

WASC Newsletter # 4

September 16, 2002

Milestone Events:

We are nearing the mid-point of our two-year process of self-examination as part of the campus' 10-years reaffirmation of accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Many small and large tasks remain to be completed. Here are some of the key dates to keep in mind:

Nov 1, 2002 - Preparatory Report must be revised and have final editing.

Nov 15, 2002 - Prep Report, Docs and Evidence on Website and sent to WASC

Dec 2002 and Jan 2003 - Teleconferences with Visitation Team to discuss report

March 5-7, 2003 - WASC Visit Team on campus. **(Mark these dates on your calendar!)**

June 15, 2003 - Educational Effectiveness Report must be sent to WASC

October 15 -17, 2003 - 2nd WASC Visit Team on Campus **(Mark these dates on your calendar!)**

WASC Preparatory Report Draft:

We have completed draft of the Preparatory Report and are ready for widespread campus comment. A synopsis of the report is provided later in this newsletter. Hard copies have been provided to each department on campus and you can access the full report on our WASC website:

<http://wasc.csusb.edu/pprep/preprev-draft.htm>

Your suggestions for clarification, changes, and improvements are welcomed. Please send your feedback to Associate Provost, Jerry Pritchard (jpritcha@csusb) by October 15th.

Our lead writer and editor, Ward McAfee has done a fine job of looking at the many, many documents, reports, databases, policies, and procedures that we are using as the evidence that we meet the new WASC Standards and putting our findings in a series of short reflective essays. (Ward is retiring on September 21st after 37 years of outstanding service to CSUSB in roles as faculty member, department chair, Dean, and Vice President for Academy Affairs. We congratulate him on his many achievements and wish him well.)

The heart of the report, however, is the Appendix II, which is a 50-page listing of the many sources of evidence that we believe supports our position that we meet and exceed all the WASC standards:

<http://wasc/csusb.edu/pprep/appdx2.htm>

Each of these sources of information and data is linked (or soon will be linked) to web addresses where the evidence is housed on-line. We will not be printing out this voluminous appendix. (We probably have collected too much and may overwhelm our WASC Visitation team with the plethora of evidence, but for this first time of review under the new standards we wanted to make it clear that CSUSB is in institution that has a “culture of evidence” and that we track and use data for improvement.)

We also still are working on completion of Appendix I, a report on campus follow up to the recommendations made by the 1998 WASC visit team and the action letter of the WASC Commission on Senior Colleges and Universities.

WASC Preparatory Review Report Synopsis

1. The report begins with a General Reflective Essay that includes the following points:
 - CSUSB is beginning to develop a “culture of evidence” with its assessment efforts.
 - Both Library resource development and increasing usage patterns are in the area of on-line resources.
 - Library resource development is preparing the university to engage more in distance education and distributed learning.
 - The opening of the Palm Desert Campus of CSUSB additionally aids the university in serving its 27,000 square mile service area.
 - Given the extraordinary challenges facing commuter students in our huge service area, the university is investing heavily in improving retention/graduation rates especially for students from historically underrepresented minorities.
 - Current issues of concern regarding the quality of teaching and learning at CSUSB involve grading practices, quality of out-of-class assignments, and trends toward larger average class sizes.
 - The institution needs to set priorities in carrying out its strategic planning goals and objectives, especially as the CSU system enters upon an era of predictably lean budgets.
2. The report then covers the four accreditation standards developed by WASC under its new procedures. Each standard is reviewed with a reflective essay concerning how it applies to CSUSB’s current conditions. The principal

points in the reflective essay for Standard 1, which concerns “institutional purposes and integrity”, are as follows:

- **Community University Partnerships (CUPs) are being developed to integrate the region’s needs with the campus community’s educational resources. The College of Education carries on a similar program relating specifically to the needs of regional K-12 public education.**
- **CSUSB is committed to the principle of academic freedom.**
- **CSUSB is also committed to multicultural diversity. This orientation is made especially relevant by the changing demographic profile of CSUSB’s student body, which increasingly represents historically underrepresented groups. The U.S. Department of Education has designated CSUSB a “Hispanic-Serving Institution.”**
- **CSU system-wide rules and faculty/staff unions serve both to protect and constrain local operations in fulfilling institutional purposes and integrity.**
- **CSUSB conducts its operations in a well-managed and open manner.**

3. The principal points in the reflective essay for Standard 2, which concerns “achieving educational objectives through core functions”, are as follows:

- **CSUSB has long been characterized by its substantial General Education package.**
- **For the last two decades, CSUSB has been characterized by a comprehensive curriculum.**
- **CSUSB enjoys a well-equipped library and computer resources suitable for achieving its educational objectives. Statistics reflect growing usage of on-line library resources.**
- **Declining student usage of traditional library resources (i.e., books) raise questions involving CSUSB’s educational objectives. Evidence indicating that written research assignments do not necessarily typify CSUSB course requirements highlights concern in this area.**
- **Growth in Service Learning and off-campus programs are designed to enhance CSUSB achieving its educational objectives.**
- **Increasing average class size raise questions whether CSUSB’s educational objectives are possibly compromised as a result. Evidence indicating that CSUSB students are less actively involved in the learning process than is the case at comparable institutions highlights concern in this area.**
- **Several concerns regarding academic rigor in traditionally offered CSUSB courses heighten an insistence that standards be maintained in the development of distributed learning course offerings.**
- **CSUSB needs to pay more attention to current grading practices and whether they possibly threaten institutional educational objectives. Evidence suggesting that CSUSB’s students do not warrant the high percentages of “A” and “B” grades being granted heighten concerns in this area.**

- **CSUSB provides the faculty with resources both for the improvement of instruction and professional development. CSUSB enjoys a talented faculty that is professionally active.**
 - **Positive signs of effective, small teaching/learning communities providing quality educational experiences at CSUSB include Model U.N., Model Arab League, as well of instances where faculty/ student laboratory research projects result in professional publication of the findings.**
 - **Surveying of student satisfaction occurs in abundance but needs to be more carefully managed so that surveying itself does not outstrip the institutional ability to analyze and digest the results.**
 - **CSUSB provide multiple opportunities for student involvement in activities and clubs that support the achievement of institutional educational objectives.**
 - **CSUSB provide multiple support systems for students to continue their studies successfully to graduation. These include financial aid, transfer services, and focused retention efforts.**
- 4. The principal points in the reflective essay for Standard 3, which concerns “resources and sustainability”, are as follows:**
- **CSUSB enjoys a quality staff, largely due to the fact that CSU statewide salary schedules and benefits are better than those offered in the private sector in the region served by the university.**
 - **CSUSB enjoys a quality faculty for a variety of reasons, one of which concerns a favorable ratio of local cost-of-living indicators to statewide CSU salary levels. Other factors include a rigorous Retention, Promotion, and Tenure procedure that encourage faculty to be achievement oriented.**
 - **Several concerns in the area of “resources and sustainability” are: (1) A growing reliance upon temporary faculty and (2) a growing trend toward larger class sizes. The second factor appears to be encouraged both by centralized planning within the CSU system as a whole and local departmental and college-level decisions to lower faculty course loads while maintaining student enrollment goals.**
 - **The Teaching Resource Center serves to improve teaching and learning.**
 - **Although the CSU is funded as a teaching-centered institution, CSUSB provides faculty with professional growth opportunities through a variety of means.**
 - **The university’s financial affairs have been well managed and scandal free throughout the history of the institution; however, there is a need to improve coordination between strategic planning and budget making.**
 - **While existing in a potentially dangerous area (i.e., earthquake, wind, and fire), CSUSB is appropriately alert to the need to plan for possible disasters.**
 - **CSUSB has systematically been developing its technology resources to meet anticipated needs.**

- CSUSB is administratively structured to have the Vice President of Academic Affairs also serve as Provost, thereby emphasizing the centrality of the university's educational mission.
 - CSUSB's faculty and administration work harmoniously to resolve local issues.
5. The principal points in the reflective essay for Standard 4, which concerns "planning for improvement", are as follows:
- Much more has to be done by the institution to begin to approach living up to its ambitious Vision Statement.
 - Surveys of stakeholder satisfaction reveal that a positive impression of the University is common both on and off campus.
6. A Concluding Essay includes the following general points, followed by 10 specific recommendations.
- CSUSB is a maturing institution, characterized by significant changes in its demographic composition.
 - The relatively low academic profile of the university's service area challenges the institution to contribute positively toward bringing about an educational transformation.

Preparatory Report Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The ten specific Recommendations made in this report are:
 - 1) Make the Vision Statement a Reality.
 - 2) Establish Strategic Priorities.
 - 3) Link Strategic Planning with Budget Making.
 - 4) Improve Assessment Capacity.
 - 5) Improve Student Utilization of the Library.
 - 6) Encourage Active Student Learning.
 - 7) Investigate Grade Inflation.
 - 8) Increase and Improve Service Learning.
 - 9) Improve Coordination and Implementation of Distributed Learning.
 - 10) Improve Surveying of Stakeholders.

Understanding the Preparatory Report and the New WASC Process

Why is the self-study structured as it is? Under the new WASC processes, a university under review makes the first step by responding to how four standards identified by WASC are operational for that institution. The four standards are: (1) Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives; (2) Achieving

Educational Objectives Through Core Functions; (3) Support for Student Learning; and (4) Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement. Under each standard, WASC also provides subsidiary “Criteria for Review” that flesh out each standard.

In composing the Preparatory Report, Professor Ward McAfee, lead writer and editor of the self-study report, began by examining each of the standards and criteria and recording what documentation CSUSB had relating to each item. These documents are collected in Appendix 2 of the Preparatory Report. He also prepared a concordance, which shows the relationship of the Preparatory Report content and recommendations to specific WASC standards and criteria. He then reviewed this evidence in composing an institutional response relevant to each standard. At the conclusion of this effort, ten recommendations were drafted for the institution to consider in reflecting upon its current situation in 2002.

Grades, SETEs, and RPT: Points Made in the WASC Preparatory Review

- In the 1998-99 Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey of faculty nationwide, 24.4% of CSUSB’s faculty indicated satisfaction with the quality of their students. This compared to figures of 35.2% and 44.9% of faculty from all public four-year universities and faculty from all four-year universities, respectively. 431 CSUSB faculty participated in this survey, indicating a 51.5% response rate. Temporary as well as tenure-track faculty participated. Full-time faculty indicated more dissatisfaction with CSUSB’s students than the part-timers; only 20.9% of CSUSB’s tenure-track faculty indicated satisfaction with their students. The 1998-99 HERI survey results may be viewed at [<http://ir.csusb.edu/FacSur99.pdf>]. On page 12 of the survey, see the last item (“quality of students”) listed under “Job Satisfaction”.
- In stark contrast to the HERI survey, CSUSB faculty grading practices show high levels of satisfaction with students. In the same year as the HERI survey (1998-99), CSUSB’s faculty gave a combined 40.3% for “A” and “A minus” grades in all upper-division courses (300-599) university wide. That same year, they gave a combined 29.8% for “B plus”, “B” and “B minus” grades in upper-division courses. In short, 70.1 % of all grades given that year in upper-division courses were “B minus” or above. The comparable statistic for AY 2000-01 was 70.5%. CSUSB grade distribution trends from AY 1994-95 through AY 2000-01 may be viewed at [<http://wasc.csusb.edu/deata/grades/Grades1994-2001Rev.pdf>]. Page two of this document provides generalized trends for the entire university. The remainder of the report gives trends by colleges and departments.

- A local survey of faculty conducted in spring quarter, 2002, corroborated the results of the earlier HERI survey. In this latter survey, only nine percent of the full-time faculty indicated that they are satisfied with the academic preparation of entering students, and only 22 percent recorded that they are satisfied with the academic performance of typical students at the university. This survey is not hotlinked as yet.
- The disconnect between faculty attitudes concerning student abilities and grades granted by faculty to those same students suggest that grading practices need to be reviewed by the Faculty Senate.
- A faculty perception that students will punish rigorous graders by means of the Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) process may contribute to the disjunction of high grades and the faculty perception of low student achievement.
- An analysis of SETE data by Institutional Research reveals a correlation between high average grades awarded to students and high student ratings given to instructors. This study may be viewed at: http://wasc.csusb.edu/data/sete/SETE_Notes.pdf].
- SAT/ACT scores of CSUSB students at time of entry to the university indicate that our students are relatively low academically among the cohort admitted to the CSU. The region served by the university is characterized by low college-attendance rates.
- It is possible that some high grading is motivated by a faculty perception that granting higher grades than are warranted by the level of achievement demonstrated will enhance student self-esteem and thereby encourage academic interests.
- In a 1998-2000 National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], CSUSB's students scored below national averages in every indicator of "student participation in a challenging educational environment." The sample was relatively small, and these results are therefore somewhat questionable. This survey is not hotlinked as yet.
- Faculty members record a common complaint that many students do not come to class on a regular basis unless the teacher "counts attendance."
- Students self-report in surveys that they expend less effort outside of class on their studies than is normally expected.
- The faculty Retention, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) document states that "fair and thorough assessment of student achievement is an important aspect of effective instruction." Yet no statistical data

concerning grading practices comparable to SETE data is required to be part of the RPT evaluation of faculty effectiveness.

- CSUSB's problem is with "grading practices", not "grade inflation". In AY 1994-95, 70.3% of grades awarded in upper-division courses were "B minus" or better. In AY 2000-01, the comparable statistic was 70.5%.
- The university catalog describes the "B" grade as indicating "a high level of performance." Does the word "high" lose its meaning given our grading patterns?
- Standard 2.4 in the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Handbook of Accreditation, January 2001, states: "The institution's expectations for learning and student attainment are developed and widely shared among its members (including faculty, students, staff, and where appropriate, external stakeholders). The institution's faculty takes collective responsibility for establishing, reviewing, fostering, and demonstrating the attainment of these expectations."
- Questionable grading practices validate efforts to assess student learning outcomes

Educational Effectiveness Report Update:

The Committees for Themes I, II, and III have not been meeting during the summer, but will start up again in October. These groups worked very hard last year and produced draft reports in June that provided input for the Preparatory Report in addition to forming the basis of the Educational Effectiveness Report that must be submitted to WASC next June. We should be able to have the final reports written and ready for campus review in winter quarter.