

# San Diego State University/WASC Site Visit

November 9 – 11, 2005

## Briefing Notes

### Background

Working with WASC staff, we have constructed this site visit to extend our efforts to become a more educationally effective institution. The sessions that will take place on November 9 – 11 are opportunities for the site team to learn more about San Diego State University by focusing primarily on the three themes—Access, Retention, and Graduation; Student Learning; Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity—that have served as the touchstones for the WASC Coordinating Committee over the past three years.

This visit has been designed with two guiding assumptions in mind. The first is that we have a good deal to learn from the site team members, they bring a wealth of expertise, and that they have much to learn from us, from the way we have engaged the reaccreditation process, and from the significant progress we have made. The second assumption is that this visit is not a concluding activity, even though we fully expect that we will be reaccredited, but another step we are taking in the process of improving our educational effectiveness.

Consequently, several sessions during this visit are markedly different from what often occurs during site visits. The following descriptions provide brief overviews of what we expect will happen as we work with the site team to address our three themes. Please note that for each theme, there are four sessions:

1. Setting the Context/Framing the Questions
2. Exploratory Review I
3. Exploratory Review II
4. Future Directions/Institutional Commitments

Perusing the schedule, you will see that these sessions are numbered 7-12, 20-25, and 27-32.

### Setting the Context/Framing the Questions

These half-hour sessions are opportunities for the site team to meet with individuals in leadership roles across the university to present and expand on the questions that arose as result of the coordinating committee's work on the three themes. The questions indicated on the schedule for each of these areas are questions noted in the Educational Effectiveness Report. During these "framing" sessions, a facilitator will make sure that the representatives from SDSU will have a chance to present these questions and perhaps to expand upon them. At the same time, the team will take this opportunity to put additional questions on the table, questions that may have arisen through their reading of the Educational Effectiveness Report.

We have agreed with the site team and the WASC staff that these half-hour sessions are not opportunities to describe programs we wish to highlight or to answer the questions that are being posed. Rather, working with the team, the participants in these sessions will describe, refine, and focus the questions that are important for us to pursue as we continue our efforts in upcoming months. At the conclusion of these framing sessions, the team will move to engage with representatives from the university in two Exploratory Review sessions.

### **Exploratory Review Sessions**

The exploratory review sessions are scheduled to run 45 minutes and will consist of two parts. In the first half of these sessions, also facilitated by individuals from SDSU, the site team will observe groups of faculty, staff, and/or students address a particular focus, topic, or challenge that is part of our three themes. For example, following the framing session on student learning, one group of faculty will discuss general education exploring the challenges we face or wish to address as we increase our focus on student learning in this important part of the undergraduate program.

Once this discussion has been underway for about 20-25 minutes, the facilitator will ask the site team members to join the discussion. At this point, they can ask questions, make suggestions, and representatives from the university can do the same. The aim is to engage in a collaborative discussion about how the university can move forward on this particular issue.

At the end of the first Exploratory Review for each theme, the site team will move to a second Exploratory Review with different folks from the university as they address a second issue related to that overall theme. The overall pattern of the second Exploratory Review will be the same as the first. At the conclusion of the second Exploratory Review, team members will take a short break and then move into a session entitled Future Directions/Institutional Commitments.

### **Future Directions/Institutional Commitments**

These one-hour sessions will conclude the focus on each theme and will be attended by everyone who has been involved in the three previous sessions: Setting the Context/Framing the Questions; Exploratory Review I; and Exploratory Review II.

One of the site team members will take the lead for each of these sessions and invite everyone to come back to the original framing questions to discuss where San Diego State University is headed as it maps out directions for future actions. Here again, the aim is to create a collaborative, open discussion in which participants examine the steps we need to take to improve our educational effectiveness in each of these three areas. We will have note takers at these sessions so that in addition to whatever recommendations eventually come from the site team, we have our own record of what transpires. We see these sessions as excellent opportunities to benefit from the impressive expertise the site team brings with them, and as opportunities for us to think deeply about the actions we can take to realize our commitment to increasing our educational effectiveness.

## **A Few Final Comments**

This site visit is markedly different from those that usually occur during reaccreditation. We are breaking new ground here and doing so at WASC's invitation. They realize the significant level of engagement we have undertaken over the past three years and see San Diego State University as an example of the kind of institution that fully understands the new WASC process. This process, which was redesigned in 2001, aims to be more useful to campuses, to address issues of accountability in ways that help them become stronger, and to create ongoing learning organizations firmly embedded in a culture of evidence. We thus see this visit and its design as a powerful compliment to San Diego State University, and believe it establishes us as a leader in higher education in this regard. We are grateful for your involvement in this visit. Your contributions are important and they are key to helping us maintain the momentum the WASC process has allowed us to achieve.