

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE  
WASC Thematic Pathways for Reaffirmation Proposal  
May 1, 2019

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

To build on an already strong foundation for its Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR), California State University, Northridge (CSUN) proposes the comprehensive and overarching theme of “Student Success” – framed through the prism of diversity and inclusiveness. The theme contains three interrelated components seen as vital to ensuring the desired results. The subordinate elements include: 1) Student Achievement, 2) Student Engagement and 3) Student Support.

Taken together, the Student Success theme aligns with, and expands on, the existing campus-wide initiatives to raise retention and graduation rates while eliminating long-standing barriers of opportunity gaps for Pell grant-eligible and first-generation students who comprise the majority of CSUN students. The themes, detailed below, demonstrate CSUN’s commitments to key WSCUC Standards and Criteria for Review (CFRs), contained in the “2013 Handbook of Accreditation Revised.”

Nurturing and sustaining student success is an “enduring principle priority” at CSUN – a minority serving institution with HSI and AANAPISI designations with a student body among the most diverse in the nation. *Advancing Student Success*, the first of eight interdependent strategic planning priorities, has been the core of CSUN’s mission, vision and values since 2006. “Student Success” underscores academic excellence and student engagement for retention, persistence and graduation, and is the central priority of the university community. CSUN employees across divisions on campus recognize and talk about their collective roles in advancing it.

CSUN was making strides in raising its retention and graduation rates before the California State University (CSU) launched its Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI 2025) in Summer 2016. This statewide mandate aligned with the prevailing Matadors Rising Initiative, which included projects like the Association of American Colleges & Universities’ grant-funded “Campus Action Plan,” Matador Momentum, a first-year experience initiative, and other collaborative strategies spearheaded by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. The Campus Action Plan’s cornerstone is elevating retention and graduation rates for traditionally underserved students through an array of equity-minded measures.

In 2016-17, armed with an initial \$3.35 million CSU grant and other resources, the campus was able to broaden its scope. Activities centered on 1) Students (engagement survey and intervention/chatbot and peer mentorships through the Office of Student Involvement and Development); 2) Faculty (“Data Champions,” eLearning at the Faculty Technology Center, AAC&U-inspired “Inclusive Innovations Series” and creation of Faculty Learning Communities to tackle issues like high DFU rates in lower division General Education courses), and 3) Staff

(formation of a Graduation and Retention Specialists Team and data development). Additional GI 2025 allocations in 2017-18 and 2018-19 supported hiring 78 tenure-track faculty, nine retention and graduation specialists and a staff psychologist as well as funding ongoing projects in faculty development and eLearning, schedule augmentation, institutional research and analytics, and summer completion grants for students, among others. Many of these initiatives are in partnership with the Division of Student Affairs, reflecting an intentional desire to facilitate a critical sense of belonging among students across the university.

In June 2019, CSUN will open the first Matador Advising Hub, a centralized advising center for first through third semester first-time freshmen. This is a major shift away from the college-based satellite centers and is expected to result in higher persistence levels, as indicated by outcomes at similar universities.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION:**

According to its mission, the university “exists to enable students to realize their education goals.” Its first priority is “to promote the welfare and intellectual progress of students.” It does so by adhering to a set of values that demonstrate its visionary commitments to teaching, scholarship and active learning and excellence. CSUN is a diverse institution that “aspires to behave as an inclusive, cooperative community,” seeking alliances with the community while encouraging innovation, experimentation and creativity.

CSUN began in 1958 as San Fernando Valley State College in portable classrooms on former agricultural land. It has evolved into the nation’s second-largest public master’s university. Ranked second in enrollment among the 23 CSU-system campuses, CSUN serves nearly 40,000 students on a 356-acre park-like campus in the heart of the multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multicultural and otherwise diverse and populous San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. More than 11,000 students are eligible to graduate each year.

The undergraduate profile illustrates campus diversity: In Fall 2018, Latinx students comprised 50 percent of undergraduates. Women made up more than half (55 percent), while approximately one-half were first-generation college students. In 2016-17, 20,168 CSUN students received federal Pell grants from the total campus award of \$89 million, among the highest amount distributed nationwide.

Last year, CSUN received the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from Insight into Diversity, one of many honors affirming the campus’ commitment to fostering diversity and inclusiveness. The university is recognized as a leader in many areas, including by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) for a third gold rating in its Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS). CSUN earned a top five rating by the National Science Foundation for graduates who go on to earn doctorates in the sciences.

In the years since its first accreditation in 1960, the institution has matured from an extension campus of Los Angeles State College to a thriving urban center of innovation and research with

major economic impact in Southern California and beyond. CSUN's 171 academic programs and engaged centers are recognized nationally and internationally. As a comprehensive institution with a strong commitment to liberal arts, the institution also has substantial programs in technological and professional fields. CSUN has nine colleges and more than 2,000 faculty members, who teach courses leading to bachelor's degrees in 69 disciplines, master's degrees in 61 fields and doctorates in educational leadership and physical therapy, as well as 14 teaching credential programs.

#### **PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEMES:**

The 30-member CSUN Reaccreditation Steering Committee empaneled in Fall 2018 led the process of developing themes by conducting a series of open campus discussions and dialogues in both formal and informal settings.

The cross-divisional group, facilitated by the Faculty President and a campus Dean, hosted three campus-wide Open Forums in Spring 2019 and consulted separately with members of Provost's Council, Faculty Senate Executive and Educational Policies committees, Council of Chairs, Associated Students and the President's Extended Cabinet, as well as the university's Alumni Association and Foundation. These forums drew students, faculty, staff, administrators and other stakeholders from across the colleges, the Oviatt Library and auxiliaries as well as the wider campus community.

Ultimately, the proposed theme and interrelated sub-themes (Student Achievement, Student Engagement and Student Support) emerged as central to virtually all comments and concerns contributed during the myriad information-gathering sessions. The committee identified specific "Areas of Study" to investigate and address within of the sub-themes. (See below.) Core campus values, such as "Diversity and Inclusive Excellence," are woven into each of the subordinate themes.

Once the themes were developed, the committee formed three teams, each given the task of investigating a sub-theme, to better clarify and focus on the WSCUC Standards and CFRs. The teams worked on their own before reconvening in the larger group in early April. The team leaders determined whether and how to include additional consultation into their discussions, and used the university's WASC Re-Accreditation website ([www.csun.edu/wasc](http://www.csun.edu/wasc)) to share and solicit sub-theme feedback and responses.

The teams will continue working in their subsidiary areas during the reaffirmation process through the 2020-21 academic year. Concentrating more intentionally on an expansive definition of "Student Success" will empower CSUN to fully confront the many challenges anticipated in achieving its own planning priorities and goals, while meeting the formidable expectations set by GI 2025.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF EACH THEME:**

##### **Primary Theme – Student Success**

The primary theme addresses a range of CFRs across three WSCUC standards:

- Standard One, “Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives,” (1.1-1.8);
- Standard Three, “Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability,” (3.1-3.10);
- Standard Four: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning and Improvement,” (4.1, 4.2).

As noted in its mission, “The University’s first priority is to promote the welfare and intellectual progress of students...” In its planning priorities, the university promises to provide “authentic access” to qualified students, to engage them through “quality academic programs” with High Impact Practices (HIPs) like service learning and innovative hands-on experiences, to prepare them with effective advising, to focus on “meaningful assessment,” to offer co-curricular opportunities and to use technology to support “inclusive excellence.”

Although the framework for our TPR has been CSUN’s guiding light for more than a decade, “Student Success” gained crucial momentum in mid-2016 through an infusion of state funding which allowed us to create a new administrative position (associate vice president for student success) and the subsequent opening of an Office of Student Success. Since then, faculty, staff and administrators have been laser-focused on instituting and executing numerous initiatives with one objective: Improve retention and graduation rates overall and eliminate the opportunity gap among underrepresented, Pell grant-eligible and first-generation students.

This has resulted in what the CSUN Student Success website ([www.csun.edu/student-success](http://www.csun.edu/student-success)) describes as “innovative practices, policies and programming to promote student achievement, eliminate the opportunity gap, and encourage timely degree completion.” The work has boosted advising via the hiring of graduation and retention specialists, developed predictive analytics, supported early intervention utilizing social-emotional techniques for pre-General Education Math courses and piloted an EAB progress report system to support at risk student athletes and EOP students. Additional efforts include the “15 to Finish” campaign, improved tutoring and several other HIPs.

Notably, as indicated in the data below, many of these initiatives contributed to increasing the retention and graduations rates for first-time freshmen and have “moved the needle” on closing opportunity gaps by decreasing DFU rates and raising GPAs for transfer students.

- The overall retention rate for the Fall 2017 freshmen cohort overall was 81 percent, a 4-point gain over the Fall 15 group. The rate was 79.3 percent for Pell grant recipients and 80.3 percent for first-generation students.
- Our current graduation rates look better as well, with particular gains in the transfer student population: The Pell opportunity gap in the two-year and four-year graduation rates for the transfer class finishing this year was only .3 percent. Meanwhile, the overall six-year graduation rate for First-time Freshmen continues to climb, hitting nearly 54 percent for the current cohort. We recognize that opportunity gaps continue

to exist, especially among first-time Freshmen, and that we have important work ahead. The Pell opportunity gap for six-year graduation rates among FTF is 7.5 percent.

Other measures with positive outcomes include fostering creative faculty development projects guided by the Institute for Transformative Teaching and Learning, activities addressing students' basic needs and sense of belonging, and promoting data driven decision-making through the Office of Institutional Research-led Data Champions project in which faculty become proficient in applying analytics to determine outcomes. At the same time, scores of ongoing and promising new Student Success-based initiatives and projects are in progress in departments, colleges, the library and auxiliaries across campus.

Sustaining many of these efforts has been complicated for a variety of factors, including implementation of two controversial CSU Executive Orders 1110 and 1100R related to GE curriculum and replacing remedial courses with credit granting courses, and leadership changes in the Provost's Office.

Comments in the Open Forums show CSUN will need to address several important questions, as the campus moves forward in the TPR process to delineate and evaluate Student Success in its many forms and facets, including but not limited to:

*How is the university defining student success beyond the numbers? What are we doing now and to what do we aspire moving forward? How do we examine the quality of education beyond metrics? How do we capture the frustrations some are feeling over the CSU Executive Orders? What are we doing to address needed improvements in classroom engagement to support HIPs? What is "Inclusive Excellence" and how does achieving it mesh with the overall theme? How does the campus foster communication and collaboration?*

#### **INTERRELATED SUBORDINATE THEMES**

Several CFRs within Standards One, Two and Four, are common to all three subordinate and overlapping elements under the "Student Success" banner, including: 1.4, 2.10, 4.1, 4.3, respectively. Each of the three subsidiary components, or "Areas of Study," listed below, addresses more fully the assortment of connecting Standards and CFRs.

- Student Achievement (Team 1) – Focusing on Retention and Graduation Rates, Assessment, Workforce/Career and Graduate School Preparation, Academic Innovation, Research and Holistic Development (diversity and inclusion).
  - This TPR theme addresses these Standards and CFRs: 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 3.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4.
- Student Engagement (Team 2) – Incorporating HIPs, Co-Curricular activities, Research, Community Engagement, Continuous Improvement, Diversity and Inclusion and Academic Innovation.
  - This TPR theme addresses these Standards and CFRs: 1.4, 1.7, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.5-2.13, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 4.1-4.7.

- Student Support (Team 3) – Integrating Basic Needs: CSUN with a Heart, Financial, Academic and Information Technology support, Support for Communities, Mental and Physical Health and Advising.
  - This TPR theme addresses these Standards and CFRs: 1.4, 1.6, 2.10, 2.12-2.14, 3.1, 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7.

#### **TIMELINE:**

Since the theme and its subordinate interrelated components are embedded in CSUN’s top planning priority, and given the multi-pronged nature and interdisciplinary scale of this undertaking, an “end date” is unlikely. When they reconvene in Fall 2019, the three TPR Teams, in conjunction with campus leaders, will need to establish a series of key milestones with tentative deadlines as they examine the areas within each of the sub-themes. They also will be mindful of the GI 2025 deadline – less than six years away.

This process, with its many complementary components, is a long-term commitment that means it will carry on well beyond the reaffirmation review period.

#### **RESOURCES:**

CSUN has devoted extensive human and financial resources to a multitude of relevant projects and activities in the past three years. Going forward, more than \$11 million has been earmarked through the 2019-20 academic year for planned full-time faculty and staff hiring, while one-time allocations in state and federal funding over three years totals more than \$6 million. The GI 2025 Multi-Year Plan currently comprises approximately 24 initiatives; more than half are proposed for permanent funding, beginning in 2019-20 and continuing through 2024-25.

The reaffirmation process coincides with the arrival of a new provost in July 2019, and other new administrators, including the recruitment of a new AVP Student Success and the new Matador Advising Hub director.

The staffing changes, coupled with results from the first six-year cohort, gives CSUN the opportunity over the next two years to reflect and examine which of the profusion of existing initiatives are working, and which can be altered or ended. Rather than a siloed approach in the nascent Office of Student Success, campus leaders anticipate a diffuse strategy, with the provost as the “champion” of student success, working collaboratively across divisions to bring different units together in the common cause. As the new academic administrative leadership settles in, the TPR Teams’ work will be critical to advancing campus and CSU objectives.

**INSTITUTIONAL REPORT CERTIFICATION FORM**

To: WASC Senior College and University Commission

Re: 2021 Reaffirmation of Accreditation  
Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation Themes Proposal, May 2019

From: Dianne F. Harrison, President  
California State University, Northridge  
18111 Nordhoff Street  
Northridge, CA 91330

This report is submitted in support of our institution's accreditation review.

I affirm the accuracy of the information presented and the institution's intention to comply fully with WSCUC's Standards and policies.

Signed: Dianne F. Harrison

Chief Executive Officer

Name: Dianne F. Harrison

Title: President

Date: May 01, 2019