the demand it places on college advisors.

Hybrid and Online Courses: The last five years have seen significant growth in hybrid and online courses, providing greater flexibility and access for students. (To put this in context, it is enlightening to note that at CSUN’s last reaccreditation visit in 2000, online courses were so rare that the faculty who taught them had a group nickname, the “Cyber Seven.”) From Spring 2006 to Spring 2011 the number of online courses tripled to 156, and demand for them continues to grow. During the briefer Winter and Summer sessions, more than one-third of the curriculum is offered in an online format. The increase in online/hybrid course offerings has made it easier for students to complete courses while attending to work and family commitments.

In keeping with these recent shifts in course format, the Director of University Assessment established a faculty learning community in Fall 2010 designed to foster reflection on the pedagogical merits of online, hybrid and traditional courses as means of achieving student learning outcomes. Through monthly meetings and independent work, participants are designing pilot projects to assess the comparative effectiveness of hybrid, online and traditional course delivery modalities, with each project identifying a set of student learning outcomes that can be assessed across at least two delivery modalities with the aid of embedded signature assignments. Instruments for assessing these outcomes are also being designed. Projects currently under way are examining diverse issues, including the utility of supplementing face-to-face instruction with online instruction, identification of practices associated with more effective online learning and the conditions that foster online learning.

Initiatives Contributing to the Most Recent Improvements in Graduation Rates

High-Unit Students

California’s 2008 economic downturn, which gave rise to serious enrollment restrictions and large tuition increases on all CSU campuses, led Cal State Northridge to examine its procedures

for ensuring timely graduation and identifying any practices that might inadvertently encourage students not to make progress toward a degree. In hopes of accommodating additional new students by encouraging current students to graduate more expeditiously, a range of existing policies and procedures were either more strictly enforced or revised and new policies were adopted. These most recent graduation initiatives have a dual focus: a) solving the “SuperSenior” problem—i.e., students with 140 or more units when 120 are required for graduation—and b) providing academic support to new and continuing students. These initiatives, several of which are briefly described below, played an important role in the most recent gains in the six-year graduation rates of First Time Freshmen (see [Appendix D](#)). We expect they will continue to do so.

- Launched in late 2008, one practice encourages department chairs to do what they can to help seniors graduate by finding appropriate course substitutions for outstanding requirements and approving waivers where possible and non-detrimental to the student.
- Funds were distributed for department-identified bottleneck classes and schedule augmentation, especially at the gateway and capstone levels and in Freshman GE. In AY 2010/11, \$979,311 was distributed.
- Another 2008 initiative was implemented to foster expeditious graduation among seniors who have accumulated more than 130 units but have yet to submit the required paperwork to graduate. To “encourage” them to file for graduation, a “hardhold” is placed on the ability to register for classes of those students with more than 130 earned units but no graduation plan (the grad check) filed. Students are given six months’ notice of the need to use degree progress software (My Academic Planner) to plan their last semester(s), to meet with an advisor to complete the grad check procedures and to submit the documents to the Office of Admissions and Records. These efforts proved effective: In Spring 2008, CSUN had 1,917 students with more than 130 earned units although the majority had grad checks in place. By Fall 2010, there were 1,434 such students, a reduction of 25 percent. Even more telling, in Spring 2008 there were 612 students with more than 130 units but with no grad check. By Spring 2010, there were only 368 such students, a difference of 244, for a 40 percent decrease. Since then, the number of high-unit seniors has remained fairly steady, with warning letters going out to 397 late in the Fall 2010 term.
- Under the Administrative Graduation policy, passed by the Faculty Senate in 2010, students who accumulate over 140 earned units but refuse to follow the new procedures may be graduated “administratively” if they have completed all degree requirements and a major, regardless of whether it is the one they desire/declare. During the 2009/10 academic year, approximately 25 students were administratively graduated from CSUN. While some of them were not pleased with the new policy, others professed to not having known that they could graduate and were grateful.
- The new [Major and Minor Policy](#) approved by the Faculty Senate in 2010 has several components to discourage students from becoming high-unit seniors. Students are allowed to declare up to two majors and two minors provided the program can be completed in 140 units (with exceptions for higher-unit programs). Students must declare a major by the completion of 60 units. Late changes of majors or addition of a second major (after 90 units) require approval of the department chair and associate dean. Similar rules apply to late additions of minors.

- The newest arrow in the University’s graduation quiver is the requirement that the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam (UDWPE, a.k.a. WPE) must be attempted no later than the semester in which 75 units are completed. Students who have not taken the WPE by the completion of 75 units will have a hold placed on their subsequent registration. The intent of this policy is to identify students who do not pass the exam on their first attempt (20 percent) in order to direct them to support services in a timely manner.

Along with initiatives directed at seniors, the University changed policy in two other areas over the last two years, both of which we believe will contribute to future gains in the six-year graduation rate:

- Financial Aid requirements for Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) were tightened. Until 2008/09, students were routinely granted exceptions to existing Financial Aid SAP requirements (i.e., the percentage of courses a student must pass to continue receiving aid). Since requirements were tightened and strictly enforced, SAP appeals dropped from approximately 1,500 in 2008 to 420 in 2009 and 192 in 2010. Additionally, those appeals for exemption to the SAP requirement are scrutinized more thoroughly and the appeal denial rate increased from less than 10 percent to 40–45 percent. Federal SAP guidelines are currently being tightened. As the new standards, which are likely to exceed our own, are announced, the University will develop appropriate procedures to address them. In 2008, the University also lowered the maximum allowed Financial Aid units from 180 to 150.
- The ability for a student to repeat courses is strictly limited. In keeping with a CSU policy revision in August 2009, the number of courses students can repeat for grade forgiveness (16 units) or grade averaging (12 units) is limited, as is the number of times a single course may be repeated (one original and one repeat). Cal State Northridge further decided to limit the ability of students to enroll in a course for purposes of repeat until just days before the start of classes each semester. This has had an even more significant impact because most classes are full before the start of the semester, with the result that repeating a class has become extremely difficult. Consequently, anecdotal evidence suggests, students are “trying harder” to pass courses the first time they attempt them. Initial data show a sharp decrease in the number of students repeating classes: from 5,447 in Fall 2008 to 3,117 in Fall 2010, a drop of 2,330. Conservatively calculated at 2,000 fewer repeats, this drop represents a savings of \$333,340 to CSUN over the two-year period.⁷ From another vantage point, the new policy can be said to have yielded 2,000 additional seats for students attempting specific courses for the first time.

The New General Education Program

A key recommendation of the GRTF was that the University rethink its existing GE program and bring it into line with those on other CSU campuses. Although work on a reconceptualized

⁷ The figures cited in this paragraph double-count students who repeat more than one course during a semester. The dollar savings shown are calculated by multiplying 2,000 by \$166.67 (the per student cost in an average 30-student class).

program began shortly after the report appeared, the new GE took longer to be implemented than most other GRTF recommendations (see essay on [Learning as an Institution](#)). The new program was rolled out in Fall 2006; thus, we have yet to feel its full effect. Initial evidence indicates, however, that entering freshmen subject to the new GE requirements are more likely to graduate with no more than 125 units, versus those entering and graduating during comparable periods but subject to the old GE requirements (60 percent vs. 52 percent; see Table 1 in [Appendix H](#)).

CSUN's new GE package requires 48 semester units of coursework, a 10-unit reduction from the old program. Part of the core requirements (i.e., basic subjects, Title 5 and five broad subject explorations) is an intensive writing (WI) component required in all upper-division GE courses. An information competency requirement was added during the revision. We believe that the reduction in GE units will allow students greater flexibility in exploring multiple interests, adding a minor or changing majors within the newly established parameters. Initial evidence suggests that baccalaureate degree recipients subject to the new GE package are somewhat more likely to claim a completed minor at graduation than comparable degree recipients subject to the old GE requirements (13.2 percent vs. 11.5 percent; see Table 2 in [Appendix H](#)).

Initiatives Designed to Improve Freshman Persistence

In contrast to the steady gains in graduation rates, the one-year continuation rate of FTF entering CSUN during the Fall 1999-2008 period describes an arc that began at 70 percent, rose to 76 percent for the cohorts entering in the 2004/05 period and then fell off relatively sharply, ending up at 71 percent for the Fall 2008 entry cohort. The rate bounced back to 74 percent for the Fall 2009 entry cohort, however (see Figure 18 and Table 4 in [Appendix D](#)).

Shifts in the percentage of entering freshmen ready for college-level work are closely related to these shifts in the one-year continuation rate. Thus, during the first half of the 2000s, when the continuation rate was rising, the percentage of FTF entering CSUN fully proficient in mathematics and writing (and therefore deemed ready for college work) grew from 23 percent to 28 percent, dropping off modestly thereafter. Similarly, the percentage arriving with remedial needs in both writing and mathematics also declined during the first half of the decade, dropping from 49 to 42 percent; since then, however, the percentage has risen again to 46 percent.⁸ Throughout the 2000s, FTF from traditionally underserved groups have been less likely than those from better-served groups to enter fully proficient in mathematics and writing and more likely to enter needing remediation in both subjects. Since such students have come to CSUN in disproportionate numbers during the substantial growth in size of the post-2004 freshman classes, the increased remedial needs they brought with them are an important contributory factor to the 2006–08 drop-off in the overall one-year continuation rate. The links between these trends are outlined in more detail in [Appendix D](#).

⁸ When the two subjects are considered separately, the majority of our entering freshmen arrive needing remediation in English or mathematics (64 percent and 56 percent for the Fall 2009 entry cohort; see Table 1 in [Appendix D](#)).

Addressing the Remedial Needs of Entering Freshmen

Given that the CSU requires all freshmen to complete their remedial work within one year of entry, the need to provide programs that make this possible continues to be one of the biggest challenges we face.

The most radical change in remediation is currently under way in our writing program. Developmental (remedial) Writing has been in existence for nearly two decades and is housed in five academic departments: Asian American Studies, Central American Studies, Chicana/o Studies, English and Pan-African Studies. At entry, new freshmen are placed in one of two developmental courses based on their score on the English Placement Test. Should their performance on this required test be adequate, they enroll in a college-level GE writing course directly. Recently compiled data indicate that students completing one or both of the remedial reading (097) and writing (098) courses perform just as well in GE writing as students who enter fully prepared for college work and go directly into GE Writing (see Table 3 in [Appendix H](#)), strongly suggesting that CSUN's remedial courses in reading and writing take underprepared high school graduates and prepare them for college work within one year.

Following the lead of several other CSU campuses, we hope to strengthen our freshman reading/writing programs still further by full adoption of the "[stretch composition](#)" approach. Offered here as a pilot during 2010/11 to 300 students, the new approach will be fully implemented by Fall 2012. The stretch approach involves a two-semester credit-bearing course that avoids the stigma of "remedial" work and allows students more time to develop their reading and writing skills by "stretching" the time they have to do so from one semester to two. The success of the stretch pilot will be assessed through traditional quantitative measures of student success (e.g., their one-year continuation rate), as well as through more qualitative feedback from faculty members about their students' reactions to the new approach.

Like Developmental Writing, [Developmental Math](#) has been in place since the 1980s, designed to help students prepare for college-level mathematics courses if they were unable to earn a passing score on the Entry Level Mathematics Exam (ELM). The program offers two Developmental Mathematics courses—Math 092 (3 units) and Math 093 (5 units)—and supports student learning with in-class tutors in every section. In addition, the program operates a tutoring lab. Recent annual reports for the program indicate that pass rates have remained largely unchanged, despite the significantly larger numbers of FTF served in recent years.

For the past several years, CSUN has offered summer programs designed to assist freshmen who require developmental coursework in Math and/or Reading at college entry. Since 2008, we have offered an innovative six-week "[Early Start](#)" program for developmental math or reading linked to a Freshman Seminar class. Although the numbers involved are small, preliminary research indicates that students completing "Early Start" perform well in their subsequent GE courses and attempt them in a timely manner. They are also likely to persist into a second year.

The Learning Resource Center ([LRC](#)) is responsible for offering *Supplemental Instruction* ([SI](#)) at CSUN and has been offering it experimentally since 1998. SI classes are peer-facilitated group study sessions designed to assist students in mastering the subject matter covered in

classes with consistently low pass rates. Over the years, SI has been offered as an option for many courses (e.g., Chemistry 100; Biology 100, 106, 360; History 270 and Economics 160, 161 and 310). In 2005, the LRC adopted a new approach and began offering mandatory, co-requisite SI classes linked to Math 102 (College Algebra), a frequently attempted course that has consistently high failure rates.

Although students taking Math 102 in conjunction with an SI class are consistently more likely than students not participating in SI to earn passing grades in 102, few students attempted SI prior to Fall 2005. During the Fall 2002-Spring 2005 period, an average of 20 students per term took 102 in conjunction with SI. Since Fall 2005, in contrast, an average of 253 students per term have taken the 102-SI combination. Of these students, 29 percent earned A or B grades and 49 percent earned D, F, or U grades. The comparable figures for students taking 102 without SI since Fall 2005 are 22 percent and 59 percent, respectively (see Table 4 in [Appendix H](#)). Clearly, therefore, the 102-SI combination improves student performance, which is why it will continue to be required of some students. Nonetheless, additional work is needed to address our students' remaining difficulties with Math 102 and similar high D-F-U courses.

One innovative direction we are pursuing recently received support through a Next Generation Learning Challenges grant from EDUCAUSE. CSUN was one of only 29 institutions of higher education out of an initial 600 applications to receive funding. The \$250,000 grant will support campus expansion of an innovative technology-enhanced hybrid course model that has significantly improved completion and content mastery outcomes in Math 103, Mathematical Models for Business, the GE class in which it has been implemented. The course model couples a parent course (e.g., College Algebra) with a 1-unit hybrid lab. The course includes common lecture notes, practice exams, and online homework assignments with instant grading and feedback capabilities. The hybrid lab has two components: (1) a contact hour for group work on the content of the parent course; and (2) individualized online remediation for each student.

Prior to implementation fewer than 34 percent of students attempting 103 received a final grade of C or better; post-implementation more than 66 percent of students achieve a C or better in Math 103. The funding will allow the 103 technology-enhanced hybrid approach to serve as a model for similarly innovative approaches to several other CSUN courses and for equivalent courses on two other CSU campuses (Long Beach and Humboldt), as well as at an area community college. On our campus, the 103 model is being applied to Math 104 (Trigonometry) and Math 105 (Pre-calculus), the first of which has been among our high D-F-U courses in recent years.

Academic First Year Experiences Programs

The one area in which the recent decline in the one-year continuation rate of CSUN's FTF has been minimal is among new students attempting University 100, a freshman seminar introduced in Fall 1999. Gains in persistence are even more consistently evident among students participating in the Freshman Connection, a cohorted learning community for first-year students

that combines U100 with two other courses.⁹ Various elements of Academic First Year Experiences programs ([AFYE](#)) were unified under one umbrella in 2006. The unified program is led by the Director of Academic First Year Experiences. The Freshman Connection and University 100 are key aspects of this larger set of programs that also includes the [Freshman Common Reading Program](#). Collectively, they help faculty and students link curricular and co-curricular learning.

University 100 (the [Freshman Seminar](#)) is a three-unit baccalaureate-level college success class offering General Education credit in the category of Lifelong Learning. The course fosters both academic and personal success by helping students understand that traditional study skills (such as note-taking, test-taking, active reading and academic integrity) have essential and relevant counterparts outside the classroom in non-academic life. The course now reaches about 900 freshmen in fall semesters, another 125 in spring semesters and 300-400 in various summer programs. The one-year continuation rate for students enrolled in U100 during the academic year is 77 percent for the 2009 cohort.

Begun in Fall 2005 with a few linked courses, [The Freshman Connection](#) now encompasses approximately 10 small learning communities enrolling almost 500 students in two or more courses commonly taken by First Time Freshmen. Instructors collaborate before and during the target semester to develop shared approaches to freshman success, including common syllabus language, opportunities for cross-disciplinary assignments and an emphasis on the dual components of learning—academic and social. The one-year continuation rate for the program is at 75 percent for the 2009 cohort.

Transfer Student Success

As discussed in [Appendix D](#), transfer students completing their studies during the first year of the last decade displayed a high level of performance, with underserved and better-served students performing equally well. This pattern persisted throughout the rest of the decade, with modest improvement in several areas of persistence. Three-year and likely graduation rates experienced two periods of growth among cohorts entering during the 1996–2006 period, and despite some decline at other times, showed net growth from the beginning to the end of the period under study.

The three-year and likely graduation rates of traditionally underserved transfer students modestly lagged those of better-served students throughout the period considered, with the lag less pronounced among likely graduates. This pattern suggests that upper-division transfer students from traditionally underserved backgrounds are as likely to graduate as students from other backgrounds; it just takes them a bit longer to arrive at the finish line.

CSUN's transfer students clearly benefitted from the last decade's initiatives, some of which have been described above. In addition, a number of programs aimed particularly at them

⁹ Recent one-year continuation rates for University 100 students and those involved in Freshman Connection are shown in [CSUN by the Numbers](#). Once on the site, click on Retention Rates, Continuation Rates, and By Freshman Experience, on the left to find the relevant display.

contribute to their high levels of persistence, which are among the highest in the CSU (see [Appendix I](#)). For example, the University offers programs specifically geared towards improving the transfer student experience. Special upper-division GE sections are set aside for FTT only, combining the disciplinary learning with “how to do University.”

In April 2011 the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs started a campus conversation on transfer student success. In addition to hearing from a panel of transfer students, attendees discussed and shared how University departments and programs currently seek to meet the unique needs of transfer students. A primary goal of this dialogue is to consider strategies for serving transfer students in ways that promote student success and persistence to graduation.

Recruitment and outreach practices for transfer students, including veterans, have been studied and evaluated, with an eye towards designing [materials](#) that increase the ease and efficiency with which students from local community colleges are able to enroll at CSUN.

Graduate and Post-baccalaureate Student Success

CSUN is distinctive in its willingness to respond to the educational needs of the region with carefully crafted post-baccalaureate programs. Such programs, which prepare working adults for significant professional roles in the regional economy, are developed with teams of CSUN faculty and practitioners working collaboratively to define learning goals. For example, two recently developed master’s degrees in assistive technologies and therapies, one in engineering and one in human services, respond to the needs of the regional biotech/biomed industries and the need for well-prepared human services professionals in the health sciences. The two programs were developed collaboratively so that students in each program benefit from shared courses and projects with students from the complementary program: They learn the human aspects of disabilities, the personal adaptation required to using assistive technologies and the innovative conceptual strategies required to enhance the quality of life.

Another example is CSUN’s master’s of public administration program ([MPA](#)), redesigned in recent years to offer a core that provides a solid foundation in public sector management and elective tracks that allow students to specialize in fields like nonprofit management, health care administration and performance management. A team of faculty and senior Los Angeles County human resources leadership is developing a new graduate credit certificate/elective. It offers options for public sector professionals to earn the master’s degree (increasingly a requirement for professional advancement in this field) while allowing those with master’s degrees to add to their professional range by taking one of the graduate credit certificate programs. The MPA program is offered throughout the region as requested by various city and county agencies. CSUN works closely with these agencies to schedule the program to meet their needs. Graduates hold senior positions in city and county government in the region.

The University also offers fully online programs for mid-career professionals when warranted, including a master’s of [communication disorders and sciences](#) with practica arranged at a site near each student. All of our cohorted master’s degrees have high on-time graduation rates (ranging over the last several years from about 85 to 100 percent). Graduates of the online Comm Disorders degree have a first-time pass rate of 96 percent on their national exam—well above the national average. Online programs are supported with a strong technical team who

work with faculty on the range of available technical options and applications to achieve the educational outcomes they intend.

In September 2005, Senate Bill 724 authorized the CSU to award the Doctor of Education degree to meet the need for well-prepared public schools and community colleges administrators. Three years later, CSUN’s Ed.D. application was approved, authorizing the University to offer a professional doctorate using an applied methodology to prepare scholar-practitioners in educational leadership. As created here, the [Ed.D.](#) program features separate cohorts for K-12 school and community college candidates admitted on alternating years. Cohort 1 (K-12) has 23 students who are on track to finish the program in August 2011. Cohort 2 (community college) has 21 students and Cohort 3 has 23 students, all in good standing. We have admitted 22 students to start their studies in August 2011 as Cohort 4. While the majority of students are serving in various leadership or instructional capacities during their studies, we have only limited anecdotal information on the service they are providing to the region. Once students graduate, we have designed an assessment methodology that will provide data about their specific impact on student achievement and system reform.

Our master’s of [social work](#) plays a vital role in the preparation of social work professional practitioners and, in addition, provides the community with hours of service from both the students and their MSW-trained volunteer field instructors. The practicum allows students to interact with special populations with a variety of needs and problems (veterans with substance abuse issues; PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury sufferers; students at risk of school failure, abuse and neglect; patients diagnosed with mental illness; children in the foster care system; homeless adults and families; and the elderly are a few examples). Participating agencies are located in the San Fernando and Antelope valleys, Los Angeles County and Ventura County.

As the grid below shows, the program contributes thousands of hours to the community, consistent with the University’s mission, goals and objectives.

Academic Year	Community Field Instructor Hours	Foundation Year Student Hours in Field	Advanced Year Student Hours in Field	Total Hours of Community Work
2010/11	6,510	70,000	46,200	116,200

CSUN invests in innovative programming to respond to regional needs, crafting all aspects (such as format, scheduling, support services, delivery site and mode) to ensure student achievement and successful degree completion.

Assessment of Student Learning

Evidence of student learning is obtained through curricular assessment within the academic structure of the University and co-curricular assessment within Student Affairs, but, in truth, both reach across the campus. This section summarizes the breadth of student learning outcomes and depth of assessment in both arenas, with links to supporting documentation and evidence of

recent growth and evolution. Supplementary information is provided by two national survey initiatives, the Freshman Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The first, which is administered annually, provides valuable insight into the attitudes and preparation of our incoming freshmen,¹⁰ while the biennial administration of the NSSE provides information on student satisfaction and the degree to which our students engage in activities deemed to contribute to engagement with their studies. In keeping with a CSU mandate, the campus has also participated, more or less annually since 2005, in the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). Thus far, however, small sample sizes and variation in student performance have restricted the usefulness of the information provided.

Departmental, College and University Assessment

Within curricular environments, evidence of student learning through assessment comes from degree conferring programs, college-level assessment and University projects. Information about assessment, including goals and best practices, is disseminated through the [Academic Assessment website](#).

Beginning around 2005 we began building a sustainable assessment infrastructure. Academic departments have assessment liaisons, many of whom receive reassigned time to coordinate the work of their colleagues. Under the leadership of the Director of Academic Assessment and Program Review (a faculty member on reassigned time in the Office of Undergraduate Studies), liaisons share best practices through monthly meetings and an annual assessment retreat.

Five-year assessment plans have been in place since 2006, laying out a timetable for student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment. (Fall 2011 will see the second round of these five-year plans prepared.) We have found these plans to be fluid documents, often revised as a result of annual assessment activities. Departments and programs provide yearly reports summarizing their assessment activities utilizing a template that has evolved over the years in keeping with changes in assessment activities. The template makes it easier to compile results and prepare a report on academic assessment across the University, in effect creating a broad overview of the previous year's accomplishments.

Active, direct SLO assessment and other evidence gathering occur in most departments and programs. In 2009/10, for example, 53 of our 68 departments actively assessed one or more SLOs, either through direct embedded assessment or indirect assessment using surveys or other strategies. Over the last half-decade, we have moved beyond initial phases of assessment and have begun "closing the loop," that is, making changes in curriculum based on findings. Departments have used assessment results to improve their academic programs in various ways, including revision of course content and assignments (20 departments) and introduction of new courses and other curriculum revisions (14). Assessment plans also are revised based on results, either through the introduction of a new instrument (16 departments), revision of program

¹⁰ Comparison of Freshman Survey data collected during the 2007–2009 period, for example, alerted us to important changes in the economic circumstances of our incoming students as a result of the economic downturn in 2008. The Fall 2009 survey report, which is posted in the [Special Reports](#) section of the IR website, provides additional detail on these changes. Detailed reports on recent administrations of the NSSE are also posted there.

learning outcomes (6), revision of the entire assessment plan (7) or formation of an assessment committee/faculty meetings focusing on assessment (5).

Some examples of curricular changes based on assessment results include:

- The Department of Communication Studies is developing a “Plagiarism Tool Kit” for students who take their major and GE classes. It can be used across campus.
- Department of Philosophy faculty who teach the critical thinking gateway course created a progression of assignments and detailed prompts to help students meet the established SLOs. The senior seminar increased its use of student presentations and peer critiques as program assessment tools.
- In the Department of Social Work’s master’s program, course rubrics for SWRK 635 and SWRK 521 have been revised. Each new course rubric is more consistent with the use of a common signature assignment.

College-based assessment has increased for some years. Examples include:

- Both the College of Engineering and Computer Science and the College of Health and Human Development have developed learning outcomes for ethical and professional behavior and lifelong learning.
- The College of Humanities has completed an assessment of critical thinking.

Academic assessment at the University level is still in its early stages. CSUN’s Fundamental Learning Competencies were developed during Spring 2008 in response to a Chancellor’s Office executive order, [EO 1033](#), which committed the CSU to AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes. The University’s [Fundamental Learning Competencies](#) attempt to overcome obstacles to the development of a University-wide picture of student learning. They describe the knowledge, skills and abilities every CSUN graduate will have the opportunity to acquire and develop. Although they align with the Essential Learning Outcomes, they reflect our unique interpretation of those outcomes.

As promised in the Institutional Proposal, and noted in our CPR report, we continue to track the progress of several cohorts of promising freshmen. Known as the *Learning Habits Project*, this effort was launched in Fall 2007, designed to track over four to six years several groups of newly enrolled students likely to succeed at the University. Project participants are among Cal State Northridge’s most highly qualified incoming students: at entry, all have high school GPAs of at least 3.5 or are fully proficient in mathematics and English (writing).

Since 2007, we have gathered responses from approximately 200 students to seven end-of-term surveys that pose open-ended questions, and we have conducted in-depth interviews with most of them during their first and third years here. In addition, the *Learning Habits Project* just finished first-year interviews with another 200 new freshmen and will collect their responses to a second end-of-term survey. Responsibility for the end-of-term surveys rests with the Office of Institutional Research; the tape-recorded face-to-face interviews are conducted by faculty and staff involved in an ongoing Learning Habits Seminar.

While we are still in the midst of data collection, two recent reports summarize selected sets of data focusing on particularly effective instructor practices (see the [Special Reports](#) section of the Institutional Research website).

One of the first products of this project is a brochure, [Developing Effective Learning Strategies: A Key to Success at CSUN](#), created in 2008/09 and reprinted in Spring 2011. It represents an initial effort to publicize student learning strategies from which all incoming freshmen might benefit.

Assessment of Advising

As reported above, the University made major changes in advising over the last decade. In 2008, a working group of advisors and administrators attended an Advising Assessment Institute through the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), during which they developed an advising assessment plan. The plan is designed to assess selected learning in advising sessions of students reaching milestone periods in their enrollment. Implementation began with an online assessment of First Time Freshmen who entered in Fall 2009 and continues annually with that same cohort of students as they progress through the University.

Out of a Fall 2009 FTF class of 4,195, 449 students responded to the initial advising survey. Results show very good mastery of all intended learning outcomes except for two: 1) understanding the policy on completing developmental writing and mathematics during the first year of enrollment [Executive Order 665], and 2) understanding how to read and interpret a Degree Progress Report (DPR). The leadership of the Student Service Centers/EOP Satellites reviewed the results and adjusted the content of initial advising workshops to impart a greater understanding of EO665 and its ramifications. It was also agreed that advising sessions for students going into their second semester would place greater emphasis on how to use DPRs as planning tools. In the survey of students who entered in Fall 2010, the adjustments regarding EO665 seem to have paid off—students reported understanding its ramifications at a much higher level than was the case for the previous entry cohort. Adjustments made regarding DPRs did improve the students' understanding of how to use and interpret the tool, but still not at a satisfactory level. The review of assessment results and adjustment of practices and policies is ongoing as new information is collected. Advising assessment will expand in the coming year with the addition of surveys for second year students who were admitted as freshmen and first year students admitted as transfers.

Co-curricular Assessment

Over the past several years, the Division of Student Affairs has seen tremendous growth in the assessment of co-curricular activities and programs with professional staff at all levels becoming increasingly sophisticated in using focus groups, surveys and interviews to collect data. This change in organizational practice began several years ago, after Student Affairs revised its mission statement and added a divisional statement of values and beliefs to better align with the University's mission statement and the President's Priorities. In 2001/02 the division initiated an [annual planning process](#) in which departments develop goals, strategies to achieve the goals and, among other things, methods of assessing student learning outcomes. By 2006 the division had

also developed a statement of [long-term strategic priorities](#) and launched its first iteration of common learning themes. Revised in September 2009, the [common learning themes](#) have become the means by which the various student learning outcomes of individual departments are grouped together to facilitate an understanding of the division's overall impact on student learning. In a continuing refinement of assessment activity, rubrics have been developed for each Common Learning Theme in order to anchor cross-divisional measurements of student outcomes. Further, the Common Learning Themes have been [articulated](#) with the University's Fundamental Learning Competencies.

In 2007/08 the division began to utilize a commercial software product, StudentVoice, to administer surveys and collect data for assessment purposes. A review of the divisional StudentVoice site documents the impressive growth in assessment projects. In the 2007/08 academic year, there were 56 assessment projects recorded on the Student Voice dashboard. In contrast, during the 2010/11 academic year, a total of 189 assessment projects have been launched in Student Affairs, with 17,803 respondents participating over a three-month period in 2011. The project list includes a diverse set of assessment efforts including pre-test/post-test measurements and instant surveys at the conclusion of programs. But this is not the only method by which assessment occurs in Student Affairs. Dozens of focus groups are utilized each year with the intent of learning more about student perceptions, satisfaction with and suggestions for improvement on a host of topics including websites, communication efforts and programming.

The division has a strong record of using insights derived through assessment to improve practice as the following two examples illustrate:

Career and Academic Pathways

This interactive web-based application—tested with First Time Freshmen starting in Summer 2010 and expanded to all students in Spring 2011—allows students to explore majors and occupations, make meaningful choices and generate academic and career plans by discovering more about their strengths, values and interests. Improvements to the [Career and Academic Pathways site](#) are driven by student focus groups and survey feedback. As a result of reviewing the data, additional occupations were added to the database and improvements were made related to the look, feel and navigation of the site. Student feedback highlighted the need for additional content related to majors, as well as development of a refined decision-making tool. Ongoing assessment of efficacy and satisfaction is embedded in the further development of this project as data collected from students has been invaluable in creating a user-friendly web application that is responsive to student needs.

Disability Resources and Educational Services

The Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE), a graduation requirement for Cal State Northridge students, has proven to be a significant hurdle for students with disabilities. From 2006/07 through 2009/10 the passage rate for students with disabilities ranged from 66 percent to 69 percent. Interviews with students, counselors and academic mentors revealed that students need assistance in developing disability management strategies and ways to overcome difficulties in scanning and synthesizing the mainly narrative content in a timed setting. Using these data, [Disability Resources and Educational Services](#) developed the “Upper Division

Writing Proficiency Exam and Writing Handbook,” which synthesizes a variety of materials including the three phases of writing, time management and reducing test-taking anxiety. Preliminary results are quite good with an 82 percent passage rate for students with disabilities taking the exam in 2010/11.

Program Review

Finally, this key essay looks at Program Review, not only its current form and efficacy, but the new directions it will be moving in over the next decade.

Review of Academic Programs

Required of all CSU campuses by the Chancellor’s Office (CO), Program Review at CSUN is based on a combination of self-evaluation/reflection and outside evaluation by representatives of peer institutions. Part of its thrust is creative problem-solving about how to use internal and external resources effectively to address curricular, faculty and student needs. To this end, it integrates assessment of student learning. Its goals are to assure program quality and effectiveness, react to changes in disciplinary content and environments and inform strategic planning.

The schedule for review of accredited and non-accredited programs is submitted to the CO annually. Accredited programs follow the process required by their individual accreditation agencies and are exempt from the campus Program Review process. All other degree programs complete the process on a six-year cycle, supported by the Office of Academic Assessment and Program Review, which provides access to a range of relevant documents and resources. The [Program Review](#) website houses recently revised documents, including an accounting of program review policy and procedures, a description of the program review cycle and a description of the distribution of tasks.

The Office of Assessment and Program Review coordinates external review teams and visits and helps develop the final Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), created for each degree program in conjunction with its college and the University. These documents provide the basis for the periodic reports submitted to the Chancellor’s Office.

The self-study portion is the responsibility of the program under review. Over the last half-dozen years, guidelines for the self-study have been dramatically reshaped to emphasize assessment and strategic planning while encouraging the department/program to focus on those issues or themes it most cares about. In this way, it takes direction from WASC’s theme-based approach to reaccreditation self studies.

Initial experiences with the new processes show that a proper launch, as well as effective communication with departmental representatives, is crucial for success. Initiated in August 2008, the launch meeting serves departments about to embark on a self study and includes the chair of each program, relevant faculty, the University’s Program Review Coordinator (a faculty member on reassigned time) and the director of Academic Assessment and Program Review. Communication between the Program Review Coordinator and faculty in charge of the review significantly reduces roadblocks to timely completion of the self study. External reviewers are

selected from similar programs and universities, primarily in California in an effort to keep costs down. (Outside reviewers are each paid \$500 in addition to expenses.) Guidelines for external reviewer visits are provided to each program, as are guidelines for reviewers to assist them in the content and construction of their reports. Members of the University's primary curriculum bodies—the Educational Policies Committee and the Graduate Studies Committee—are assigned as relevant to each review and report outcomes to their committees.

Copies of all current academic Program Reviews are kept in the Office of Undergraduate Studies until the subsequent review makes them obsolete. Each file contains the self-study, the Visiting Team's report and a copy of the MOU.

Student Affairs Program Review

The Division of Student Affairs regularly assesses and reviews the quality and effectiveness of its programs, services and SLOs. Over the last decade, the division has been involved in initiatives that assist in creating a strong foundation for development of systematic programming. Elements of this foundational work include:

- development of division-wide [long-term strategic priorities](#), which include learning outcomes and a planning cycle;
- establishment of division-wide [common student learning outcomes](#) and rubrics;
- annual goal development and review utilizing strategic priorities, departmental goals, strategies, outcomes and assessment plans; and
- [annual year-end reports](#), utilizing strategic priorities, department goals, strategies, methodology, results/findings and action to be taken.

The primary methodology underlying the program review utilizes the [Council for the Advancement of Standards \(CAS\)](#) functional area standards and guidelines. CAS is a consortium of 34 professional associations that work collaboratively to develop and disseminate standards and guidelines while encouraging self-assessment, benchmarking and continuous quality improvement. CAS promotes programs and student services that enhance the quality of student learning, student development and the co-curricular environment. Some functional areas/departments in Student Affairs utilize an alternative method of review, as outlined on the SA Program Review Schedule. Members of the Student Affairs Leadership Team are trained in the PR methodology most appropriate for their areas.

Response to Recommendations Made by WASC Visiting Team

The third recommendation made by the WASC Visiting Team—that CSUN work to align institutional and financial planning in the areas of information technology and university advancement—is discussed below.

Information Technology

CSUN currently is engaged in a collaborative process to create [*IT Vision@2015*](#), a campus digital master plan, similar to the physical master plan discussed in the *Learning as an Institution* theme. During 2010/11, discussions to create this vision were held with all constituents of the University—students, faculty, staff, and administrators—resulting in iterative drafts of the plan. When completed, *IT Vision@2015* will establish a collective point of view for how Cal State Northridge will use technology to support our core mission and University planning priorities. The plan will articulate how we will evolve the way we use technology as well as how we expect technology developments to impact teaching, learning and campus operations.

While this planning document is still a work in progress, a number of initial themes have begun to emerge around the increasing reliance on technology tools, services and network, technology-rich learning spaces, digital information assets for teaching and research, data-driven decision making and consumer technologies. The final report is expected to be available by the end of 2011.

The University has begun moving in the direction indicated by some of these themes. For example, new standard technology for all centrally scheduled classrooms includes a thin client computer which receives a standard set of applications from a central server. This not only ensures a common computer environment in every classroom but allows rapid updating of this standard “image” when new applications are requested. This model frees the local technical staff to spend more time assisting faculty in their use of technology and less time managing the hardware and software in the classroom. In another example, the University has partnered with Google to provide students with University-branded gmail accounts for their email. As future IT plans are developed based on *IT Vision@2015*, the University will find other ways to ensure that IT staff and services focus on effectively supporting the core mission of teaching, learning and research.

University Advancement

The University continues to fully support a robust University Advancement function. To that end, during the 2010/11 year the following special initiatives were launched:

- We hired a consultant to develop for the University a unified communications platform. The work of the consultant is still ongoing with testing of ideas related to the platform continuing during the summer. The goal is to develop a visual and narrative style manual for the campus.
- University Advancement, along with the President and the Provost, established a Task Force on Engagement that consists of 18 highly influential alumni and civic leaders. The Task Force was charged with developing a set of recommendations for the University to achieve greater levels of engagement by alumni and the community for the purpose of encouraging more philanthropy and donor support. As of this writing, the Task Force’s report has been finalized and an implementation plan is under development.
- In addition, in 2010/11 the University asked the senior advisor for Campus Advancement at the system level of the California State University to work directly with University

Advancement and the college deans to improve planning and processes in fundraising at both the college and campus levels.

- Finally, the vice president for University Advancement and the senior advisor for Campus Advancement at the CSU are working together to develop a three-year budget plan to be submitted to the President. The three-year plan will prioritize the financial and positional needs of the division on its goals.

Conclusion

When we began the reaccreditation process in 2006, Provost Harry Hellenbrand urged the campus to use it as an opportunity to further already-established goals. Rather than thinking of reaccreditation as something external and imposed on the University, he suggested, we should regard it as an opportunity to re-examine the work we've undertaken in order to further our mission, evaluate its efficacy and strengthen and build on our successes. With this in mind, the Steering Committee challenged the campus community to identify that which is most important to us. They did, identifying values and programs that led naturally to our three overarching themes: *Learning as an Institution*, *Faculty and Staff Support for University Success* and *Student Success through Engagement in Learning*. Over the intervening five years, we re-discovered the value inherent in reflection and the need to incorporate lessons learned into future endeavors. The end result is this Educational Effectiveness Review document.

The years between our last reaccreditation and the current process coincide with the decade-plus that Jolene Koester served as our President. Her leadership in advancing the University as a learning centered institution that serves both students and a changing region cannot be overestimated. In her very first [Convocation Address](#) in August 2000 she reminded the campus community that “we need to do more to ensure that our students graduate in a timely way...Our mission statement affirms our belief that this university exists to enable students to realize their educational goals. We need to recognize that for the vast majority of our students, one of those goals is graduation. Otherwise, we are wasting our valuable resources and, more importantly, we are not fulfilling the important moral and societal obligation we have taken on to allow our students to make the best use of their talents and energy.”

Our report shows that we have accepted the challenge. The self study explains how we as an institution have learned about student learning and the tremendous progress we have made in supporting student success. And as the report amply shows, this “we” consists of large numbers of staff, faculty and administrators from across the campus. We demonstrate that this success is the result of purposeful, pragmatic and intentional actions undertaken over the last decade. We reflect on our actions and assess their effects. We show that people—students, faculty, staff and administrators—are at the heart of the institution, and we study how their well-being supports the University. Even more to the point, we describe how we learned to operationalize this knowledge, both in planning and in developing our personnel. In short, we demonstrate the educational effectiveness of California State University, Northridge.

Even as the WASC reaccreditation process draws to a close the University is advancing--moving forward on important issues. We are committed to multivariate student assessment. We continue to study the efficacy of programs, including how our GE reform impacts time to degree and degree completion. We have started to study how transfer students should be supported. We continue to look seriously at how to thrive as an institution in the face of eroding public funds for higher education. We remain committed to serving the needs of the region, providing well-prepared graduates who enter the workforce and relevant graduate programs for post-baccalaureate education. Most visibly, the opening of the [Valley Performing Arts Center](#) in January 2011 has further cemented CSUN's place as the intellectual, cultural, and economic heart of the San Fernando Valley. We truly are a campus that has learned to advance through collaboration, a realistic vision of the future and a culture of mutual respect.

Our Provost is given to saying, "This is California. The earth will quake, as will state funding." Notwithstanding that, the Northridge way is to move ahead through visionary thinking grounded in pragmatism and accepting of change.