INTRODUCTION

“UC Santa Cruz has created a unique environment of intensity and innovation where synergy between research and teaching provides unparalleled opportunities for people who drive intellectual, social, cultural and economic progress.”

Lipman Hearne Report, 2003

The University of California, Santa Cruz has grown significantly, both philosophically and physically, in its nearly 40-year history. It has evolved from being known as an educational experimenter to being recognized as one of the nation’s rising universities (Graham, Diamond, 1997). While the campus has matured and taken its place among the top 25 public research universities, its faculty and staff remain passionate about its mission and purpose. We are also continually reflective and constructively critical about how well the campus is achieving its educational objectives, and about the strategies we have developed to meet those objectives.

As we commence the WASC accreditation process, the campus has just completed an extensive long-range planning effort. UCSC is now engaged in three campus-wide initiatives: transforming campus business practices and strategic planning; planning for the campus’s long-range physical development; and strategic communications. For UC Santa Cruz, WASC is not just a process in itself, but it has been integrated into existing processes. Seeking renewed accreditation provides us with an opportunity to consider, in the context of WASC standards, the key goals that were the basis for the planning process and the effectiveness with which we have met them. The campus is also using this opportunity to help us address what UCSC needs to do to advance into the highest ranks of American Universities.

In the first reflective essay, we demonstrate UCSC’s consistency in institutional purposes and values. These values are shared widely, as evidenced by leadership statements, and they are confirmed in the Millennium Committee report. We provide a brief chronological story of the campus’s development, from the founding years to the many improvements in the last two decades. Throughout this period of physical expansion and intellectual/educational growth, we have maintained the highest standards of integrity. UCSC stands firmly committed to academic freedom, diversity, and the principles upon which the academic community was founded. Our core values are anchored in our shared vision – to become an outstanding public research university with an uncommon commitment to education at all levels.

In Essay 2 we show how UCSC achieves its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning. Research and other creative work is integral to UCSC teaching and learning, both at the graduate and undergraduate level. From their attendance at Freshman Discovery Seminars to authoring published research papers and producing works of art, our undergraduate students engage in discovery and creation of new knowledge.

Our graduate students are vital to the education of our undergraduates. By inspiring young scholars in the undergraduate classroom and laboratory, they enhance the quality of the undergraduate experience. Because of this contribution, and because of the economic need for more graduate students in our knowledge-based economy, we are increasing their numbers and are adding new disciplinary and interdisciplinary graduate programs. We continue to seek ways to improve the quality of graduate

education and the quality of life for graduate students.

The holistic development of our students is underpinned and encouraged by exceptional interaction between academic advising, student assessment and general education. A dual system of residential colleges and academic departments facilitates students’ move from high school or community colleges into the university – the system engages students in a supportive manner, providing more individual learning and social support than a large campus might do otherwise. A wide range of learning support services and mechanisms for intervention to ensure students’ success have resulted in improvements in our retention rates. UCSC encourages, supports, and rewards excellence in teaching.

The eleven standards to be addressed in Essay 3 comprise quite disparate elements. We have attempted, however, to connect the elements in a way that creates a coherent story. UC Santa Cruz has developed and applied a wide array of resources and organizational structures to ensure its sustainability. Through investment in human, physical, fiscal, and information resources, and through an effective set of organizational and decision-making structures, UCSC continually strives to achieve its educational objectives. We have developed an intellectual environment that attracts and inspires the best faculty and undergraduate students and also attracts first-rate graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. UCSC has exceptional strength in its culture of diversity, creativity and discovery.

In the final essay, we indicate how shared governance and decision-making are informed by both quantitative and qualitative data. The institution makes creative and informed use of these data for continuing assessment, evaluation and accountability. The means of collection and use of these data has been overhauled dramatically in the past five years. Evidence of UCSC’s commitment to excellence is shown by constant conduct of program reviews. The assessment and reports of students’ progress is now managed significantly differently since the last WASC review: it is more rigorous and delivers data that can be analyzed and applied more easily. We have also risen well to the challenge of ever shifting and overall declining state budget allocations.

We are proud of the story that these four essays tell. In less than four decades UC Santa Cruz has become known as an institution where “innovation is tradition”. It has provided tremendous leadership at the national level with respect to developing and testing best practices in undergraduate education. Its graduate students are working side by side with undergraduates and with faculty as research colleagues, contributing to a myriad of advances including deciphering the human genome, designing telescopes that may eventually image the ‘big-bang’, studying the effects of global warming on life, creating micro-electronics that convert heat to power, forecasting future state water resources, addressing contemporary issues of justice, tolerance and community, improving K-12 education, and exploring the frontiers of visual expression.

In summary we have used these reflective essays to explore our strengths and weaknesses in an open and self-critical way. This openness is extended to welcoming the WASC committee members’ input on how well we are performing our continual assessment. The opportunity afforded by the WASC accreditation process provides UC Santa Cruz with an unparalleled opportunity to determine what this university wants to accomplish during the next decade, how we intend to reach our goals, and how we will determine if we have done so. We are using this process to bring together university stakeholders to learn, to plan, and to determine how we might better assess our effectiveness as an educational institution. We welcome the scholars who will be participating in both our Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews, and will draw upon their expertise and advice to help us become even better.