

Please read the following DRAFT reports and mail your suggestions and responses to the [WASC Coordinating Office](#).

Introduction and Overview to the Innovative Self-Study Final Reports

The purpose of this "Introduction and Overview" is to provide the Cal Poly community with a set of brief summaries of the work of the various subcommittees involved in the self-study and to aid interested readers in navigating among the separate draft reports posted here.

The theme of the WASC self-study for reaccreditation is *Cal Poly as a Center of Learning*. It is intended to provide a perspective on the University through a focus on several issues that speak to the heart of our mission as a teaching and learning community. It is important that we engage as fully as possible the members of the University to reflect on this study. To that end, the WASC Steering Committee asks for your feedback to this first draft. We need to know, and to incorporate in later versions, your responses to the opinions, questions, and issues raised by the several reports.

To that end all members of the campus community are invited to participate in a forum to be held from 11am-12pm., Wednesday, October 27, 1999, in UU 220, and to attend an open discussion at a Faculty Senate meeting, 3-5 pm., Tuesday, November 9, in UU 220. We also encourage your specific responses by email to the Steering Committee, WASC Coordinating Office.

Please read the attached reports attentively, keeping in mind that some members of the WASC Visiting Team will be coming to our campus for the first time in early November. In other words, we need your responses as soon as possible.

Background to the Innovative Component of the Self-Study

The WASC staff encouraged Cal Poly to undertake an innovative, research-based study that would explore both the achievements and the shortfalls of the Cal Poly community's efforts to enhance undergraduate and graduate education and to promote the goal of life-long learning. The Steering Committee adopted these principles to serve as guidelines for the self-study:

1. To study some real issues of importance to Cal Poly.
2. To use as wide a representative group as possible for the members of the subcommittees.

3. To use materials and research already available.
4. To learn something new which we would not have known before.
5. To make recommendations without regard to expected resource constraints.
6. To recommend infrastructure changes, where appropriate, to further the progress recommended from the committees.
7. To enjoy this study.

We modeled the University as a Center of Learning, with three overlapping and integrating components or environments:

- Intellectual (content of what we do)
- Physical (context of what we do); and
- Campus Climate (social and psychological environment for what we do).

Discussions in the Steering Committee led to the development of potential researchable questions which were assigned to the appropriate subcommittee(s) for in-depth exploration. The researchable questions and the model of a Center of Learning formed the framework for the studies undertaken by the subcommittees.

The subcommittees formulated measurable questions and specific issues for each topic, and they were empowered, with loose guidance from the Steering Committee, to investigate their topics widely. Technical, methodological, statistical, and administrative support was provided. Reporting of conclusions and recommendations was completed in Spring and Summer; drafts of the subcommittee reports were made available to the Steering Committee members in Summer, and subsequently to the wider campus community. Feedback was solicited during the fall in two open forums (one at the Academic Senate), by email, and by other means.

What We've Learned So Far

We learned that doing research on yourself is difficult and messy, that there are numerous perspectives on singular issues, and that sincere efforts to cope with an increasing emphasis on the priority of, as well as the simple definition of, assessment are problematic. A bitter contract dispute for the faculty unit and a multi-

year curriculum revision served as a backdrop for the work and certainly influenced some of the perspectives explored in the reports. We found that much of what we thought we knew already was verified, but that some of what we thought we knew was not supported. Perhaps, most clearly of all, we found that the subject does not stand still. That, perhaps, argues most strongly for the perception that the self-study is a constant work-in-progress. Even in its finished form it will be essentially a starting point for a long-term discussion and not just a one-time study.

Summary of Subcommittee Findings and Brief Discussion:

Main results are discussed in the eight reports from our subcommittees, but a few of the salient points are these:

Intellectual Environment

The intellectual environment was one of the three main areas studied, with the tasks assigned to four subcommittees, focused on student learning; faculty scholarship of discovery, integration, and development; faculty scholarship on teaching; and staff professional development.

Student Learning

One of the most important of our charges was to seek to improve learning at Cal Poly, especially student learning. To this end, the first WASC subcommittee founded on the Intellectual theme was Student Learning.

The researchable questions were:

- To what extent is Cal Poly focused on student learning, accountable for it, and committed to its improvement?
- What additional actions are appropriate to advancing these goals?

Using numerous existing program review and accreditation materials gathered on an on-going basis on campus, the committee studied a large number of documents and followed up with interviews. Confidentiality was requested and granted, so specific details about individual departments are not identified, nor will they be, except in a few cases where best practices were uncovered. Permission to highlight these programs was granted and they are discussed in some depth in the report. In general, confidentiality enabled the subcommittee to ensure a robust and frank discussion of characteristics of programs.

Eighteen programs in the professional schools as well as six in other colleges were studied. In addition, several programs in Student Affairs, Cal Poly Plan projects and programs and several in General Education were studied. There are several which exemplify excellent integration of setting goals, measuring outcomes, and providing

feedback to the programs and their faculty. Results provide a view of excellence in defining, monitoring, and improving student learning. Several programs have demonstrated that evaluation and assessment may serve to improve programs. Several recommendations on ways to improve efforts at assessment are:

1. Begin to close the feedback loop and provide a direct focus on specific goals to help maintain effectiveness in student learning outcomes.
2. Improve research design and analysis in order to provide convincing evidence of a program's effectiveness.
3. Link student learning objectives with program goals.

Scholarship of Teaching

Subcommittee members were charged with studying the scholarship of teaching at Cal Poly. A "Campus Conversation" with faculty provided a few responses to the question, "How does the University support the Scholarship of Teaching?" The committee members reported two preliminary conclusions:

- Faculty need better information on what is available (in teaching resources), and
- Faculty development programs need to be designed by faculty.

In additional conversations, it was concluded that there is a suspicion of the term "scholarship" in the context of teaching, especially at Cal Poly, which has long prided itself on its commitment to teaching. Many faculty felt that studying teaching might be added to their already heavy workloads, while others felt that studying teaching (and learning) belonged to the Education area and should be studied by professionals in that discipline. However, no matter how faculty felt about studying teaching as a scholarship area, a large majority were interested in good teaching and its ramifications. This was observed by the committee members during numerous discussions held in college meetings and in smaller department and program meetings.

Conclusions drawn from these discussions included:

1. Faculty mentioned that student learning was not mentioned in the charge from the Steering Committee. The focus was, rather, on teaching rather than enabling students' learning.
2. Defining what constitutes a good teacher was elusive, at best.

3. There was doubt, even resentment, about the idea that innovation would necessarily lead to better teaching.

The faculty, in fact, are very interested in teaching and learning, are passionate about it, and feel that they know best what and how to improve both, in spite of other constraints.

Scholarships of Discovery, Integration, and Application

The subcommittee focused on the University as a Center of Learning by asking questions about faculty development in their disciplines. Main areas studied were:

- To what extent do Cal Poly faculty engage in the scholarships of discovery, application and integration, thus continuing to learn in their fields and to contribute to the learning of society?
- What additional actions are appropriate to helping increase both qualitatively and quantitatively the University's scholarly achievements?

Members assessed current policies and programs that support or hinder faculty scholarship. In addition, they examined possible benefits to students of faculty scholarship. Sixteen questions were developed and a variety of sources were utilized to address these questions. Results from their study indicate that Cal Poly values most those scholarly activities that support the teaching-learning experience.

There are several areas in which the subcommittee felt that Cal Poly could improve efforts to secure external funding for research, to provide more resources and support for faculty scholarship, and to design more consistent procedures for tracking and assessing scholarly activities of faculty.

Recommendations included considering scholarly activities in the complex equations governing resources and work loads, and that consideration of scholarly activities be applied in a consistent manner in the retention, promotion and tenure process. The committee recommended, also, that resource allocations be considered without compromising the quality of the undergraduate education offered, and that there be greater support for proposal development and graduate programs.

Staff Learning

As part of the overall theme of Cal Poly as a Center of Learning, it was decided early that activities and resources for all members of the University community would naturally include staff members (the staff designation includes all personnel not classified as faculty members). The Staff Learning subcommittee addressed three main questions:

1. Is Cal Poly's current approach to staff development adequate and

appropriate?

2. How prepared and current are Cal Poly staff employees with respect to their support roles?
3. What steps should Cal Poly take to improve the climate for staff development?

One of the most interesting discussions centered on the issue of the difference between work-related training and the concept of life-long learning. The subcommittee looked at both. Issues regarding staff at Cal Poly need to be understood in the context of the abolition of the Staff Council. The Council, established in 1993, was dissolved in 1998 following the resolution of an unfair practices lawsuit brought against the CSU by the collective bargaining unit. While the Staff Council could not be involved in staff training issues (this being under the purview of the bargaining unit), the Council did actively engage in efforts to improve staff communication and encouraged activities such as staff involvement in cultural awareness workshops and other types of across-campus discussions. Many staff members felt that the Staff Council had been an effective body that encouraged staff to engage in meaningful ways in the life of the University.

Findings suggest that support for staff development beyond that for work-related training is not universal at Cal Poly. It appears to be dependent on the individual department and supervisor. Further, it was found that many existing policies were unfamiliar to subcommittee members themselves and to focus group participants as well. The report also noted that while many employees do take advantage of existing policies to pursue educational opportunities and degrees with the support of their supervisors, fee waiver participation is down considerably, dropping by 70 percent in the period between 1986 and 1997.

Lack of time and lack of financial support were frequently mentioned as barriers to allowing for training and development activities. Since it was clear from the focus groups and surveys that professional development enhances the morale and value of each employee, these issues were also discussed by the subcommittee.

Subcommittee recommendations include revising the staff evaluation form to include training goals and accomplishments, improved communication of available learning opportunities (including mandatory training in safety and health areas), increased efforts to make managers more aware of staff development policies and assistance to managers in supporting those policies, and coverage of duties for those staff participating in professional development opportunities. A proposed new department would coordinate many of these activities, addressing both the policy and the process issues, and enhancing the perception both by and of Cal Poly staff members that they are important participants in the learning community.

Physical Environment

The physical environment was studied so that we could better understand the context for the learning-centered University. This study involved an examination of physical facilities or the physical environment, especially in the classroom and laboratories; technology and its impact on learning; and policies and procedures of the University that enhance or inhibit timely degree completion.

Facilities Design

This subcommittee developed two questions for their research from the self-study proposal:

1. To what extent do the facilities at Cal Poly support current and future learning and how can they be improved?
2. To what extent does the activity of providing facilities at Cal Poly support current and future learning and how can it be improved?

From these questions, two types of learning environments at Cal Poly were chosen for focus: instructional space and information resource space. Methodologies included surveys, raw data already available, physical inventory and analysis of every formal instructional space, and in-depth department head and student outreaches (meetings and presentations). Criteria were developed during an "ideal classroom exercise" which produced principles that would guide how the ideal classroom would look and function. Environmental control, flexibility, life cycle costing, security, and access were addressed in this subcommittee. Conditions of physical facilities were determined to be good to excellent, for the most part. Environmental control and flexibility were not determined to be as good, however, and it was also a surprise to committee members that perceptions of faculty and of those who conducted the surveys differed.

Additional information noted the need for better ventilation in lab areas, better planning for future needs, more multi-purpose facilities. A by-product of the study was a new distribution of space database. Of some consequence to Cal Poly and its future was the conclusion that numerous requirements from the State of California often inhibit long-range optimization of costs, environment sustainability, and user needs. A relaxation of the stringent adherence to the formulas for generation and allocation of space would contribute to more effective planning.

Technology

Questions addressed by this subcommittee were:

1. What forms of technology are now being used or are planned to be used in the teaching and learning processes at Cal Poly? Do these technologies enhance or diminish teaching/learning? In particular, is technology facilitating active learning?

2. What are appropriate mechanisms for assessing the effective use of technology in teaching and learning?

In general, this subcommittee dealt with computer technology and its impacts on learning. The members spent time defining terms for "use of technology" in teaching and learning. Ways in which technology is used include educational delivery, improving access to resources, facilitating learning outside the classroom, enhancing the quality of learning, and administrative support for faculty uses.

An extensive survey was developed to be administered on the web. It included questions about course delivery, student learning, assessment, faculty and student usage of technology, barriers to usage and integration into courses, as well as demographics. Enthusiasm and acceptance of integrated computer technology appears to be high. E-mail, accessing course information on line, and library uses were areas that elicited the highest degree of positive responses on the uses of technology. Limited time for designing and developing technology-based materials was mentioned often, as were inadequate classroom capabilities and support for faculty. Another factor mentioned was curriculum review processes. Assessment areas and enhancing student learning and efficient uses of time were determined as worthy of additional study. Several recommendations included assessment as a key point in implementing technology so that it enhances learning and communications about ourselves.

Retention and Progress to Degree

Factors affecting the retention of students and their degree completion were studied by this committee. Questions studied were:

1. To what extent do University policies and procedures enhance or inhibit the ability of students to be successful in their studies and to complete a degree program in a timely manner?
2. What resources would enable students to be more effective in their studies and complete a degree in a more timely manner?

These are long-standing issues at Cal Poly. Cal Poly compares favorably with other CSU campuses in the areas of retention and time-to-degree. Comparison with the UC campuses is less favorable. The subcommittee explored causes of why this is so and possible solutions that could be implemented to improve students' success. Factors identified by the subcommittee (and of concern to prior committees) include barriers to changing majors, need for remediation of incoming students, class scheduling, advising, and the senior project requirements.

Surveys with questions similar to those used in a prior University study on student throughput were administered to over 600 students. Areas chosen to study further include those of high-risk students, as well as those of advising, scheduling, senior projects, and undergraduate admissions. After administering the survey, it appears

that students are moving through Cal Poly at a faster rate now than in 1994. In addition, scheduling was seen as a continuing problem, fewer students are changing majors than five years ago, and a significant number of students are participating in a co-operative or internship opportunity in addition to their academic programs of study.

Recommendations include structuring senior projects better in the programs so that more students complete them on time, improving advising and responses to student requests for information, and preventing students from going through graduation if they haven't completed degree requirements.

Social Environment

Campus Climate

In an effort to explore the ability of the Cal Poly environment to enable its members both to understand and to function in an increasingly multicultural and multiracial world this subcommittee addressed the following questions:

1. How do the members of Cal Poly demonstrate tolerance and support for constructive ideas, attitudes, and behaviors that differ from their own?
2. How does the environment contribute to communicating effectively with others?
3. How does Cal Poly create an environment that welcomes and supports diverse members of the community?
4. How can recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff, students, and administrators be improved?
5. How can the campus use vacancies to be created by upcoming retirements to encourage an increasingly diverse campus community?

These questions were used as a basis for additional questions developed for a survey instrument administered to faculty, staff, and students. In addition, forums and materials from other committees and individuals were used to help inform an understanding of attitudes and perceptions.

Over 300 student, 250 faculty, and 400 staff surveys were returned. Investigations of the intellectual and social environment for students were conducted. While conclusions are tentative, it does appear that there is room for improvement. Results from analyses of these surveys in general led to the conclusion that many students, faculty, and staff feel that Cal Poly's campus climate is not reflective of the value statements made by the University in its Strategic Plan and in other guiding

documents.

Increased attention needs to be paid to recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty as well as orientation and support mechanisms.

Recommendations include:

1. Devise a clear plan to promote and support diversity
2. Assign direct responsibility for initiatives, evaluate results
3. Provide more resources and authority to effect institutional change
4. Combine efforts into a more unified body for these areas
5. Continue to study these issues and implement recommendations to provide for a more supportive and inclusive climate for all of Cal Poly's community.