

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

Introduction: From Suburban College to Urban University

California State University, Northridge celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2008. In those 50 years, the institution has, indeed, grown from a suburban college of 3,300 students in 17 temporary structures taking classes concentrated in Education to an urban university with approximately 35,000 students in 96 buildings that house more than 5,500 courses each term. In those 50 years, the institution matured from an extension of the normal school at Los Angeles State College to the “intellectual, economic and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond.” In those 50 years, the institution changed from a virtually all-white, majority male, traditionally-aged student body to one of the most diverse in the nation.

San Fernando Valley State College was projected in *The California Master Plan for Higher Education* as a polytechnic-like school that would prepare local managers and employ a teaching force largely without Ph.D.s. Along with its sister campuses, it followed a path in the 1960s and 1970s of hiring Ph.D.-trained faculty who focused mainly on disciplines, not region. By the late 1960s, emerging regional needs in relevant programs in business, education and health services began to refocus the university. Renamed California State University, Northridge in 1972, we now embrace both regionality and disciplinarity, having introduced new ethnically focused disciplines and majors over the years (e.g. Pan African Studies, Chicano/a Studies, and Jewish Studies), while retaining such traditional disciplines as Philosophy, English Literature and Biology. Complementing each other, such new and traditional programs address the needs of a highly diverse student body with a wide range of interests and educational expectations.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, Cal State Northridge is regionally focused and nationally recognized. At the same time, changing University demographics—coupled with our mission to improve K-12 education—have placed pedagogical research among our priorities. We embrace this new emphasis because teaching and learning are subjects worthy of sophisticated study. Accountability studies, exploration of how pupils learn and teachers teach and a growing focus on understanding why students stay or leave, have transformed CSUN into a learning-centered university. Our participation in *Teachers for a New Era* is just one example of our national leadership in addressing these challenges. (See Appendix A for a description of selected terms and programs.)

Since 1958, Cal State Northridge has served as the educational bridge to a better life for tens of thousands of students. The color of the students’ skins may be different, the language their parents speak at home may be different, their preparation for college often is inadequate. All the same, there is no difference between what the institution did for Robert Hilburn, who graduated in San Fernando Valley State College’s first class and went on to become the rock music critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, and the 18-year-old freshman who will graduate to become the hip-hop critic of *LATimes.com*. No difference between what the institution did for Yvonne Chan, who received her master’s degree in Special Education in 1976 and went on to become the principal of the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in the San Fernando Valley, and the current liberal studies major who will use her degrees to help shape the future of public education.

A different world; the same relevant, quality education for our students and service to our community.

A. Setting the Institution's Context and Relating the Proposal to the Standards

A.1: Institutional Context

California State University, Northridge is a public, urban, comprehensive university (Carnegie Classification Master's I) that provides undergraduate and graduate education on a campus that reflects the rich diversity of the region. The University is at the forefront of teacher preparation as well as professional programs in California. Our graduates are well prepared to succeed in post-baccalaureate education and to become leaders in their chosen fields.

The University is located on a 356-acre campus in the San Fernando Valley, at the northern edge of the city of Los Angeles. The Valley—as it is known by most—has an approximate population of 1.8 million and would be the sixth largest city in the United States were it independent of Los Angeles. The U.S. Education Department ranks Northridge among the top 100 universities nationwide in graduating Hispanic students at the bachelor's and master's levels. The University also places highly in *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* and *Black Issues in Higher Education* rankings for degrees awarded. CSUN was first among 529 master's level universities in the number of graduates who went on to earn Ph.D.s in the social sciences and psychology between 1996 and 2005, according to the National Science Foundation. The University also ranked second in mathematics and among the top dozen similar campuses in biology, computer sciences, engineering and physical sciences. CSUN is the leading public university in California preparing students to obtain teaching credentials, granting more than all of the University of California campuses combined. In 2006-07, pass rates on RICA and CBEST (see Appendix A) were 100 percent, top tier in California.

Northridge is one of 23 campuses in the California State University (CSU) and offers 64 bachelor's degrees and 50 master's degrees. (See Appendix F.) We are preparing to offer doctoral degree programs in education (Fall 2008), physical therapy and audiology. One of the largest campuses in the system, CSUN enrolls over 35,000 students. The numbers of new transfer students and new freshmen entering the University each fall have been largely equivalent in recent years, with First Time Freshmen (4,132) outnumbering First Time Transfers (3,990) in fall 2007, followed by new graduate students (1,688).

The University is organized in five administrative divisions: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Administration and Finance, Information Technology and University Advancement, a fairly typical structure but one that is characterized here by cross-divisional collaboration and cooperation. Academic Affairs is organized into nine academic colleges: the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication; the College of Business and Economics; the Michael D. Eisner College of Education; the College of Engineering and Computer Science; the Tseng College of Extended Learning; and the Colleges of Health and Human Development, Humanities, Science and Mathematics and Social and Behavioral Sciences. The Oviatt Library is part of Academic Affairs.

Nearly 60 percent of our students receive some form of Financial Aid. In addition, our NSSE (see Appendix A) data suggest that many of our students work at least half-time, especially by the time they are seniors, and that 55-60 percent are first-generation college students.

About 80 percent come from Los Angeles County and reflect the rich diversity of the greater Los Angeles area (see Summary Data Form in Appendix F). With 5 percent of our student body international students, the University consistently ranks in the top 25 for master's level institutions based on the size of its foreign student population. In addition, the University educates the largest

number of Armenian students outside of Armenia and ranks either first or second—depending on the year—in enrollment of Central American students and Jewish students. One of the first mainstream universities to accept deaf students in the 1960s, we now host the largest mainstreamed deaf student populations in the United States, supported by our National Center on Deafness. Our excellent support services and reputation as the most physically accessible CSU campus result in a large and thriving disabled student population.

Immediate and long-term institutional challenges

The challenges faced by the University as it begins its sixth decade are similar to those faced by other public educational institutions in California and can be understood only in that context. Foremost is the interplay between constraints on public financial support for education and the bifurcating needs of our students for intensive developmental work and increasingly technical pre-professional preparation. California continues to grow and has an increasingly heterogeneous population; over half of its public school children come from households where English is not the first language spoken at home. Californians are divided about the value of public support for higher education as it vies for funding among worthy contenders in social services and K-12. A major challenge is the continued problem faced by urban schools in preparing students for university-level work and the implications of this for student retention at the post-secondary level. While CSUN has made significant strides in this regard (see section B.1 below), we continue to address this concern aggressively. At the same time, a good many of our students arrive fully prepared to tackle college-level work, including honors programs and pre-graduate studies.

We are beginning to deal forthrightly with the paradoxes and challenges of state support. Although such support is nearly the highest in the nation, student fees are among the lowest. CSUN has begun the transition from being a “state-supported” institution to being “state-assisted,” leading to a new focus on fundraising, extension and joint public business/service ventures. Thus, our view of fundraising is broad and includes many forms of resource enhancement—grants and contracts, University Corporation revenues, and programming offered through the Tseng College of Extended Learning (ExL). Our development efforts must underwrite our service to regional needs. This requires us to rethink our approach to applied research and venture partnerships.

A.2 & A.3: Preliminary Self-Review under the Standards for Accreditation and Process for Proposal Development and Leadership Involvement

The start of the reaccreditation process could not have come at a more auspicious time for Cal State Northridge: The evaluation and assessment that underlie the process dovetail with our own strategic planning processes, the new physical master plan for campus (Envision 2035; see Appendix A) and the reconsideration of the decade-old CSU system-wide strategic plan. As a result, we consider this WASC examination to be an important complement to planning and assessment processes already in place and which increasingly engage faculty, staff and administrators. Over the last seven years, the institution has developed a high degree of awareness of “what really matters on our campus.” Both short-term planning and strategic planning—and the concomitant collection and use of evidence—are rapidly becoming part of the institutional culture.

This process emerged from our tradition of shared governance. In his fall 2005 annual message, Provost Harry Hellenbrand prepared the campus for involvement in the reaccreditation process. President Jolene Koester gave WASC reaccreditation a prominent place in her 2006 convocation address. One month later, the co-chairs of the Steering Committee were selected—one an academic

dean and the other a former faculty president actively involved in many areas of the University, from developmental courses to athletics. Working together, the co-chairs, provost, accreditation liaison officer (ALO) and Faculty Senate president identified potential Committee members who broadly represent the campus. (See Appendix B.) The 17-member committee met biweekly during the latter part of fall 2006 and all of spring 2007. Members consulted with their constituencies. The co-chairs met with relevant campus groups throughout the spring and summer to discuss the process and garner input: a Faculty Retreat workshop in January; President's Cabinet in February and July; department-based assessment liaisons in February; Faculty Senate and Senate Executive Committee in March; Council of Chairs in September; Provost's Council in February and July; and Chairs/Deans Retreat in August. The Institutional Proposal Working Draft was shared across campus in the fall and feedback, comments and suggestions were solicited: President's Cabinet and Provost's Council in September; Senate Executive Committee in September and Faculty Senate in October; Student Affairs Leadership Team in September; two campus-wide open forums and Associated Students in early October. Additionally, the campus community had access since summer to the CSUN reaccreditation website, <http://www.csun.edu/~instrsch/wasc/index.html>, where feedback on the proposal was actively encouraged.

The campus' February 2 meeting on *Access to Excellence*, the CSU system-wide strategic planning effort noted above (see Appendix A) was of major importance to the reaccreditation effort. Nearly 200 faculty, staff, students and administrators participated in five theme-based discussions and two plenary sessions. These discussions were a fruitful source of ideas about what most matters to our academic community; comments/suggestions were recorded and later summarized by Provost Hellenbrand in a 37-page letter to the Chancellor's Office (available at www.csun.edu/academic.affairs/access_to_excellence.pdf). A 15-member campus delegation participated in the subsequent statewide planning summit for two days in April 2007, where strategic priorities were refined.

Participants in the February 2 meeting were invited to complete a preliminary version of a survey on potential WASC themes. The results helped to refine the "Survey Monkey" survey that the campus community completed over the next month. By May 25, 2007 when the site closed, 2,281 students (1 in 14 enrolled in spring 2007) had completed the survey, as had 376 faculty members (1 in 5) and 351 staff members (1 in 5). The survey results played a major role in informing the selection of self-study themes. (See Appendix C for a summary of the survey results.)

Various members of the Steering Committee, as well as the President, Provost and ALO, attended one or both of the WASC-sponsored meetings in Pomona (January) and San Jose (April), using the settings to begin consolidation of ideas into themes. Thus, the Steering Committee had a solid foundation from which to begin and complete a preliminary self review, with the aid of the detailed worksheets developed by WASC. What we found was a strong convergence of our internal planning processes with the WASC Standards. Implicitly, the Standards have been central to campus efforts over the last seven years as we have begun to institutionalize assessment and direct evidence of student learning into our planning and actions.

In reviewing the Standards with an eye toward issues of capacity, we became convinced that under Standards 1, 2, and 4, the University has made significant progress since 2000. As noted above, Cal State Northridge has a "high degree of awareness of what really matters on our campus" (Standard 1). President Koester, Provost Hellenbrand and Student Affairs Vice President Terry Piper lead our commitment to advancing as a learning-centered university. Along with faculty leadership,

administrative leadership instituted processes and procedures to facilitate student success—the “infrastructure to support learning” (Standard 2). We found that we are increasingly engaged in a deliberate and coordinated planning process, based on evidence and assessment (Standard 4). Finally, our consideration of “Core Resources” (Standard 3) in relation to capacity led us to identify Theme 2 as the major focus of the CPR.

Our planning consists of two major internal components: presidential and strategic planning priorities and the academic planning process. At her first convocation (August 25, 2000), President Koester identified four priorities: increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree, strengthen internal and external connections, create a more user-friendly campus and improve fundraising. These presidential priorities became the planning priorities for the campus and have held over the succeeding seven years, now cast in the context of advancing as a more learning-centered university. As we embrace this more comprehensive planning process, “learning-centered” expands to include academic excellence and student success:

- academic excellence (the excellence of faculty and student scholarship, infrastructure and support);
- student engagement and success;
- campus and community collaboration;
- user-friendly business processes that facilitate the work of faculty and staff and that benefit our students; and
- resource enhancement through grants and contracts, earnings of the University Corporation and programs offered through Extended Learning.

The institution engages in planning that is directed by Annual Planning Cycle Guidelines. (See Appendix A.) The University Budget and Planning Group (UPBG) serves as the hub that connects and integrates the planning processes across the five divisions of the institution. Planning processes are evidence-based, driven by both internal and CSU requirements.

The campus commitment to improving graduation rates and reducing time to degree speaks directly to WASC Standards 1, 2 and 3. Indeed, the WASC process separates questions that are a holistic endeavor for us. As an example, the more that assessment tells us about what keeps students in school and what learning processes work best, the more able we are to re-align instruction and services and make better use of core resources. Concerted efforts in new student orientation, first-year programming, intervention by advisors and realignment/redesign of support services have contributed to notable improvement over several years.

Our commitment to strengthen internal and external connections addresses WASC Standards 1 and 3. The campus mission and vision statements declare that “we will be the leader in enhancing the educational, cultural and economic resources of our region” and in building “alliances with the community.” While we look outward toward expanding our centrality in meeting the region’s needs, we look inward to “creating a community of shared values in which faculty, students, staff, administrators and alumni will experience personal satisfaction and pride in our collective achievements.”

Campus commitment to fundraising addresses WASC Standards 2 and 3. Attracting outside funding is imperative to better achieve educational goals through core functions. We carefully consider how we develop and apply resources and organizational structures to assure sustainability. For example, because CSU is funded at only a fraction of the University of California marginal formula for

graduate assistants, CSUN will need to increase grants and contracts—with the associated dollars for graduate students—in order to advance more minority students for master’s and doctoral work.

B. Framing the Process to Connect the Capacity and Educational Effectiveness Reviews

B.1 Overview and Goals for the Accreditation Review Process

The last time California State University, Northridge was accredited, we titled our self study *Becoming a Learning-Centered University*. Since that time, we believe we have made significant progress in our 2000 goals of promoting student achievement, utilizing technology to enhance learning and expanding and strengthening our use of assessment. As noted in Section A.2/A.3 above, these efforts are united in the overarching presidential theme of learning-centeredness. During the current review, we will focus on *Advancing as a Learning-Centered University* and have identified these themes to guide us:

- *Student Success through Engagement in Learning*
- *Faculty and Staff Support for University Success*
- *Learning as an Institution*

The themes constitute an interrelated response to the last review and provide structure for initiatives we plan for the future. They allow us to answer the questions, “Where are we now?” “What are we doing right?” and “What indicators do we use to tell us what we have achieved?” They also will direct us forward, providing answers to the questions, “Where do we want to be?” “How do we get there?” “How will we measure progress toward our goals?” and “How will we know we’ve arrived?” The themes provide the framework.

Theme 1: Student Success through Engagement in Learning

In the 2000 review, the WASC team applauded campus initiatives to strengthen student academic success and noted our supporting assessment efforts. Yet the team also expressed concern that ongoing initiatives and plans did not comprehensively address student retention and graduation. Partially in response to this criticism, a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF) was established in 2001. Composed of representatives of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, including faculty, administrators, staff and students, the Task Force was charged with reviewing data, identifying major barriers to graduation and making recommendations on what the University might do to help students graduate. The 2003 GRTF report is the source of several important initiatives aimed at fostering student success through engagement in learning. Improved academic advising is a major issue. The 2006-07 Academic Advisement Report prepared by the Office of Undergraduate Studies describes efforts already underway and efforts planned for the future to improve the efficacy of academic advising.

Student advisement and communication: During the last few years, campus-wide efforts have improved student advisement and communication, targeting specific populations. Most of the initiatives were developed through collaboration, primarily between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Information Technology. Examples abound: All departments now have 4- and 5-year degree plans posted on their college websites. Department and college websites are much improved, as is the portal through which students connect with the University electronically (see Appendix A). Communication with students, under the leadership of Student Affairs, is an intentional mixture of traditional mail, email, telephone and face-to-face exchanges. An Academic Affairs/Student Affairs

committee is examining advising policies and practices for consistency and leads efforts to engage the advising community in ongoing dialogue. On the horizon are new initiatives building on this initial success: “Ask the Matador,” an interactive advisement resource for basic questions; compilation and disbursement of advisement models and best practices by Undergraduate Studies, the Educational Opportunity Program/Advising Resource Center and the college-based Student Services Centers; online career exploration focused on the relationship between the worlds of academics and work; and further iterations of our interactive Degree Progress Report (DPR; see Appendix A) which allows students to know accurately what courses they have taken and still need so that they do not expend resources haphazardly.

Learning in General Education and the major: During recent years, the focus in this area has been on technology and assessment in support of learning. Additionally, faculty and programs continue to expand student learning beyond the classroom. Following Carol Twigg’s methodology, faculty are redesigning multiple-section courses into larger lectures with virtual components, both to salvage funding for other academic projects and to allow students to vary the pace and means of learning. An active program of curriculum redesign/transformation is underway for these courses and others, supported by the Provost through mini-grants and through the expanding Office of Online Instruction. Technology suffuses the curriculum. So does assessment: Since 2006, all departments and programs submit annual assessments of how well they meet their defined Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). The degree to which resource allocation in Academic Affairs is increasingly driven by the data in these plans is one of the ways in which we will monitor success in this area.

A new GE package (revised from 58 to 48 units), which went into effect in fall 2006, is more cohesive and easier to understand. Part of this reform is a plan to certify/recertify GE courses every six years, with the recertification of Basic Subjects completed in spring 2007. In the next few years, our efforts in GE will incorporate two approaches to assessment: 1) continual individual course assessment to show how each course meets the SLOs of that section of GE and 2) assessment of the overarching Learning Themes (see Appendix A) identified as those we expect students to develop through their GE experiences. A newly initiated “Learning Habits Project,” in particular, should yield insight into students’ gains in the latter. This multi-pronged, in-depth examination of how several groups of newly enrolled freshmen develop and learn over their years here will involve a series of in-depth interviews as well as the collection of a wide range of data on them (e.g., selected class assignments, information on background characteristics and course-taking patterns, and term-by-term responses to a small set of open-ended questions). During its first two years, the project will focus on lower division GE.

Learning outside the classroom: Learning takes place beyond the walls of the classroom. In 2001, Student Affairs (SA) added meaning to that proposition by beginning a transformation from service-defined to student learning-defined. Each SA department replaced operational goals with learning outcome goals and assessment plans. Focusing on learning allows SA professionals to cross traditional boundaries separating inside and outside of the classroom. Students benefit from more educationally purposeful programs and activities when they are in an environment of continuous reinforcement and collaboration among SA professionals, faculty and academic staff.

Cal State Northridge is a CSU leader in the development and implementation of service-learning courses and co-curricular volunteer opportunities, two of many ways we offer students an opportunity to learn beyond the classroom. During the next few years, we plan to expand community service-learning into a more broadly defined civic engagement program, including creation of a

Certificate in Social Involvement, which will incorporate other programs across divisions to help institutionalize civic learning as part of the University experience. An active Center on Innovative & Engaged Learning Opportunities (CIELO; see Appendix A), which works with faculty interested in new learning-centered pedagogies, will be a key player in these new initiatives. We will gauge their success by the numbers of faculty participating in the programs and the dissemination of these pedagogies into the classroom.

Dimensions of Retention: One of the questions asked by the WASC reviewers in 2000 centered on retention and graduation. Special attention was paid to the issue of our seemingly scattershot approach—lots of little initiatives with no coordination. We’ve improved. Again, examples abound: In the past several years, we have concentrated our retention efforts on incoming freshmen—at first through an interdivisional, ad hoc First Year Experience Committee and more recently through the Academic First Year Experience programs which, under a single director, coordinate all Academic Affairs retention and engagement initiatives. Of course, programs such as Summer Bridge continue to thrive after 22 years, expanding to a commuter version in 1998. Now, however, added to those successful programs are the Freshman Seminar (U100), Freshman Connection, Freshman Convocation and Freshman Common Reading, as well as the Living Learning Communities in residence halls (see Appendix A). All of these collaborate across divisions. We plan greater coordination in developmental reading/writing courses, and are currently examining new approaches to better serve the nearly three-fourths of FTF enrolling in fall 2007 who need developmental work in reading, writing and/or mathematics. We will continue to monitor both student performance and the one-year continuation rates for these programs. On the horizon: An expanded summer Freshman Connection is being designed to better prepare students for university work before their first “real” semester here by combining developmental work with the Freshman Seminar. A Freshman SWAT “super-committee” began conversations in fall 2007 designed to enhance freshman activities, making them cohesive and timely from point of admission through the end of the first semester.

Research Questions for Theme 1: Our research questions are driven by goals; they are answered, by evidence that assessment yields. So, we ask a general question within which we nest tactical questions: What are the most effective approaches for enhancing the learning and engagement of students with our demographic and preparatory characteristics? We strive to be in the top quartile of comparably classified institutions when we make comparisons.

From this flows tactical questions:

- A. To what extent can improved advising and support services reduce the time to degree?
- B. To what extent is technology helping us in teaching, learning and advising, specifically by making online courses available and by making self-help tutorials and conferences available on line? Which online learning tools are being used effectively in teaching and learning?

Because non-retention from the first to second year is substantial, we focus questions on that as well.

- C. How does special programming contribute to student success—FTF and FTT?
- D. How effective are our initiatives in engaging and retaining students and what evidence do we have of that effectiveness? How can what we learn be applied to other student populations?
- E. What are the academic practices and study habits of successful learners, those who persist with at least a 2.5 GPA?

We expect to answer these questions, and others which we might discover, as we engage in the self-study process.

Theme 2: *Faculty and Staff Support for University Success*

The roles played by faculty and staff are central to our commitment to student success and therefore essential to University success. This theme will be explored in two ways: support *by* faculty and staff and support *for* faculty and staff. In simplest terms, we intend to aggregate data about the time, money and infrastructure invested in faculty and staff development to support student learning.

This theme has a dual focus because the University's ability to attract, retain and provide support for faculty and staff creates the context within which they, in turn, support and promote student success. Faculty and staff support has a spiraling effect on our ability to achieve our institutional mission, while institutional support enables faculty and staff to excel in their roles and facilitates the academic success of our students. This success then contributes to the development of the region we serve (80 percent of our students remain within the region after graduation), which results in greater community support for CSUN.

Learning through faculty and student research; developing the scholar/practitioner: To enhance our research culture, we support faculty research with an increasing emphasis on research that directly includes student involvement. For example, in fall 2007, we expanded our revived GE Honors program to match students with faculty to support their research or in community service. New emphasis also is being placed on enhanced undergraduate student participation in the ongoing, university-wide student research competition. We believe, and research confirms, that undergraduate students who have hands-on research opportunities guided by a professor have greater success at the university, in graduate education and in professional careers. Nevertheless, studies also indicate that there are many variables that must be considered in this equation. We intend to test and build on this hypothesis by comparing control groups of students who have and have not participated in faculty-directed research.

The University also is expanding graduate programs and related research opportunities. The changing world of work and the impact of the global economy suggest there is increasing demand for both traditional graduate programs and innovative and/or cross-disciplinary degrees that address new and emerging fields in which employment opportunities are growing. Recognition of the need for advanced studies and the resources to support expansion is creating opportunities to develop new programs, such as our master's degrees in Social Work and Engineering Management. Along with these applied programs, we offer a wide variety of traditional academic programs with thriving enrollment such as master of arts degrees in Linguistics and in Creative Writing. We also are expanding our master's-level offerings through the Tseng College of Extended Learning where we have developed new degree programs in Public Administration, Knowledge Management and Taxation, featuring innovative approaches, completely online programs and the same stringent standards as our campus-based traditional degrees.

In particular, we are developing three applied doctoral programs—educational leadership, physical therapy and audiology, all of which are being created to support the University's mission and respond to the needs of our region; these programs also will enhance the opportunities for collaborative faculty and student learning. One of our challenges is that doctoral study is costly. Planning and collaboration will be required to create and sustain these programs while fully supporting the existing bachelor's and master's degrees.

Faculty research is supported financially at the department, college and university levels. Dissemination of results is often a grant requirement, especially in pedagogically-focused research.

Of particular note is the new, university-wide Faculty Research Fellows program, which should contribute to a more vibrant research focus and provide opportunities to mentor young scholars.

Support for teaching excellence and innovation: New faculty often report that they are attracted to Cal State Northridge because of the diversity of our student population. They also often report that graduate school did not prepare them for the unique challenges they face in working with our students. The University offers faculty development in pedagogical skills and techniques—in seminars, workshops and one-on-one support to respond to these challenges and nurture innovative pedagogy. These activities are based in CIELO which supports online education, community service-learning and linked courses, and faculty exploration of pedagogy.

The desire of faculty to form learning communities has fueled programs such as CIELO's newly instituted GE Honors Freshman Faculty-Mentors Brown Bag Lunch Series and the popular Faculty Book Groups in which a faculty member facilitates monthly discussions on a selected book related to teaching and learning. Most importantly, efforts based on identified student and faculty need are expanded in response to that need. The impact of these efforts will be tracked over time.

Recruitment, retention and on-going education for a diverse faculty and staff: We believe that during the past decade, we have done a better-than-adequate job of ***recruiting*** a diverse faculty and so we increasingly turn our attention to ***retention***. Our most recent efforts include an expanded New Faculty Orientation that offers ongoing support and workshops throughout the academic year; a faculty/staff housing initiative which, as part of the campus master plan, will break ground in 2008 and provide 160 units of living space in its first phase; and the Provost's Professional Development Series, now in its second year for chairs and academic administrators. Last year, the Faculty Senate's Educational Equity Committee reported on recruitment and retention of underrepresented faculty and provided a list of recommendations. The Provost developed a set of initiatives in support of this report, including a Professional Development Series session on "Enhancing Leadership on Diversity, Retention, Faculty Support and Communicating across Differences," and the creation of a Diversity Workshop which explores the ability to work across differences as part of hiring and RTP considerations. We will judge the success of these initiatives by how well our retention rates compare with peer institutions and how new hires and recently tenured faculty describe their experience of support.

Growth opportunities for professional, technical, administrative support and facilities support staff are valued. For example, Student Affairs promotes staff development through use of nationally prominent speakers and consultants, providing release time and funds for conference attendance, encouraging professional association leadership and peer-to-peer learning through seminars and discussion groups. A committee of classified staff developed a peer-to-peer staff training program, empowered by President Koester's call for individual commitment and action to promote student success. The program provides information on our students, the University's commitment to student success and each staff member's role in that success. Human Resources-sponsored seminars and workshops provide professional development opportunities. Additionally, we are learning to think more broadly about staff contributions to University success. One such example is Tom Brown, Cal State Northridge's executive director for physical plant management, who was the recipient of the prestigious 2007 CSU Wang Family Excellence Award. Brown was cited for his innovative involvement of students in the campus physical plant operations, in particular their participation in the design, funding and installation of the one megawatt fuel cell power plant, the first of its magnitude at any university in the world.

As we seek to advance as a learning-centered university, we attempt to engage all staff in University success. Whether through shared decision making or the opportunity to participate in the creation of new traditions—such as Freshman Convocation and the Freshman Common Reading pilot underway this fall—we communicate a message that each staff member is valued and it takes everyone to achieve the University’s mission.

Generating external resources in support of faculty, student and staff development: As noted in section A.1, Northridge is increasingly challenged to enhance resources through external support. This support can come through donors and gifts but it also must come through grants and contracts. Thus, research both depends on and contributes to our development efforts. Since our last WASC review, we have seen the growth of a robust division of University Advancement and we have made measurable gains in both fundraising and in securing grants and contracts. There is clearly much more to be accomplished—particularly as California spends its dollars in arenas other than public higher education. The engagement of faculty and administration in effectively “telling the CSUN story” and attracting external resources to campus is critical to our success, both of which we will track carefully over the next few years.

Another area where we have experienced success upon which we will build in the immediate future is the generation of programs through the Tseng College of Extended Learning (ExL). Many of our off-site programs are offered through ExL, including some of the applied programs noted above. Not only does ExL allow us to be more flexible and responsive to regional needs, it provides a revenue stream which can support campus initiatives. ExL also provides opportunities for faculty to experiment with new ideas and teach courses which might not be feasible in our traditional programs.

Research Questions for Theme 2: We start with a general question that is easy to formulate, although exceptionally difficult to answer: How do we reliably and with validity measure the effect of our academic programs—the professors, curriculum and culture—on learners?

- A. What impact does a research experience have on a student's engagement in learning? Assuming that the experience has positive impact, is it feasible to expand opportunities to more students? How can we attract resources to sustain these efforts?
- B. How will the new Ed.D. program impact other programs?
- C. To what degree will the Faculty Research Fellows program affect faculty perceptions of the University’s support for their research activities?
- D. Do activities through CIELO have a sustained impact?
- E. How do staff contribute in traditional and non-traditional ways to University success? How do we recognize and reward staff accomplishments?
- F. Has collaboration between ExL and other units produced viable distance education programs?
- G. How does CSUN support the use of technology as it contributes to faculty, staff and student success?
- H. How does the Library facilitate faculty and student research and success?

Finally, we will ask two key questions for each of these areas: What evidence do we have of support and impact? How are such programs scaleable and sustainable?

Theme 3: *Learning as an Institution*

In her 2003 Convocation address, President Koester used an analogy that has become part of our common language: She described a small family who once traveled on vacation in a spacious sport utility vehicle. Over the years, the family grew but their income stayed the same; more family members were squeezed into ever-smaller cars—first a four-door sedan but eventually a compact car. This analogy spoke to the hearts and minds of the University community, and we have worked together to meet the challenge that Dr. Koester helped us visualize. Addressing this challenge requires that we stop conducting “business as usual” and find more effective ways of meeting the educational needs of the region. As we reflect on our accomplishments in recent years, we see that we have found success in endeavors which were dismal failures a decade earlier. Thoughtful examination of how we can best manage to thrive and “enjoy the road trip in a Mini Cooper” will allow us to continue to plan effectively.

In an effort to understand why some recent campus-wide initiatives have been implemented, while other, equally worthy efforts have fallen by the wayside, we plan a series of case studies of initiatives launched during the last decade. These studies, some of which will focus on similar topics addressed at different points in time, are likely to include:

Coordinated Campus-wide Planning Efforts: Efforts were initiated several times over the last 15 years. At least three can be distinguished: the recovery from the 1994 Northridge earthquake and the disaster-preparedness plans it generated, the strategic planning initiatives of the late 1990s and the recent revitalized university-wide planning process begun in 2005.

Reform of the General Education Program: GE reform has been attempted several times in the last 20 years. All such efforts have resulted in often publicly spectacular failures—except the finally successful reform launched in fall 2006. In each case, detailed reform plans were developed, but only the most recent one survived.

The Graduation Rates Task Force: The GRTF was formed in response to concerns raised by the 2000 WASC review. To identify barriers to graduation, the Task Force assembled and/or collected a range of data. Widely circulated, the recommendations in its final report became the basis for several important campus initiatives.

Campus Master Plan (Envision 2035): This was a CSU-mandated initiative to create a physical master plan for the campus. After a multi-year process that involved a wide range of groups, the new plan was accepted by the CSU Board of Trustees in March 2006.

Rethinking Disenrollment Procedures and Practice: Four years ago, the campus regularly found itself in a quandary: either dismiss thousands of students for non-payment of fees or waive a major deadline. Fixing this process required a cross-functional team to redesign policy, business practice and the information students receive so as to improve service and salvage funds.

Objectives like persistence and learning are effects not of isolated acts but of webs of acts that are institutionalized intentionally or inadvertently. Learning how a process works to yield learning enables us to replicate it and multiply successful effects. Faculty will be responsible for executing the case studies, incorporating advanced graduate students as appropriate. Once the case studies are complete, a group of faculty, staff and administrators will review them with an eye towards extracting organizational principles that can be used to move campus initiatives forward.

Research Questions for Theme 3: In addition to developing an overview of the life span of each initiative under study, the case studies will assemble data addressing the following questions:

- A. Which aspects of the processes used to advance an initiative contributed to its fate?
- B. Did the University devote core resources to the initiative? If yes, how were they used?
- C. Did the initiative feature committees or partnerships bridging divisions and units? Were these consciously established or unplanned coincidence?
- D. What evidence do we have of the relationship between selected common characteristics of initiatives and their success? How has this knowledge been used and how will it be used to increase success and efficiency in the future?
- E. What roles do Program Review and accreditation play in institutional transformation?

We expect to answer these questions, and others which we might discover, as we engage in the self-study process.

B.2 & B.3: Approach for the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review

When the Steering Committee conducted the self-review under the Standards in spring 2006, it concluded that our most productive approach to the Capacity/Preparatory and the Educational Effectiveness reviews is to examine the themes differently in the two reviews. To that end, **Theme 2** and its accompanying research questions will be addressed primarily in the CPR while **Themes 1 and 3** and their research questions will be the focus of the EER. Of course, all three will be addressed in both the CPR and the EER, as will all four Standards. Indeed, our themes are interwoven throughout the two reviews precisely because they are interwoven throughout the campus processes and in strategic thinking and planning. Our focus on different themes in the reviews emerged from our consideration of the Standards.

The CSU system faces the challenge of constrained public support coupled with the growing needs of a changing population and rapidly changing technologies and technical canons in many fields of learning. Thus, as we outlined in **Theme 2**, support *by* and *for* the faculty and staff is crucial to our ability to achieve our educational mission. In particular, we need to address capacity issues as they relate to concerns about core resources—faculty, staff, technology, library resources and finances—as a foundation for establishing the goals and desired outcomes in the EER. Our ability to meet this challenge drives our approach to the other two themes and the EER (Standard 3): How, as an MA I, can we appropriately connect student learning and persistence with entrepreneurship so that we increase public good through ventures and partnerships?

The evidence we gather on issues of core resources during the CPR will provide the foundation for examining our commitment and progress in student success and learning. Particularly, in addressing **Theme 1**, we will build upon evidence from our assessment of the quality of education here—in our revised General Education program, in our department-based programs reviews, in individual course assessment and in our overarching university learning themes.

C. Demonstrating a Feasible Plan of Work and Engagement of Key Constituencies

C.1: Work plan and Milestones

As noted earlier, our review process is an outgrowth of our tradition of shared governance. The Steering Committee was identified collaboratively. This committee conducted the Preliminary Self-

Review under the Standards and engaged in widespread consultation with campus constituencies. The findings gave rise to three themes which were again vetted throughout campus. The final draft was submitted to the campus for review.

Once the proposal is approved, three Research Task Forces (RTF) of approximately 15 members each will begin to prepare for the Capacity/Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews by sketching out the evidence required to assess the success of the initiatives integral to each theme. Each RTF will be co-chaired by a faculty member and an administrator, a configuration that worked well in the last self study and review. As necessary, sub-groups will be formed within each RTF. These RTFs are likely to differ from each other and adopt different approaches as they answer their research questions. For example, **Theme 3** will require case studies, not a viable approach for the other two. Graduate students will be employed as research assistants wherever appropriate.

Each RTF will prepare a final report to the Steering Committee addressing its particular theme. Consultation across the University will continue throughout the process, relying on existing administrative and faculty governance structures. (See Appendix D for a detailed work plan.)

C.2 Effectiveness of Data Gathering and Analysis Systems

The Office of Institutional Research (IR) at Cal State Northridge provides the nexus for the campus' data-gathering and analysis systems. Its core function is to transform the campus-specific student, faculty and curricular data stored in the CSU's multiple databases into information useful to various campus units, helping to resolve data extraction and reporting problems in the process. With the aid of regularly updated longitudinal databases, IR responds to the data needs of diverse campus constituencies. In addition to providing enrollment data to allow departments to respond to course needs each semester, student progress and persistence are tracked on a term-by-term basis, providing a reliable means of generating key continuation, graduation and persistence rates for various groups of freshmen, transfer and graduate students. Increasingly, these sorts of data are being made available on the Web, a transition that will continue during the next few years. IR also assists departments preparing for periodic reviews of their academic programs by providing a range of information on student and faculty characteristics, along with data on key courses offered. Additional information for these reviews comes from various college and department sources, including on-going assessment data.

IR staff are responsible for administration of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), as well as analysis of data generated by national initiatives such as the NSSE and the CSU's accountability initiatives. (See Appendix A.) IR also takes the lead in collecting student data that supplement those collected system-wide. Thus, beginning in 2007-08, we are collecting data on incoming cohorts of FTF through the comprehensive Freshman Survey distributed annually by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (see Appendix A) and examining the educational trajectories of students leaving Northridge before the completion of their studies. These data, along with IR's multiple databases, form the basis for periodic analytic reports designed to provide insight into our success in enabling diverse students to graduate. A particular focus last year was the examination of factors fostering student success during the first year of college, with special attention to various first-year experience programs. As these programs are expanded and strengthened during the next few years (**Theme 2**), one feature of their assessment will be the continued tracking of the one-year continuation rates of participating students. Additionally, the new "Learning Habits Project" should yield insight into students' gains in GE, another focus of **Theme 2**.

C.3 Commitment of Resources to Support the Accrediting Review

The University is committed to supporting the accreditation review process by providing funding for outreach, reassigned time, publications, professional development, data collection and analysis, travel and staff support. The 2007-08 budgets for assessment of GE and the first full year of WASC are attached (see Appendix E), reflecting more than \$480,000 in financial support for administrative and technical staff, reassigned time for faculty involved in the self studies and in assessment of the curriculum, travel and related areas. Additionally, the University is financing a number of assessment instruments, including CLA and NSSE, as well as the newly launched study, “Learning Habits of Highly Effective Students” described above.