

CSU, Fresno Proposal

I. Distinctive Context of Institution

California State University, Fresno has many distinctive characteristics. Some are widely known, such as generous community support of "our" university—particularly for competitive athletic programs in outstanding privately funded sports facilities and for high visibility academic programs (e.g., endowed schools of business and of education named for their benefactors). Each College or School is renowned for distinctive characteristics, particularly among its own constituents (e.g., the School of Education trains more teachers than any other California State University system campus). The faculty and staff are dedicated to excellence in teaching and in serving the students. A strong sense of entrepreneurship pervades the campus at all levels, accompanied by a reputation for being strongly interactive with community, education, business, agriculture, and government groups. The university is a significant cultural and artistic center for the community (e.g., CSU Summer Arts Program). Applied research and practical problem solving are a thread running through the campus, expressed in scholarly endeavors, outreach programs, and academic experiential learning. Another noteworthy characteristic is educational access provided for a very ethnically diverse, first generation college student body; CSU, Fresno is officially designated a "Hispanic Serving Institution" by the U.S. Government.

A. Institutional Overview and Changes

The student body is approximately 19,000 with women outnumbering men 11,000 to 8,000. Statistics speak to the importance of CSU, Fresno to this region; 85% are Central Valley residents and 52.8% are ethnic minorities. Because of the large and varied immigrant population and high regional unemployment, this university represents opportunity for large cohorts of K-12 students as freshman entrants or community college transfers.

The university is classified as a "Master's Colleges and Universities I" type institution under the new Carnegie classification (and "Comprehensive" under the old system). CSU, Fresno aspires to become a "Doctoral/Research Universities—Intensive" institution over the next decade. The university has one doctoral program (i.e., jointly with the University of California), forty master's programs, and fifty-six bachelor's programs. These programs are accredited by twenty-nine different organizations. In AY 1999-2000 2,845 Bachelor's degrees were awarded and 595 graduate degrees (including 9 doctoral) were conferred.

Last year (AY 1999-2000) faculty numbered 1,203, of which 683 were full-time and 520 were part-time. Hiring into new tenure track positions is attempting to keep pace with retirements and 52 new tenure track searches were approved for the current academic year as part of a continuing effort to rebuild the faculty.

The institution is now fiscally stable and the budget is higher and more

predictable than was the case in the early 1990s when severe retrenchment was forced by substantial cuts in state funding. There has been dramatic growth in recent years of non-state funding in the form of grants and contracts as well as private donations. Financial audits have been clean.

Major technology infrastructure investments have been made on campus with more being planned. Athletic units have been improved. An alumni house was recently constructed as was a planetarium—both with private funding. The old science building was refurbished and a new science building is proposed in the 2001-02 CSU capital budget. The multi-event Save Mart Center (16-18,000 seating capacity) has been approved by the CSU Board of Trustees. Many more projects are nearing full financing. The campus has been made more secure with improved lighting and surveillance equipment; and the grounds have been noticeably beautified with attractive landscaping.

Academic changes include a revised General Education program and a new Smittcamp Family Honors Program. Outcomes assessment of nearly every academic degree program is underway as of this year, and a taskforce has been formed to conduct an assessment of the General Education program. Numerous major programs have undergone significant improvement as well, including the establishment of a pilot bachelor's degree program in environmental sciences provided jointly with the University of California, Riverside.

External partnerships and collaboration with community, education, business, agriculture, and government have grown greatly. Many linkage programs have been established or expanded for students, such as the campus-wide Service Learning and Solutions Center programs. Campus-based research and outreach institutes and centers now number forty-nine. And a Charter University High School has been established on campus.

In sum, CSU, Fresno is consciously and steadily being improved and transformed through multiple initiatives planned and carried out by dedicated faculty, staff, administrators, students, alumni, and friends. Through them the vision and mission of the university are being realized—the same vision and mission in which the accreditation themes are rooted.

B. WASC Commission Action and Campus Response

The Commission in its March 10, 1994 letter to the university president was very laudatory in its recognition of institutional accomplishments and the direction the campus took with its planning process. While it reaffirmed accreditation of the university with special commendations, it did "support the [review] team recommendation that the university continue its efforts to engage the university community, and especially faculty, to develop responses to the changing character of the student body"—referring to the diversity issue. The review team had determined that: "Faculty, especially, seemed unaware of the need to change to deal with the new student constituencies. Neither could we sense that the importance of cultural diversity is understood by the faculty or that it is critical to what they do." The Fourth-Year Report to WASC (March 1998) addressed this concern and the Commission's letter of response (August 3,

1998) acknowledged the progress that had subsequently been made in serving the diverse student body more effectively.

C. Major Challenges and Issues

Among the multiple challenges any university faces today, there are three that have important implications for the accreditation self-study in light of the themes chosen to frame it.

First, this is the only large public degree granting institution in an extensive geographic region that is highly agricultural and rural with significant unemployment and poverty level populations that are also largely minority and immigrant in nature. This presents a challenge of access to higher education by diverse ethnic groups who have special needs (i.e., academic, financial, social) en route to and upon arrival on campus.

Second, the university's success in realizing its vision of becoming a "premier interactive university" has placed increased demands upon the institution to serve pressing community needs. By necessity of location this is truly a comprehensive university with a full range of academic programs and a wide range of centers and institutes that conduct research and perform outreach to meet those needs. But "being all things to all people" is becoming increasingly difficult (i.e., lack of space, personnel, and funds) and requires hard choices unless the physical, human and financial resource base can be substantially increased (i.e., especially non-state funding).

Third, the university is transforming itself into an institution where more applied research and creative activity is expected of faculty for tenure and promotion as well as merit recognition. CSU, Fresno's origins and mission have historically emphasized excellence in teaching. The challenge is maintaining quality instruction while increasing scholarship and service. The issues of balance and workload naturally arise.

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II. Goals and Expected Outcomes of Reviews

The institutional goals for and expected outcomes of accreditation are fivefold. The first two are oriented toward a learning community, which is the masthead for CSU, Fresno's chosen themes. The next two focus on organizational processes (i.e., accreditation and strategic planning) and on structural alignment and support systems that contribute to educational effectiveness. The last one is institutional self-awareness among internal constituents and between the university and the external stakeholders. The goals and outcomes are numerically paired.

A. Institutional Goals for Accreditation

1. Establish a campus-wide culture of Outcomes Assessment, with special focus on student learning, teaching effectiveness, and academic programs. The campus has embarked upon an ambitious program such that by spring 2002 every academic department will have initiated assessment planning. Non-academic programs are also beginning the assessment process, and are expected to have established plans for improvement and development by 2006. This major transformational exercise will prove invaluable to the accreditation self-study for determining the changed nature and extent of student learning, instructional pedagogy, and program quality.
2. Link accreditation standards and self-study themes with the university's strategic plan goals and institutional priorities. This will enable the campus community to more readily understand and embrace these complementary exercises and their results as being mutually supportive and beneficial. In turn, this should foster engagement in the sense of "taking ownership" of accreditation, just as the campus-wide participation in strategic planning task forces has demonstrated in 1996 and 2001. Ultimately (in the next full cycle of strategic planning approximately five years hence), accreditation requirements will be positioned at the heart of strategic planning concerns (which can be broader in scope than accreditation) instead of being tangential to them.
3. Integrate the university's accreditation and strategic planning processes in pursuit of institutional improvement. The strategic planning process has now become well established on campus, this year marking the start of the third cycle. This is particularly important for the interim period between the Educational Effectiveness Review (year 3) and the commencement of the next self-study (year 10), during which time continuity needs to be ensured. This will make follow-through on all initiatives and recommendations more likely. This is absolutely necessary, since scheduling of future strategic planning launch cycles will not necessarily coincide with the next accreditation self-study, as they do this time.
4. Ensure the campus's internal systems and structures effectively support informed and rational evaluation, planning, decision-making, and implementation of existing programs and new initiatives. This supports the paradigm of the university being a 'learning organization' that is rooted in a "culture of evidence" as a basis of action. This is inherent in an academic environment characterized by Ernest Boyer's description of the scholarship of teaching and learning as well as of research and creative activity. Certainly, the ultimate purposes of these mechanisms should become more apparent.
5. Heighten awareness of California State University, Fresno's mission and vision among its many and varied internal and external constituencies, such that it reinforces consciousness of the university's identity and direction. Increased visibility of accreditation and recognition of its importance to stakeholders is essential: (a) for the maturation and promotion of the university as the institution of choice in the Central Valley of California in meeting the needs of its inhabitants as a "premier interactive university" and (b) for marshalling their support for the improvement and development of CSU, Fresno.

B. Associated Outcomes of Accreditation

1. Improved student learning in the pursuit of specified educational objectives at the institutional and program levels. The faculty are deeply engaged with issues of student learning in the context of outcomes assessment, framed with specified educational goals and objectives in academic departmental plans. Broader educational aims are found in strategic plans of the Colleges/Schools as well as the University. The self-study will draw on outcomes assessment and also examine strategic plan documents with the intent of clarifying the criteria for evaluating educational objectives, inclusive of improved teaching effectiveness and program design as a means to improved student learning.
2. Allocation and utilization of resources to maximize efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability to stakeholders. Alignment of accreditation standards and self-study themes with university's strategic plan goals and institutional priorities not only conserves resources, it also strengthens the capabilities of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment to gather and analyze essential data that can illuminate important and related issues, provide evidence for evaluation of on-going programs, and give substance to proposed solutions.
3. A formal relationship between the steering committees for strategic planning and for accreditation. Membership of both committees is drawn from the same leadership pool representing faculty, staff, administrators, students, and university advisory bodies of community and business interests. By design the chair of the Self-Study Steering Committee, who is a member of the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, is also a member of the University Strategic Planning Steering Committee. This chair, along with the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), facilitates regular communication and coordination between the two groups, which have separate, yet concordant, charges. Accreditation's focus on fulfillment of the core commitments of Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness serves as a major "raison d'être" for strategic planning and properly should influence its course.
4. Alignment of institutional policies and procedures, processes, structures, and resources with accreditation standards and self-study themes. Such coordination has worked reasonably well in the formulation of two successive strategic plans in the 1990s. The aim is to make equally obvious to all consultative and governing entities on campus that accreditation has no less a need for relevant, timely, and sustained support for its genuine accomplishment of the twin core commitments of Educational Effectiveness and of Institutional Capacity to be educationally effective. This means internal structures and systems must be validated at the Preparatory Review (Fall 2003) in order for CSU, Fresno to be certified by WASC as ready to proceed with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review (Fall 2004).
5. Know ourselves better so that we may enable others to know us well. Passionate enthusiasm about CSU, Fresno's educational achievements and potential is crucial for the institution's advancement objective of motivating external constituents to become more engaged with university life and translating such fervor into generous development support in the

prospective capital campaign for an Academic Enhancement Fund leading up to the university's centennial celebration in 2011. The concurrent and integrated cycles of accreditation self-study and strategic planning during the next few years are critical to knowing who we are and what we wish to become as a prelude to the fund raising.

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III. Engagement of Issues by Campus Constituencies

A. Proposal Development

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee began discussion of the upcoming accreditation in Spring 1999. Consideration of the emerging WASC guidelines led the committee to recommend that accreditation be dovetailed with the next cycle of strategic planning two years hence. In Fall 2000 a WASC Self-Study Steering Committee was established.

The proposal was developed in Spring 2001 by the Self-Study Committee, whose 24 members were drawn from faculty, staff, administration, and community. The WASC Chair and the university's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) made monthly presentations to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and solicited feedback from its members (i.e., President, Provost, Academic Senate Chair, deans, faculty senators, staff personnel, administrators, and representatives of the alumni organization and student government).

The WASC Chair and ALO twice met with the Co-Chairs of the 10 Strategic Planning Task Forces (with 230 participants)—initially to orient them about the interface of accreditation and strategic planning processes, and subsequently to sensitize them about the use of accreditation themes to frame selected goals and priorities that will arise from the strategic planning process in May 2001. It should be noted that each task force, by design, had at least one member who also serves on the accreditation committee.

In an effort to reach an even wider audience the WASC Chair and ALO have composed articles for the University Journal (distributed to every campus employee) regarding the interface of accreditation and strategic planning, the chosen themes for accreditation, and the WASC review process with reference to core commitments to standards and the forthcoming Institutional Capacity Review (Fall 2003) and Educational Effectiveness Review (Fall 2004). The WASC Chair has also reported to the campus's Administrative Roundtable with updates.

B. Proposal Implementation

Once the WASC Commission staff and the Proposal Review Team provide feedback to CSU, Fresno on its proposal and once the campus strategic planning process is finished this summer, the Self-Study Steering Committee will develop a detailed action plan that translates the conceptual schematic of the final approved proposal into an operational document. Essentially, proposal

development is analogous to the preliminary "planning to plan" stage inherent in strategic planning. The operational action plan will be replete with definitions, indicators, and data measurement necessary to meet the needs of accreditation standards, institutional themes, and strategic planning goals and priorities along with steps to review the alignment and efficacy of internal structures and systems to support institutional improvement.

Formulation of the operational plan is the responsibility of the Self-Study Steering Committee, which will divide into thematic sub-groups again. They will form the core of accreditation task forces that include invited members of the strategic planning task forces that generated the goals and priorities selected by the Self-Study Steering Committee. This will sustain participation of interested university community colleagues, who would otherwise become disengaged with the disbandment of the Strategic Planning Task Forces in June 2001 (because monitoring of progress toward accomplishment of goals and priorities is the charge of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee). This engagement model mirrors the strategic planning process, which included accreditation committee members on its task forces. Finalization of the operational plan in fall 2001 will involve extensive consultation with Academic Senate committees (i.e., faculty, student, and administrative members) and with the strategic planning task force co-chairs (i.e., a mix of faculty, staff, and administration representatives) among other groups (e.g., the Council of Deans, the Council of Chairs, the Administrative Council, etc.)

C. Scheduled Reviews and Milestones Timetable

The Institutional Capacity Review, which essentially focuses on the institution's core commitments to the four integrated accreditation standards, is due to take place in fall 2003. The report and accompanying portfolio is scheduled to be done by spring 2003.

Assuming a favorable judgment on the university's readiness to proceed to the Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2004, the report and an expanded portfolio will be completed by spring 2004. Preparation for this review emphasizes realization of the institution's chosen themes and progress toward achievement of selected related goals and priorities.

The tentative sequencing of accreditation review milestones is presented in an attached schedule.

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IV. Staging of Institutional Presentation

A. Hybrid Model of Accreditation

Broad themes rather than narrow topics were chosen; and selected strategic planning goals and priorities rather than comprehensive criteria were decided. The Self-Study Steering Committee, in consultation with the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, elected to pursue an approach that was most meaningful and practical for CSU, Fresno. Given that accreditation would be linked to strategic planning, the question of criteria for selection of particular goals and priorities arose—hence, themes that best reflect the nature and direction of the university and its major challenges. The themes serve a dual purpose: (a) they are substantive in their own right, complete with evidentiary indicators; and (b) they are organizing themes for the selection of some strategic planning goals and priorities, which will have their own evidentiary indicators.

1. Special Themes

Banners across the campus will read:

California State University, Fresno
A LEARNING COMMUNITY:
OPPORTUNITY + EXPLORATION + INTERACTION
Accreditation Themes 2001-04

"A Learning Community," the focus of California State University, Fresno, is characterized by three themes: **Opportunity, Exploration and Interaction**. These themes apply to all constituencies of the university: students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and supporters who participate in our educational enterprise and campus life. They are deliberately broad and encompass multiple aspects of a learning organization. These themes are rooted in the university vision and mission.

OPPORTUNITY—"Access to Quality Programs for Diverse Populations."

VISION: "Recognized for quality teaching..."

MISSION: "The university offers a high quality educational opportunity to qualified students..." And "The university seeks and encourages historically under-represented students to embark upon and complete a university education."

The theme "opportunity" is meant to communicate the idea that a quality education is available to all eligible students and that a strong commitment to equity exists to ensure barriers to entry and retention are lowered for all groups of learners—be they low income and migrant students, community college transfers and first generation college attendees, immigrant and international students, reentry adults and returning professionals, or distance and web-based learners. But this opportunity is not limited to students; it also refers to the chance faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and others have to be involved in this noble and important endeavor as teachers, advisers, supporters, and enablers of students. Moreover, the

faculty, staff, and administrators—as diverse learners themselves—require access to excellent training and development programs for professional advancement and for the improvement of the university.

EXPLORATION—"Discovery of Knowledge, Self, and Society Through Expanding Horizons"

VISION: "Recognized for ...transformational scholarship, and cultural leadership for the benefit of society."

MISSION: "California State University, Fresno furnishes opportunities for students to expand their intellectual horizons, foster life long learning, prepare for further professional study, and gain an appreciation of cultures other than their own."

"By emphasizing the primacy of quality teaching and the close interaction between faculty and students, the university seeks to stimulate scholarly inquiry and discourse, inspire creative activity, heighten professional and technical competencies, encourage and support research and its dissemination, and recruit and develop outstanding teacher-scholars/artists."

The theme "exploration" is intended to convey the concept of acquiring a deeper understanding of the individual and society by pushing out the boundaries of awareness. For students it means becoming conscious of new ideas and possibilities. For faculty it involves extending the frontiers of knowledge and creating new expressions of culture as scholars and artists. For staff and administrators exploration includes mastering and improving organizational support systems that contribute to educational effectiveness of the university. In every instance the intellectual endeavor is stimulating and meaningful.

INTERACTION—"Transformation through Integration of Knowledge & Experience "

VISION: "To be one of the nation's premier interactive universities."

MISSION: "The university serves the San Joaquin Valley while interacting with the state, nation and world. Through applied research, technical assistance, training and other related public service activities, the university anticipates continuing and expanding partnerships and linkages with business, education, industry and government."

The theme interaction connotes empowerment to transform oneself and be changed by the world about you. It involves the acquisition and application of knowledge and skill through

experience with students, faculty, staff, administrators, colleagues, and constituents of the university. Interaction extends outward from classroom dialog among students and between faculty and students to involvement of the entire university with cultural organizations, industry associations, community groups, government bodies, and educational institutions through its many and varied outreach programs, educational centers and research institutes. The reciprocal impact of experiential learning via student internships, professional collaborations, institutional partnerships, service-learning, and other interactions can be enriching intellectually, spiritually, financially, and otherwise.

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2. Institutional Priorities and Strategic Planning Goals

The Administrative Council of the University drafted a list of institutional priorities for submission to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, which modified and refined the document before sharing it with the many subject-oriented Strategic Planning Task Forces for consideration.

These ten Task Forces will have reported to the campus as a whole on May 9, 2001 in an all day "charrette" process, whereby their sense of institutional priorities and strategic planning goals for the next five years will be discussed. Afterwards the Task Forces will review the feedback from the entire campus community and then submit their revised recommendations to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee before its May 22, 2001 meeting, when the Strategic Plan will begin to be finalized.

Suffice it to say now that the WASC Self-Study Steering Committee will examine the Strategic Plan with the intent of identifying those goals and priorities that dovetail with the three themes and then will subsume selected ones under Opportunity, Exploration, and Interaction. [See Figure 1 Matrix]. NOTE: it is important to realize that some standards will require evidence of fulfillment beyond indicators of the institutional themes, goals, and priorities; so the interface is not comprehensive.

B. Commitment to Institutional Capacity

The university Self-Study steering Committee will utilize the previously described Task Forces to examine how the accreditation standards will be met for the Preparatory Review. It will involve a combination of evidentiary indicators and data measurements of themes (and related strategic planning goals and priorities) and of independent criteria necessary to satisfy the standards. These task forces will also be involved in reviewing evaluation studies and writing reflective essays for their assigned standard. The specifics will have to await the completion of the strategic planning process in May 2001 and the subsequent development of an operational plan to implement the proposal.

C. Commitment to Educational Effectiveness

The self-study task forces will shift their focus more toward the institutional accreditation themes (and related strategic plan goals and priorities) as well as addressing the three major challenges/issues identified herein that will confront the university in the next few years. Outcomes assessment of student learning will obviously be an important emphasis of AY 2003-04 leading up to the Educational Effectiveness Review.

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V. Construction of Portfolio

A. Content

An electronic portfolio will be designed in summer 2001 to include the proposal and attachments. A WASC Accreditation website will also be set up. Referrals to other websites that have on-line availability of the "Stipulated Policies" (Appendix I of the WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001) will be built into the portfolio.

Once the evidentiary indicators for meeting WASC standards and institutional themes and related strategic planning goals and priorities are determined during summer 2001, the electronic portfolio will be configured in fall 2001 to accommodate the presentation of data and exhibits as quantitative and qualitative measurements of the indicators.

B. Utilization

Navigation through the electronic portfolio containing a myriad of data and exhibits constitutes a challenge in the design, so that computer novices can readily find documentation referenced in the Institutional Capacity Report and the Educational Effectiveness Report. This portfolio is envisioned to have multiple uses beyond those required for WASC accreditation; the campus community and university stakeholders interested in university strategic planning and institutional accountability may also seek access.

There are important issues that must be addressed, such as restricted access to some data and exhibits in the portfolio and incorporating interactive capability on the web-site so that visitors can comment on the proposal, accreditation review reports, and portfolio contents.

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Appendix

Signed Statement Of Required Institutional Stipulations

California State University, Fresno hereby certifies:

That the university is using the accreditation review process to demonstrate its fulfillment of WASC's Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness; that it will engage in the process with seriousness; and that data presented will be accurate and will fairly present the institution.

That the university has published and has publicly made available the stipulated policies identified by the Commission for the purpose of demonstrating compliance with the Core Commitments. These policies will be available for review on request throughout the period of accreditation.

That the university will abide by procedures adopted by the Commission to meet U.S. Department of Education procedural requirements.

That the university will submit all regularly required data, and any data specifically requested by the Commission during the period of accreditation.

That the university has reviewed its off-campus programs and degree programs offered by distance learning to ensure they have been approved by the WASC substantive change process.

Signed: John D. Welty, President

Date:

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See also:

[Milestones Timetable](#)

[Addendum to Self-Study Proposal - November 11, 2001](#)