

## Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

### Reflective Essay 1a: From the Revolving Door to the Corridor to Graduation: How Do We Balance Issues of Access, Retention, and Graduation?

#### Introduction

Since 1960, the campuses of the California State University have implemented the [California Master Plan for Higher Education](#) that promised admission to the CSU to first-time freshmen from the top one-third of all graduates of California public high schools and transfers from California community colleges with junior standing and a minimum 2.0 GPA. However, in 1996, concurrent with Dr. Weber's presidency at SDSU, there were strong signs that the CSU, and most dramatically SDSU, would no longer be able to accommodate all eligible applicants. Campus discussions began regarding how to manage enrollment in light of the impending influx of students, commonly known as "Tidal Wave II." These discussions have been challenging as the issues of managing enrollment and maintaining student access often appear at odds with one another. Having suffered serious problems with [unfunded enrollment](#) and budget reductions in the early 1990s, SDSU wanted to ensure that history would not repeat itself.

This essay discusses our capacity to address issues related to access, retention, and graduation. The essay is divided into sections to address each of these three issues for the sake of reader clarity; we know, however, that these issues are complex and interwoven. That is, a policy change we make to enhance one area may affect our progress in another area. We will return to explore in detail the challenge of balancing access, retention, and graduation in the Educational Effectiveness Report.

#### Admission Policy Changes: Enrollment Management and Issues of Access

[CFRs: 1.1 & Q4; 2.14; 3.7 & Q1, Q4; 4.2].

[CSU policy](#) defines a campus as "impacted" when it receives more applications during a defined application period than it can accommodate. An impacted campus may use supplemental admissions criteria as part of a planned enrollment management strategy. SDSU sought authority to manage its enrollment growth when it became clear that it was not funded at a level that would meet the needs of all CSU-eligible students who wished to enroll. For example, in 1996-97 SDSU was over-enrolled by 1,048 FTES at an unfunded cost of \$5.6 million; in 1997-98 there were 1,157 excess FTES at an unfunded cost of \$6.2 million. At the time, there were few tools to manage enrollments other than becoming an impacted campus. The most obvious, closing the application filing period early, was implemented in November 1996 for fall 1997 admission. Yet undergraduate applications to SDSU continued to grow. From fall 1998 to fall 2004 applications increased by 73%--from 25,536 to 44,235 for about 6,000 - 7,000 spaces. It was clear that additional measures were necessary if we were to continue to provide a quality education to our students.

Campus-wide discussions about impaction began in September 1996. As we will discuss further in Essay 3b, the SDSU Senate recommended seeking impaction status in March 1997 and developed the "[Principles to Guide Impaction](#)." These principles include: a) our commitment to provide the greatest possible access for qualified students with the funds available to us; b) our commitment to search for new ways to provide access; c) our commitment to maintain the rich diversity of our student population; d) the importance of using a consultative process including both on and off-campus constituents; and e) the implementation of an annual review of the effects of our enrollment management policies. In April 1997 the "80/20" admission model was approved by the University Senate, meaning that 80% of students would be admitted based on their academic preparation while the remaining 20% would be admitted based on supplementary criteria including special talent, local residency, socio-economic status and other factors. The Chancellor's office approved campus impaction in June 1997 and it was implemented in 1999.

Prior to campus impaction, entry into some high demand majors has been impacted since the 1980's. Concurrent with the advent of campus impaction, additional high demand majors (N = 35) also became impacted. These 35 majors include approximately 80% of the undergraduate population.

In addition to campus impaction, various CSU and self-imposed policies were created in an attempt to manage enrollment demand fairly. The first series of these policies became effective for students admitted for fall 2000. Students ([first time freshmen](#) and [transfers](#)) admitted to SDSU were required to submit an "Intent to Enroll" form, official transcripts, and \$100 nonrefundable (applicable to fees) deposit by May 1 to confirm their fall 2000 admission. At the same time CSU-eligible service-area freshmen who did not meet SDSU's selective eligibility index and who needed remediation in English and/or mathematics were required to begin their remediation during the summer or forfeit admission in the fall. And finally, students were required to submit their final official transcripts with spring grades by July 15. Failure to submit the final transcript or failure to meet the admission requirements with final grades rescinded their admission. Additionally, in December 2001 SDSU's service area was redefined to exclude high schools and community colleges that better fit into the CSU San Marcos service area.

A [dual admission](#) policy was approved for our campus by Chancellor Reed in December 2001, with the first students admitted in fall 2002. This policy requires service-area freshmen who are CSU-eligible, but do not meet SDSU out-of-service area selective criteria and who have remediation requirements, to be dually admitted to SDSU and a community college—the same population of freshmen who had previously been required to begin remediation in the summer. These students have one year to complete their remediation requirements in order to maintain their SDSU admission and begin their matriculation at SDSU.

The change to an impacted campus in 1999 and the increase in the number of impacted majors also increased the need for clear communication and dialogue between SDSU and the community colleges. Thus, a [Transfer Studies Degree Agreement](#) was developed in 2000 to: a) guarantee admission into an impacted major; b) lock in impaction criteria in effect at the time the student signs the agreement; c) encourage better advising and planning; and d) encourage more transfer students to enroll in the "Transfer Studies" Associate degree program at the community college to ensure that unnecessary course work was kept to a minimum. In 2002 the SDSU/San Diego and Imperial County Community College Association Enrollment Management Task Force was created to improve intersegmental communication and ensure a smooth transition from the community college to SDSU. The task force meets on a monthly basis and consists of the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Executive Director of Enrollment Services at SDSU and the Vice Presidents of the SDSU service-area community college districts. The importance of maintaining open lines of communication between SDSU and community colleges will continue as we make additional changes to transfer requirements. For example, beginning fall 2004, upper-division transfer students will be admitted to SDSU by major and must have attained 60 transferable units, including all General Education and preparation for the major courses, as well as the required GPA for admission to the major. Beginning in fall 2004, non-service area transfer students must meet all requirements for admission to a major and will also be ranked by their GPA, and admitted as spaces are available.

In addition to implementation of new policies to manage enrollment, organizational changes also occurred. In January 2000 the Office of Admissions and Records and Student Outreach Services, previously under Student Affairs, were moved into Academic Affairs and reorganized as [Enrollment Services](#). This unit now includes the Offices of [Admissions](#), [Registrar](#), [Advising and Evaluations](#), and a new Prospective Student Center housed in Advising and Evaluations. This re-

organization emphasizes the interconnected nature of access, retention, and graduation and ensures that all areas dealing with these issues are housed in the same academic division.

#### Other Strategies to Increase Access [CFR: 1.5]

While the San Diego campus has been dealing with impaction, the University has increased access to the [Imperial Valley Campus](#). SDSU, in coordination with community leaders in Imperial Valley, has worked to develop a college-going culture in the Valley. SDSU became the first four-year institution in Imperial Valley when eleven high-performing students were admitted to a pilot freshmen program in AY 2003-04. All of the students were women who had been admitted to other four-year institutions but were unable to leave the Valley for economic and/or familial reasons. This program has been expanded for AY 2004-05. In addition, two new majors, mathematics and agri-business, were added to the campus to meet community needs. The University has also opened a second site for the Imperial Valley Campus in [Brawley](#) to facilitate the enrollment of students at the north end of the Valley.

Finally, the issue of access is being addressed through a collaborative program with Sweetwater Union High School District, in which two-thirds of the students are Latino. The [Compact For Success](#) was created in 2000 to further three of SDSU's goals: a) community involvement; b) enhancement of academic quality; and c) a commitment to increasing diversity at SDSU. This unique program guarantees 7<sup>th</sup> graders in the years 2000, 2001, and 2002, admission and paid fees to SDSU if they complete the CSU required A- G courses with a 3.0 GPA and satisfy the writing and math competency tests. In addition, they must complete either the SAT or ACT admission test. SDSU collaborates and participates in district-wide reforms, offers tutoring, including summer sessions, and provides enhanced teacher preparation to ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to be successful in college.

The ultimate indicator of success of the Compact will be the percentage of students in the high school graduating class of 2006 who have completed the benchmarks and enter SDSU. In the interim, however, the Compact has already flourished beyond the original intent. A comprehensive reform of curricula, policies and practices within the Sweetwater district has developed. Collaborative efforts among SDSU faculty and students, district teachers, students, parents, and community leaders have resulted in improved curricula and support services in the district and opportunities for faculty and students to work in the "laboratory" of Sweetwater Union District. Other indicators of the success of the Compact include the broad acceptance of the program through feedback from parents and community meetings. Moreover, high school report cards now include a description of the Compact and show each student's progress toward completion of the requirements for admission to SDSU. Monthly progress checks on student achievement also take place.

#### Retention and Graduation Rates [CFRs: 1.7; 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13 & Q5, Q6; 3.7; 4.3]

Interest in access to higher education in California has always seemed to overshadow interest in retention and graduation rates. SDSU believes this relationship must change. To quote Dr. Weber, "It is time to stop the revolving door of higher education and concentrate on the corridor to graduation." While we have long had a number of retention programs on campus (e.g. [Freshmen Success Program](#), [Faculty Student Mentoring Program](#), [Educational Opportunity Program](#)) we had not systematically examined their effectiveness. This changed when these issues were brought to the University Senate.

In May 1999, the University Senate received a [report](#) from the Senate Diversity, Equity, and Outreach (DEO) Committee that concurred with a March 1999 Academic Policy and Planning (AP&P) report to the Senate that SDSU needed coordinated recruitment and retention programs

that would enhance graduation rates. In February 2001, the Senate issued a "[Resolution on Student Retention](#)," which called for a coordinator, a direction, and mandatory first-time freshman advising and orientation coupled with registration. As a result, the Retention Council was established collaboratively by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to gather information and to integrate retention programs and practices. Since 2001, representatives from several colleges and the directors of several retention programs have been meeting regularly to better align their efforts. In that year, the Council recommended working on "Ten Next Steps" grounded in retention literature, particularly the work of Vincent Tinto, and relevant to our campus. These steps include improvement in the following areas: a) student engagement; b) orientation programs; c) analysis of retention programs; d) at-risk students (dual admits and students affected by [Executive Order 665](#)); e) students on probation; f) academic affairs/student affairs collaboration; g) the faculty role in retention; h) retention data in departmental plans; i) pre-majors not making progress toward the major; and j) coordination of academic advising. An annual report [see [2002](#) and [2003](#) reports] detailing our progress on the "Ten Next Steps" is presented to the Senate. As a result of these efforts, a number of changes in policy and procedures have been implemented. Some of these changes will be described in detail in this essay while others are described in an essay for Standard 4.

We have developed a number of policies and procedures that we believe assist both freshmen and transfer students in taking a more direct path toward graduation. Beginning in fall 2001 freshmen entering SDSU were required to register in oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, and mathematics within their first two semesters. To ensure that students registered for and completed these four classes, the requirement was computer-enforced at registration. In addition, freshmen receive priority registration, guaranteeing them space in these courses. In fall 2000 all new transfers were mailed a degree audit within their first semester of attendance. In December 2002 automated degree audits showing students exactly how credits are applied and what courses are needed to graduate were made available to current students online. A very recent improvement has been the development of four-year Road Maps [[See Geological Sciences example](#)] for all SDSU majors and emphases (N = 187). These Road Maps provide students with the best four-year sequence of courses for their majors. The Road Maps have been posted to the web and will be used in summer 2004.

Our use of technology has also greatly enhanced students' ability to obtain information relevant to their status. A [web portal](#) was developed in spring 2003. This feature allows us to send registration dates and information to students via the portal and students can pay their fees on-line. In addition, the portal allows current students to view and/or print unofficial transcripts, obtain degree audits, and receive advising information on-line. A message center built into the portal provides all students with important and timely information. Our ultimate goal is to incorporate degree audits, registration, and the class schedule into the portal so that students can find out which courses they need, go directly to the class schedule and find available classes, and then register immediately. Our plan is to have the class schedule/registration piece available by fall 2004. The availability of the web portal has also facilitated the work of campus advisors, who also have access to students' degree audits and unofficial transcripts, eliminating their need for access to our cumbersome Student Information System (SIMS).

Another example of how technology has assisted student planning is the development of the web-based Transfer Admission Planner ([TAP](#)) in summer 2003. The TAP system was developed using our Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) and ASSIST, which contains complete articulation information for our top 50 feeder schools. The system allows students and advisors at these feeder schools to verify how their courses apply to General Education and "preparation for the major" requirements and what they would be held to for preparation for the major from their transfer institution for admission to SDSU.

Evaluating the effectiveness of policy and procedural changes is accomplished through collaboration with the [Office of Analytical Studies and Institutional Research](#) (OASIR), which provides official information to the SDSU community, the CSU, and external agencies regarding admission applications, student enrollment, course enrollment, continuation rates, and graduation rates. In addition, OASIR customizes Web information/reports for departments to offer them information on their majors such as: a) student preparation, performance and outcomes such as remediation/proficiency at entry, new student academic indicators, one-year continuation rates, one-year academic probation, cumulative GPA by student level; b) degrees granted/graduation rates by ethnicity and degree level; c) student enrollment by ethnicity, full-time/part-time status and gender, and average unit load; d) course enrollment sections by course level, FTES generated by majors and non-majors, FTES generated from General Education courses; e) faculty FTEF, FTES, SFR and unit load by faculty rank; and f) facility utilization, enrollment by section, day and time. Providing departments with the ability to access these data and customize reports has been a great step toward identifying areas of concern with regard to continuation rates, graduation rates, probation, and disqualification rates at the department level as well as the institutional level.

While the technological changes that have taken place facilitate student success, we also continue to find ways to improve our personal interactions with students. These include the first University-wide meeting of advisors, held in fall 2003, to enhance the consistency of information provided to students, the increased collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs in conducting new student and transfer student orientations, and the development of the New Student Convocation. Ongoing reflection of practices takes place to ensure that students not only receive consistent information from offices across campus but also feel welcomed and part of a community committed to their success.

#### Summary

We have made great strides in developing the infrastructure, policies and procedures to examine the balance among access, retention, and graduation. CSU accountability data and SDSU campus data will allow us to compare retention and graduation rates over time. However, we also know that we have much more to do, particularly in examining the effectiveness of the dual admit program and the success of transfer students. These two issues will be addressed in the concluding essay.