

## WASC Educational Effectiveness addendum and response to team capacity visit report

24 February 2003

### Introduction

In January of 2003, the WASC preparatory review team submitted its report on its December visit to UC Davis. We were very impressed by the report's thoroughness and it offers us many useful insights. The report concludes with six recommendations. We have been asked to offer a brief written response to these recommendations in this addendum.

1. In this item, the team recommends attention to the relationships between goals, strategies, and outcomes.

Our mission statement, academic plan, and new educational objectives are key documents at UC Davis. In addition, a strategic vision statement is in draft form and will probably be revised and adopted soon. Progress in linking goals, strategies, and outcomes requires leadership and communication. When the strategic vision statement is finalized, the Provost and the Academic Leadership and Planning group (ALAP) will have the primary responsibility for coordinating and monitoring its implementation. The Deans, who are also essential players, periodically update ALAP on progress in fulfilling the goals of their academic plans. Since much of the strategic vision document will involve academic matters, the Senate must also participate in its implementation. Key Senate committees are the Executive Council, CAPBR, the Graduate Council, and the Undergraduate Council. The last two of these have appropriate administrators as *ex officio* members, and the first two maintain good communication with the administration. In addition, there are regular meetings of the Provost, Vice Provosts, and the Senate leadership. This communication contributes to an improved alignment of resources, the curriculum, and progress toward educational objectives.

Achieving the desired student outcomes depends ultimately upon the efforts of departments and faculty members. Departments are connected to the administrative side through the reporting of chairs to deans. Most deans invite administrators to participate in an extended meeting with department chairs held within the first few weeks of each new academic year. In addition to the connections between department chairs and deans, the senior administration convenes two to three meetings per year with department chairs.

The departments also have close ties to the larger Senate organization. Proposals for changes in courses or programs must be reviewed and approved by Senate committees. In addition, departments undergo periodic program reviews.

Two examples of current activity are worth noting. Educational objectives were adopted last April. New program review guidelines that draw upon those objectives have been drafted by last year's Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and this year's Undergraduate Council (UGC). They are now being reviewed at the college level. Another example is associated with the first objective, which is to develop effective communication skills. The Undergraduate Council is currently engaged in a review of our writing curriculum.

Another important element is evidence that our efforts actually result in improved student learning. This is the area in which we should begin to lay the groundwork for real improvement.

Our area of weakness is in the systematic collection of direct evidence of cumulative student learning. We believe that the new program review guidelines will lead to significant progress in this area. They call upon each program to develop and use measures of student learning that are appropriate to the program and its educational objectives.

These comments, and much more detail that can be found in our capacity report, demonstrate that the administration and the Senate have the organization and communication that are needed to make the Strategic Vision a reality and that we have begun to improve our approach to collecting the direct evidence of student learning that must also be a part of the formula for progress.

Many of the meetings that have been scheduled for the educational effectiveness visit in March relate to this recommendation from the team. However, there is a meeting for Joel Hartman that includes representatives from ALAP, the Provost/Senate Chairs group, and the Undergraduate Council and is especially focused on this recommendation.

2. In this item, the team commends UC Davis for its improved planning processes and urges the institution to be sensitive to enrollment growth.

Like virtually all other public universities, UC Davis is coping with significant resource shortfalls stemming directly from the poor economy. Because of several years of improved planning processes, we will be able to deal with the lean days ahead. Fortunately, we have little evidence to suggest that students are unable to graduate on time due to insufficient course offerings. To be sure, there are wait lists for our more popular courses, and students are increasingly finding that they must take early morning, evening, and (gasp!) Friday courses. Physics labs meet on weekends, and other laboratory courses may follow. It should be noted that many of these inconveniences are a consequence of limited physical facilities, for which there is a very long lead time (see additional comments below), rather than inadequate funding for current instructional needs. Indeed, it is an axiom of the planning for the anticipated decreasing state support that there will be full funding for instructional activities including funding for enrollment growth; thus much of our budget planning is focused upon how to adjust to the cuts in a way that does the least damage to non-instructional activities. A key group in this work is the Budget Work Group ([http://www.news.ucdavis.edu/budget/budget\\_committee.html](http://www.news.ucdavis.edu/budget/budget_committee.html)), which is guided by the Budget Planning Principles ([http://www.news.ucdavis.edu/budget/campus\\_principles.html](http://www.news.ucdavis.edu/budget/campus_principles.html)).

We have scheduled a meeting with members of the enrollment planning and policy groups to discuss this team recommendation. An example of how those groups address the issue is that as of this writing in February 2003, we are refining enrollment targets for fall 2003. Given the anticipated growth in CAES and Bio Sci freshmen for this coming fall, we are already planning and budgeting for the fact that we will need more lab stations for organic chemistry for their sophomore (2003-2004) year. Although this renovation will exceed \$200,000, we are proceeding.

Although uncertain finances necessarily generate increased stress in the workforce, we continue in our commitment to do the best that we can for all employees. We remain in labor negotiations with AFT, the union representing the lecturers. We have great respect for these employees and look forward to the signing of a contract.

Because of our commitment to being a model employer even through the budget downturn, Chancellor Vanderhoef has appointed Senior Associate Vice Chancellor, Special Advisor to the

Chancellor--Human Resources Dennis Shimek to oversee our efforts to minimize the detrimental impact the budget problems will have on UC Davis staff.

During the WASC exit interview in December, the team drew attention to comments articulated by faculty eager to increase the number of classrooms on campus. In mid-January, EVC Hinshaw charged a committee with planning for construction of a new classroom building. Although this project had been under discussion for several months, we do believe that the comments our faculty made to WASC accelerated this project.

3. In this recommendation, the team notes the progress UC Davis has made on General Education. The team also ponders the fact that students can reduce their GE commitment to 24 formal units. The team requests additional data in order to better understand student course selection practices.

In both its verbal and written reports, the preparatory review team noted the "admirable and significant" progress that UC Davis has made in improving its general education program. The team also noted two issues that deserve attention. They are understandably concerned that it is theoretically possible for some students to take as few as 24 official GE units. Also, they have a more general concern about our GE program meeting its objectives for student learning. Actually, our students voluntarily choose a much broader range of courses than our requirements mandate. Also, we are in the process of improving our methods of evaluating the effectiveness of not only GE, but all our academic programs.

In thinking about GE during work on our preparatory review report, we wondered about the actual practices of students in choice of courses. SARI led the effort to collect and analyze the data that we described in our preparatory review report (Criterion 2.2). They confirmed our hunch that students select a breadth of courses that goes far beyond our GE requirement. A member of the educational effectiveness visiting team requested a look at the data that would give more information on the distribution of units than was available in the averages that we included in the preparatory report. This query developed into the kind of researchable question envisioned by the WASC handbook. Our research revealed that the fraction of students who arrange their schedules to have only minimum allowed breadth is very small. While this point merits additional consideration on our part, the data do not support giving it a high priority.

From our perspective, the team's second point about assessing the educational effectiveness of the GE program extends beyond the scope of our formal GE curricula. As the various campus constituencies ratified the recently adopted educational objectives, it was clear that our faculty don't compartmentalize GE courses in a fashion distinct from the classes in a major. We expect our curriculum--all of it--to fulfill the appropriate educational objectives. During a January 2003 visit to assess the status of our Hewlett GE grant, Kathleen Yancey, Ph.D. observed, "...the new pedagogies that faculty have developed in the courses are spilling over into the more conventional curriculum so that this effort is infusing the curriculum more broadly. This is what one hopes for but often doesn't achieve." In order to better measure our efforts, we are working to instill a more conspicuous culture of evidence as a foundation for the evaluation of our overall educational objectives. Aspects of this are described in our preparatory report, in the first essay of our educational effectiveness report, and within the context of our special themes, in the other three parts of the educational effectiveness report.

We believe that we are forming a fruitful collaboration among the General Education Committee, the Undergraduate Council, and the Vice Provost--Undergraduate Studies that will allow us to build upon the recent progress that was described in our capacity report and commended by the

preparatory review team. Yancey concludes her third report on GE at UC Davis by noting, "In sum, the Hewlett Grant continues to enable UC Davis to make good progress toward developing a more innovative general education program that also promises to be more cohesive." We hope the WASC team will agree.

4. In this item the team focuses on the student research theme UC Davis will document during for the educational effectiveness review and asks about the capacity the campus envisions for these programs.

We have written extensively about student research in the educational effectiveness review submitted in December and plan several sessions on it during the March visit. However, even since December we have made progress promoting campus engagement with undergraduate research. In the Vice-Provost--Undergraduate Studies' preliminary conversations in February with the University Relations staff preparing for a comprehensive campaign, she articulated a priority for an Undergraduate Research Center. Campaign priority setting is still an unfolding process, but we are cautiously optimistic that this enterprise will find its way into the final product. The Center will provide some staff support for faculty who mentor undergraduates. At least one dean already offers a course release to faculty members after they have mentored their 20th undergraduate researcher. This Center can also work with SARI to help individual programs develop student outcomes assessment.

Students who had the opportunity to speak with the WASC evaluators in December followed up on their discussions by devoting their quarterly *Student Dialogue With the Chancellor on Undergraduate Research Opportunities*. Held the third week of January and completely organized by undergraduate students, the conversation included senior administrators, faculty, staff and the students themselves. The more seasoned, experienced undergraduate researchers shared their own stories and offered several sound suggestions for increasing the number of student undergraduate researchers. While we can talk more about this event and the follow up during the EE visit, our point here is to indicate that goals for increasing student participation span the spectrum from the freshmen to the chancellor. Given the decentralized character of UC Davis, overall objectives for capacity are difficult and not necessarily desirable. We prefer to think in terms of developing, implementing, and growing sound programs in each of our major disciplinary areas. The right size for the Theatre and Dance department and outcomes there will differ from those in Molecular Biology.

In terms of evaluating the impact of research on student learning, several comments are in order. First, we believe that the student projects speak for themselves, and they are on display in honors theses, at the Undergraduate Research Conference, and in the publications of student research and creative work. We are also considering the beneficial role that student portfolios could play in many of our plans for improvements. They would provide another way for students to display their research accomplishments and for us to collect evidence of student learning. Second, alumni surveys that collect information on the role of research participation in preparation for work or graduate study are important. Third, the draft guidelines for program review ask programs to consider the contributions to program educational objectives made by undergraduate research.

So far, we have been more concerned with developing a greater awareness of the existing opportunities for students than in where the capacity limitations lie. Nevertheless, it is an interesting question for long term planning, and we hope to engage the team in a dialog on this point. We believe we use this approach successfully with internships. With close to 6,000 of our students annually engaged in internships, one rarely finds a student who can honestly say

that they wanted to participate in an internship and no appropriate one could be found. True, some students have very high expectations for internships and we are unable to place them all in their first choice. However, we'd like to grow the research opportunities with the same goal in mind--- that all of our students will recognize that these opportunities are a part of the Davis advantage and know that if they are motivated, we'll be able to register them in an appropriate place.

5. This team recommendation deals with topics related to the educational effectiveness of information technology.

This is one of the themes of our educational effectiveness self-study. There are extensive discussions in our report. The team recommendation mentions faculty development. In our self-study, there are links to the many contributions from SITT, TRC, and Mediaworks. Among the recommendations that grew out of our self-study and comments from the team is one to add strength in the area of instructional design in TRC and Mediaworks. Our report also calls for an educational effectiveness review of all new ET projects.

Since this is one of our self-study topics, many of the meetings scheduled for the visit relate to this team recommendation.

6. Here the team recommends increased involvement of stakeholders other than alumni in the assessment of educational effectiveness.

Through SARI surveys, we systematically collect data from alumni that give information on the extent to which we are reaching our educational objectives. A new survey, which will cover alumni who are farther from graduation than those we have surveyed in the past, is being developed. However, this team recommendation calls for increased involvement of stakeholders other than alumni. While there are some examples in which we obtain useful information in this category, we do not have a coordinated campuswide program to collect useful, valid information from other stakeholders. Nonetheless, throughout the campus, individual departments and campus offices are clearly collecting external input appropriate to their individual missions. Below are some examples most relevant to the themes selected for our educational effectiveness review.

The Washington Center conducts a phone survey of the supervisors of its interns. An example of such a survey will be available during the March site visit.

The Chancellor's Fall Conference typically includes off-campus participants. For example in 2002, there were people from the news media, local and national politics, and corporations. While the feedback from them at this event is not systematically recorded and studied, it does give us some feeling for how UC Davis and its graduates are viewed from the outside. We have other events that bring to campus outside stakeholders who have had contact with our students. We intend to make better use of those opportunities to collect data.

We will also get very useful insights from the surveys of off-campus organizations with which our students intern. These evaluation forms have been collected by the Internship and Career Center. Its director will initiate a project to evaluate the responses.

As already mentioned, we are in the process of improving our guidelines for program review. One of the ways that programs may choose to demonstrate educational effectiveness is with information collected from employers or graduate schools.

While it would be expensive to collect valid, comprehensive data from employers and graduate schools at the campuswide level, this desirable possibility will be considered. However at this point, we do not believe that such information would have a major impact on our process of setting campuswide educational objectives or in assessing our progress toward the goals. An investment in improving the collection of direct evidence of student learning would yield a greater return. Thus the collection of non-alumni opinions on student learning has not been a high institutional priority. Following from the WASC philosophy that the review should be valuable to the institution, cost effective, and focus upon institutional priorities, our investment in this enterprise is likely to remain focused rather than campuswide. However, we look forward to hearing from the team about successful programs used by other comparable institutions. These may be models for future action that we have not yet envisioned.