

# Frequently Asked Questions about the SDSU WASC Review Process

## **WHAT IS WASC?**

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is one of the six regional accrediting associations in the U.S. and exists to assure quality in higher education. To SDSU, reaffirmation of our accreditation certifies to the educational community and to the general public that all of SDSU's degree programs and educational activities meet or exceed established standards and the campus is achieving its own stated objectives.

## **WHAT IS WASC TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE SDSU COMMUNITY?**

The WASC review process is an opportunity to engage in a period of self-study and promote improvement in educational quality. It is an opportunity to ask critical questions about the university, to identify evidence that helps us address these questions, to reflect and contribute to conversations about the future of the university, and to help set directions for further development and improvement.

## **HOW HAS WASC CHANGED?**

The WASC review process no longer focuses on compliance issues. Instead, institutions select issues most relevant to their mission, study them in detail, and make evidence-based decisions that lead to improvements in educational effectiveness. Thus, the new review process is outcome-based and future-oriented; it is not a status report but a shift to continuous improvement processes.

## **WHAT IS THE WASC PROCESS NOW?**

The process is now a multi-stage, sequential one:

### **1. THE INSTITUTIONAL PROPOSAL**

The new process asks each institution to conduct a self-study that focuses on issues germane to its particular mission. The proposal guides the entire review process. The WASC Coordinating Committee has selected three foci for this review period: 1) student learning, 2) the balance among access, retention and graduation rates, and 3) the balance between quality of undergraduate and graduate programs.

### **2. THE PREPARATORY REVIEW**

The purpose of the Preparatory Review is to demonstrate the institution's commitment to institutional capacity. It asks if SDSU functions with the capacity to fulfill its educational purposes.

The Preparatory Review revolves around WASC's four standards, which, in summary, ask if the campus demonstrates a capacity to function with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and with organizational structures to fulfill our purpose.

### **3. THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

The purpose of the Educational Effectiveness Review is to invite sustained engagement by the institution on the extent to which it fulfills its educational objectives. This is accomplished through use of and reflection on evidence.

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### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY” AND “EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS”?**

WASC’s core commitments are to “institutional capacity” and “educational effectiveness”:

- Institutional capacity involves resource, structure, and process issues from a holistic perspective and asks what the campus is doing in terms of its capacity to fulfill its aspirations.
- Educational effectiveness asks if institutional systems (such as course and program design, faculty support, and program review) are effectively linked to evidence of student learning and are consistent with the campus’ educational goals and academic standards.

### **WHAT PROGRESS HAS SDSU MADE?**

- We have formed the WASC Planning and Coordinating Committees.
- We have updated and disseminated the Institutional Proposal.
- We have collected evidence for the Preparatory Review and drafted the Preparatory Review Report.
- We have built an electronic portfolio for the Preparatory Review.
- We have completed and circulated the Preparatory Review Report.
- We have engaged the campus, faculty in particular, in discussions that will prepare SDSU for the Preparatory Review Site Visit from 10/31/04 to 11/2/04.
- We have completed the Educational Effectiveness Review Report and prepared for the Educational Effectiveness Site Visit from 11/9/05 to 11/11/05.