

## Concluding Essay

This essay summarizes SDSU's capacity to meet the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity as well as our readiness to conduct the Educational Effectiveness Review. Evidence from the reflective essays demonstrates our progress toward becoming a learning organization committed to reflection, planning, and improvement. Challenges we face and strategies for examining them in the Educational Effectiveness Review are discussed.

Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives. The changes in policies, procedures, and organization described in the first essay on access, retention, and graduation illustrate the challenges that can arise when external and internal policies must be addressed jointly while finding solutions to these three complex and interwoven issues. Despite this complexity, we have made considerable progress in developing the infrastructure necessary to examine and address these issues. The improvement and expansion of the Office of Analytical Studies and Institutional Research is critical to our ability to gather, analyze, and reflect upon data to make improvement in these areas. The Retention Council, consisting of faculty, staff, and administrators committed to student success, meets regularly to discuss strategies for increasing our effectiveness. These groups will play an integral role in the Educational Effectiveness phase as we examine the effectiveness of our policies and procedures on dual admission students and transfer students.

The second essay for Standard 1 described three initiatives that address one of the University's central goals, educating students for the global community. Growth in internationalism has become a hallmark of the University and the essay described in detail the infrastructure and financial resources that have been dedicated to increasing both the number of international students on our campus, as well as the number of students studying abroad. The other two initiatives described opportunities for students to engage with diverse groups at the local level. While taken together these initiatives demonstrate our commitment to educational objectives, we do need to meet the challenge of finding appropriate mechanisms to systematically examine direct measures of student learning in these programs.

Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions. The first essay for this standard described the policies, procedures, and structures that SDSU has developed to examine student learning. Many of these developments were implemented last year. The recent creation of a Senate-appointed Committee on Student Learning Outcomes will greatly facilitate our ability to systematically examine the assessment of student learning. The inclusion of student learning assessment as part of Academic Reviews and annual Academic Plans will also assist us in continuing this progress. Finally, the inclusion of workshops on student learning outcomes and assistance given to individual faculty or departments by the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning provides the faculty support so necessary when shifts in institutional thinking are undertaken. Though SDSU has the capacity to examine student learning in the GE program and the major, systematic examination of student learning has only taken place in disparate programs across campus. We will examine this challenge in detail in the Educational Effectiveness Review.

The second essay for Standard 2 describes our capacity to support the research and creative activity of the faculty. Policies and procedures to support faculty scholarship have been in place for several years, as have expectations for this kind of activity in the retention, tenure, and promotion process. The Office of Faculty Affairs and the Office of Research and Graduate Affairs offer opportunities to apply for internal grants. College Deans have also begun to develop resources to support the scholarly activity of the faculty. In addition, the SDSU Foundation is a strong partner in assisting faculty with all phases of applying for grants and contracts, which has culminated in SDSU receiving over \$130 million dollars in grants and contracts this past year. In fact, the shared commitment of the Foundation and the University to scholarship can be seen by the most recent infusion of over \$400,000

by the Foundation to assist the University in continuing to progress in this area during these financially challenging times. We also described the pervasive nature of student involvement in research activities, with the hypothesis that this activity will enhance student learning. What remains to be examined, however, is evidence to support or refute this hypothesis. We will return to this question in the Educational Effectiveness Review.

Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability. The first essay for this standard described the mature processes in place to address issues of fiscal, physical, and information resources. SDSU effectively uses a variety of fiscal resources to support facility growth, maintenance, and maximal use of existing facilities. Examples were provided to illustrate our commitment to making decisions in support of our educational objectives. Discussions regarding resources for graduate education exemplify the complexity of these issues and the need for institutional planning and consensus-building as we begin to systematically examine graduate program growth.

The second essay for Standard 3 incorporates two case studies to illustrate the shared governance process that operates on our campus. Since 1997, in particular, this process has allowed us to face and solve difficult issues confronting the University, including budget planning and enrollment management. Changes in the composition of the Cabinet Budget Committee further attest to SDSU's commitment to solving problems by working together. The changes in organization, structures, and policies greatly facilitate our capacity to make wise decisions about aligning resources with institutional purposes.

Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement. The first essay in response to Standard 4 described the Academic Review process that has been employed on campus since the 1970s. More importantly, however, the essay illustrates changes that have taken place in this process to improve its relevance to program improvement, and most recently, to student learning. The essay also described changes that have taken place in Student Affairs to begin the shift toward a student learning emphasis. Many of the changes described in this essay, which have occurred in the past two years, are indicative of the goals of many new administrators, in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, who have been hired since 2000. Clearly, San Diego State University is shifting its culture toward a focus on student learning. We are cognizant, however, that we are in the early stages of this shift and have much more to accomplish.

The second essay described changes that have taken place in the assessment of writing competency and proficiency. These changes were made in response to a thorough examination of existing policies and procedures and a thoughtful discussion of how best to improve these policies. The essay also described a shift in thinking about writing competency at SDSU: How can we enhance assessment of writing competency and proficiency to link it more directly to student learning and curricular changes in writing courses? The recent implementation (January 2004) of the new Writing Proficiency Assessment provides an important opportunity to systematically examine the impact of SDSU's updated approach to writing assessment.

In summary, we believe that the Capacity and Preparatory Review demonstrates that San Diego State University has met the WASC four standards, that there is a strong commitment to Institutional Capacity, and that we are ready to stage the Educational Effectiveness Review. While undertaking this process, we have not only documented our progress but have also reflected on areas that we need to examine in depth during the Educational Effectiveness Review. The next sections will highlight the challenges we face, particularly in relation to the three themes we will explore during the next phase of re-accreditation.

### **Access, Retention, and Graduation**

The dual admission program continues to be a subject of debate. Opponents of the program believe that it unfairly removes under-prepared students who are more likely to be students of color from the opportunity to begin their higher education at a university. Proponents describe the considerable resources that have been invested to ensure that students are successful and make the transition from the community colleges to SDSU. As we currently have only one year of data upon which to evaluate this program, we need to gather additional evidence to allow us to reflect on the effects of the dual admission policy on our students and their success.

To date, we have focused our attention on examining how a confluence of initiatives has affected the retention and graduation of first-time freshmen. We must also closely examine the impact of very recent changes in admission policies for transfer students on the retention and graduation rates of these students as well. Finally, given the literature on the positive relationship between student involvement in campus academic and co-curricular networks and student retention (as well as satisfaction with collegiate experiences and various aspects of student development), we need to examine how we facilitate student involvement, which we will be able to evaluate for the first time with our participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement in spring 2004.

By examining these multiple sources of data, we hope to identify the policies, programs, support services, technology, learning environments, faculty support, and co-curricular activities that enhance student learning and improve retention and graduation rates. We will feature and write about these issues in the Educational Effectiveness Report.

### **Student Learning**

While we are pleased with our progress in building capacity to examine student learning, we know that we are in the beginning stages of a systematic examination of direct measures of student learning. We intend to explore student learning in depth as part of the Educational Effectiveness Review. We will select a number of programs for a close examination of direct measures of student learning, including programs with learning outcomes about diversity and/or international themes, two goals described in the Shared Vision document. In addition, during AY 2004-05, we will receive a report from all departments and programs describing assessment activities and documenting how these activities were used to improve student learning. The Educational Effectiveness Review allows us the opportunity to explore what our students are learning and provide recommendations for improvement.

### **Student Engagement in Research and Creative Activity and its Impact on Student Learning**

Research and creative activity have been a definitive part of SDSU's culture for over 30 years. The Preparatory Review described the resources available to faculty to support these endeavors. As the faculty continue to increase the amount of money brought in by grants and contracts, their roles with students evolve into rich opportunities to collaborate on scholarly activities. Though we described the variety of ways that students can become involved in these activities with faculty mentors, we need to examine the extent to which undergraduate students are integrated into research and creative activity and the impact of this engagement on student learning. We will examine this issue in detail in the Educational Effectiveness Review.

Engaging in the re-accreditation process has led us in important directions. As the essays in this review illustrate, we have identified key issues and challenges and through this process, we have developed strategies for addressing those. Thus, while the re-accreditation process necessarily entails a great deal of work, we believe that we have benefited already from this work. We fully expect that the work leading to the Educational Effectiveness Report will be just as important and useful to San Diego State University.