

CONCLUDING ESSAY

On the afternoon of April 8, 1887 a telegram arrived in Chico announcing the selection of Chico as the site of the new state normal school. Then Governor Bartlett had overcome the lobbying effort of Red Bluff, Redding, and Colusa to produce a unanimous vote for Chico among members of the site selection committee. The Oroville Mercury commented, 'Chico's condition is Normal ... It will probably be abnormal on Friday.'

A Precious Sense of Place: The Early Years of Chico State
W.H. Hutchinson and Clarence F. McIntosh

Since its beginnings in 1889, California State University, Chico has provided generations of students with unique educational experiences built upon an inclusive learning community of faculty, staff, and students who live, work, and study within a rural Northern California setting. Today, CSU, Chico is a comprehensive university serving not only the local region, but also the state, the nation, and the world, through instruction, research, and public service.

Reflective Essays

In its recently adopted *Strategic Plan for the Future*, California State University, Chico reiterates its commitment to student learning and student success. This commitment is expressed in its mission statement, its values statement, and its strategic priorities. Strategic Priority #1, the development of high-quality learning environments both inside and outside the classroom, operationalizes this commitment through the recruitment, retention, and graduation of a diverse and high-quality student population, a purposeful structuring and nurturing of the total education of students, the maintenance of superior student support systems, and a systematic assessment and evaluation of efforts to promote student success. [Essay I](#) describes the structures, programs, and policies that have evolved over time to support and enable student success. The First Year Experience, the Freshman General Studies Thematic, Honors, General Education, and distinctive undergraduate and graduate programs all provide opportunities for academic and intellectual engagement. Intentional efforts to deepen the Chico Experience provide further opportunities for cultural, social, and civic engagement. All these efforts combine to structure and nurture learning environments that facilitate a broad scope of student engagement and personal development. As a result, Chico demonstrates high persistence and graduation rates and receives high levels of student satisfaction with its programs, educational experience, and CSU, Chico as a whole.

Strategic Priority #2 recognizes the importance of faculty and staff in the success of students, and pledges to invest in faculty and staff currency and continuing professional development. [Essay II](#) highlights the recruitment, retention and support policies, procedures, and practices designed to ensure a diverse and high-quality faculty and staff. While many of these policies and procedures are governed by the Collective Bargaining Agreement and CSU, Chico's Faculty Personnel Policies and Procedures, the University has developed a number of targeted development programs. The latter address specific developmental needs such as training in learning styles, effective use of academic technology, use of learning management systems, developmental scholarly and creative activities, grants and contract activities, and international and diversity experiences.

CSU, Chico has a rich history of leadership in information and academic technology. As demonstrated in [Essay III](#), Chico continues to strive for excellence in the delivery of services and infrastructures that enhance the effectiveness of its learning and working environments. Members of the campus community have access to appropriate workstations, network connectivity, training, and support. A significant evolution in the use of technology was the creation of a campus enterprise portal which brought together academic and administrative services in a common Web location.

CSU, Chico has articulated service as a fundamental tenet of its institutional character and as a goal to distinguish its students and alumni. Serving the needs of the North State has been a tradition for more than 100 years. [Essay IV](#) provides a glimpse of Chico's record in this respect and includes references to such programs as Community Action Volunteers in Education, Community Legal Information Center, Center for Economic Development, the Rural California Nursing Preceptorships, service efforts by fraternities and sororities, Regional and Continuing Education, Open University, Chico Performances (celebrating 25 Years!), Chico State Athletics, School of the Arts, and Chico's Northstate Public Radio KCHO/KFPR. Embedding a regional orientation into the daily life of the campus and connecting to the needs of the North State and beyond is becoming a motivating force for making a difference.

[Essay V](#) shows Chico's organizational structures and decision-making processes to be consistent with its mission and priorities. Efforts at wise stewardship of resources, at fostering a philanthropic culture, and at increased grant and contract activities are in

alignment with strategic priorities. Progress is being reported on one of Chico's major goals, that of further institutionalizing a culture of evidence in which performance indicators inform and drive institutional improvement and decision making.

Finally, [Essay VI](#) describes the exciting, new strategic priority of becoming an environmentally-engaged campus. The Bidwell Environmental Institute was created in 1999 to support environmental education and research, and serves as the University's comprehensive center for environmental studies, sustainable development, sustainable practices, stewardship of public lands, and outreach to the community.

Challenges and Recommendations

While the reflective essays and the associated links to evidence reports clearly document CSU, Chico's commitment to capacity, the review did reveal that Chico faced, and in some cases continues to face, significant challenges and opportunities for improvement.

The suggestions for improvement made by the evidence teams reveal a number of underlying themes. One major theme is that of **improving campus diversity**. Chico's students, faculty, staff, and administrators are still not as diverse as those of its sister campuses and still do not match the growing diversity of the state of California. Recognizing this, President Paul J. Zingg proffered diversity as a community to form and set ambitious goals to do more to engage each other in the challenging work of increasing awareness of, and respect for, diversity. The campus has adopted the approach of using routine data disaggregated on the basis of diversity measures to bring to light areas of weakness in campus diversity. The premise is that in order to bring about change, individuals in the institution must be aware of inequities, analyze and interpret the inequities, and then act upon them. The development of a Diversity Scorecard is Chico's way of bringing this about.

A second major theme that emerged was one of fostering what has been labeled a **"culture of evidence."** The review identified a wide variety of assessment and evaluation efforts, i.e. "piles of evidence." Less obvious at times was how the results of these assessment and evaluation efforts are being translated into improvement of those efforts. Evidence teams called for more systematic collection of information, more systematic reflection on data collected, and more data-driven, outcomes-based academic and co-curricular program development. Some evidence teams also called for better access to existing information and data. It was noted that the Web could be used more effectively to support user-friendly repositories for campus information, policies and procedures. The overarching recommendation in this respect is that the campus further develop an information architecture that would allow for more intentional organizational learning. Such action should be coordinated within the framework of the *IT Strategic Plan*. The use of a performance based measurement system ([PBIViews](#)) as a reporting mechanism for this purpose should be further pursued.

A third theme that can best be characterized as an amalgamation of under currents involves the continuing implementation of the institution's motto **"Today Decides Tomorrow."** In a sense, the institution currently finds itself in a situation not unlike the one the Visiting Team found in 1996. The institution has adopted a new strategic plan that defines its future direction and will serve as an effective benchmark against which to measure progress. Its successful implementation will again be determined by internal and external constituents working together with conviction; this time, however, within the context of a changing landscape of higher education. This landscape is characterized at federal, state, and local levels by increased demands for fulfilling commitments to multiple stakeholders, for assuring access to excellence, for ensuring success in student learning, and for demonstrating evidence of and accountability for institutional performance. These challenges are likely to be magnified within an era of declining federal and state financial support and local limits to enrollment growth that traditionally have driven CSU campus allocations. This state makes it all the more essential that the leadership, at all levels of the institution, sticks to its core themes of values-based "intentionality" and "alignment." As President Zingg noted in his 2005 Convocation Address. "...our ability to align our actions with our intentions, to make decisions and to allocate resources along the lines of clearly articulated priorities and values, will affect the integrity of our message, the delivery of our promise, and the faith of our friends."

Preparedness for the Educational Effectiveness Review

While CSU, Chico identified a number of challenges to be addressed in the near and longer-term future, the core capacity of the University – clear purpose, high levels of integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes – is evident, indeed quite strong. This demonstrated capacity provides and will continue to provide the basis for examining and improving CSU, Chico's educational effectiveness. Indeed, the themes selected for the educational effectiveness review – student engagement at a residential campus (including diversity), refinement of the academic program review, and the innovative use of technology – will allow further efforts to address challenges identified in the capacity and preparatory review and make further progress toward the development of strategic plan-based performance indicators.