"We believe that a young, public university can achieve greatness in both research and teaching if we set our goals carefully and pursue them with zeal."

UCSC at a Crossroads: Advisory Report of the Millennium Committee

The Preparatory Review stage of the WASC accreditation process has provided UC Santa Cruz with the opportunity and the incentive to rearticulate our institutional goals and objectives, to examine what we have accomplished during our nearly 40 year history as an educational institution, to examine how we use data to help us learn about our institution, and to improve our practices and define the next steps that our campus will pursue to make our institution even stronger. Writing and reviewing the reflective essays that addressed the four major WASC standards provided our community, many of whom have never gone through an accreditation review, the opportunity to think more carefully about our historical educational roots, discuss our strengths and weaknesses, and learn about the major strategic planning that has been underway to help shape the UC Santa Cruz of tomorrow. Even the assembly of the myriad of policies and procedures required by WASC, and the process of analyzing these documents to determine how they provide evidence in support of WASC’s specific standards, provided a learning experience for us; the resulting electronic portfolio of these documents will be regularly updated, and will be an invaluable resource for the campus in the future.

In many ways, UC Santa Cruz is at a crossroads. While continuing to strengthen what are already some of the best undergraduate programs of any public research university in the nation, we are now focusing on expanding our graduate and research programs. We plan to increase graduate student enrollments to a target of about 15% of our total student body. This will require an approximate doubling of our current graduate students. We are determined to do all this while remaining a leader in undergraduate education.

While our goals and objectives are clear, we recognize that we face many challenges. The first of these challenges is that, as a University of California campus, we have a responsibility to provide access to the children of California. As the population of California continues to increase, and as the pool of students qualified to attend the University of California expands, all UC campuses face continued pressures to increase their enrollments – and most of those pressures center on increasing the numbers of undergraduate students.

Accordingly, we, like many other UC campuses, are fast-approaching the enrollment target that was agreed upon during our last Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). This plan, which was agreed to by both our local community and by the UC Regents, called for growth to a total enrollment of 15,000 students on campus over a three quarter academic year. We currently are beginning a new LRDP process to determine what our enrollments might be in 2020, and how our institution and our community will accommodate growth.

Even with such growth, however, the success of the educational programs of UC Santa Cruz leads us to anticipate that we soon will not be able to admit all qualified students seeking admission. We will therefore begin comprehensive reviews of all students who apply, and make decisions that are governed to a large degree by policies of the State of California (State Proposition 209) which exclude the use of racial data in admissions to UC. We are committed to increasing enrollments of qualified underrepresented students as we have been during the past years. Our success in increasing these enrollments is no doubt a reflection of the campus’s creative and successful outreach activities that have targeted children as young as second grade, and that have worked with both these children and their parents to help them aspire to a UC Santa Cruz education. But this success is challenged by UC budget cuts that have specifically targeted such outreach programs.

Like all other state-supported research universities in the U.S., we face major budget problems that are both severe in the short term and will likely have long-term impacts. Because of the overall trend of decreasing
state support of public higher education, institutions must both become more efficient and find other sources of revenues. We have been successful in offsetting much of the long term decline in state support by increasing both our gift and grant support, and the UC Regents have compensated somewhat by recently increasing student fees and tuition by about 30%, after a decade of little or no fee increases. Even though about one third of the increased funds will be used for financial aid, this will lay greater financial burdens on many of our students and their parents.

Expanding our graduate programs and enrollments in times of increasing undergraduate enrollment pressures and declining state revenues poses additional challenges. Even though the UC Regents have articulated a goal of increasing graduate students at UC, as a system, the system’s graduate enrollments have continued to decline over the last decade. This may be attributed to the systemwide change in support of graduate education that occurred roughly a decade ago. Whereas UC campuses once received 2 to 3 times the support for a graduate student as they did for an undergraduate student, in order to help offset the additional costs incurred in graduate education, campuses now receive the same level of state support for all students. We face the challenge of building our graduate enrollments to 15% of our enrollment when per student state support made available for graduate programs is significantly less than when our sister campuses built their graduate programs.

But there are many opportunities for our institution, as well as challenges. We have the opportunity to develop new graduate education programs that will meet the needs of today’s graduate students and prepare them for the careers of tomorrow. As we discussed in our Institutional Proposal to WASC, a recent survey of 32,000 graduate students from all academic disciplines concluded that, while most graduate students are very satisfied with the specific training they are receiving in their own academic disciplines, they also desire additional training in areas other than their research specialty to make them competitive for positions after their graduate education. As part of our Educational Effectiveness Review, we will examine what programs might best serve these needs of our graduate students, and we will look at whether the living/learning model of our undergraduate residential college system might be adjusted to meet the needs of our graduate students. In developing new graduate programs, we will provide additional opportunities for our undergraduate students to participate in new educational and research programs, and to learn from and be inspired by our graduate students.

Although national, UC, and local surveys support the conclusions that our undergraduate students are highly satisfied with their academic programs, we must continually examine our curricular and co curricular programs to be certain that we are doing the best job that we can for our students, with the resources available. Accordingly, as part of our Educational Effectiveness Review, we will examine our freshman experience and the role of our colleges in presenting the skill-development courses required by our students – including writing, critical thinking, public discourse, and the use of technology. We will examine our capstone experiences for seniors to determine if these are meeting our institution’s educational goals. We will determine if there may be better ways to measure learning, and develop metrics to measure whether changes in programs and courses result in improvement. And we will look at our academic programs that occur outside of the traditional classroom, including academic advising, internships, and research opportunities, to determine if these meet the needs of our students and the educational priorities of our institution.

In addition, the challenges of accommodating more students with limited resources will require us to examine how we might make more effective use of instructional technologies to improve both learning and the cost-effectiveness of our educational practices. We will examine how instructional technology might augment the educational experience in large lecture format courses, providing more individualized interactive learning in concert with the lecture-based learning format characteristic of most large courses. And we will continue to examine how technology may be employed to measure learning outcomes and diagnose levels of knowledge, thereby providing better placement of students in appropriate courses.

Lastly, we will develop better methods to assess faculty teaching effectiveness, curricular design and integration, and overall program quality. The nearly real-time data that is now made available by the Office of Institutional Research provides us with powerful assessment tools that can help determine whether changes we undertake to improve teaching and learning are successful. As an institution, we must refine the data we use to evaluate our programs, make resource allocation decisions, and provide the detailed assessments that will be required in the future.