



THE ACCREDITATION PLANNING TEAM:

REPORT TO CAMPUS

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Accreditation Planning Team (APT)

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1. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT/CHARGE

The Accreditation Planning Team (APT) was created by Interim Provost Susan Elrod in February 2015 with the goal of engaging in preliminary efforts aimed at organizing campus preparations for reaffirmation of accreditation by WASC¹. In consultation with the president and vice presidents, Interim Provost Elrod recruited representatives of all divisions of the University including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Business and Finance, and University Advancement to participate in this work. Membership on the APT has fluctuated over time; those listed as co-authors of this report reflect the current composition of the committee.

The APT's charge includes:

- Establishing a basic timeline of activities to prepare for reaffirmation;
- Collecting preliminary data on progress the campus has made since our last reaffirmation in 2009;
- Consider mechanisms by which the campus can discuss the establishment of university-wide learning outcomes to articulate and better define the Chico experience; and
- Help establish a campus Steering Committee and appropriate Working Groups to lead the campus reaffirmation effort.

The APT has generally met biweekly since its establishment. In addition, several APT members participated in the WASC Academic Resources Conference (ARC) in Oakland in April 2015 to become more familiar with WASC's evolving reaffirmation standards and processes.

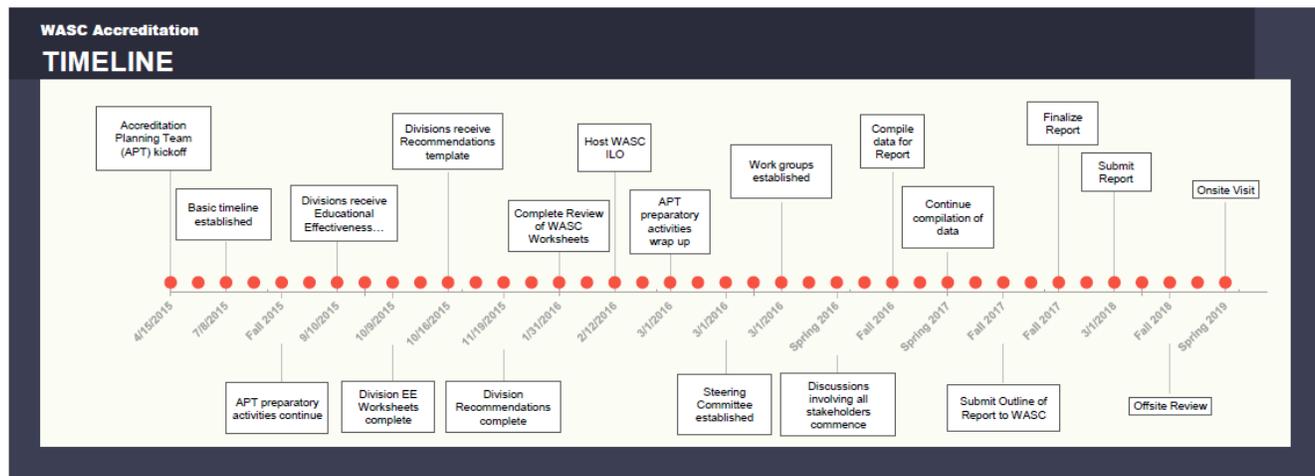
2. TIMELINE

One of the APT's first tasks was to gain clarity on the WASC-defined timeline for our reaffirmation process, and to suggest preliminary activities to meet that timeline. There was some initial uncertainty regarding the timing of WASC-mandated activities. These ambiguities were cleared up at the WASC ARC in a meeting with our campus Institutional Liaison Officer, Dick Osborn, who reviewed the reaffirmation process and timeline with campus personnel. Based on WASC's expectations, the APT "reverse engineered" a timeline of campus activities aimed at meeting important deadlines in a timely manner. Key dates for our reaffirmation are:

¹ The acronym "WASC" will be used throughout this report for convenience sake. The official name of our accrediting organization is now WSCUC: WASC Senior Colleges and Universities Commission.

- Outline of Institutional Report: Due Fall 2017.
- Institutional Report: Due March 2018.
- Off-site Review: Approximately six months later, Fall 2018.
- Site Visit: April 2019.

The timeline developed by the APT is presented below.



Like the APT, this timeline has been continuously evolving. We expect that moving forward, the proposed activities for 2016 and beyond will become more detailed and “fleshed out” as the pace of campus activities in preparation for reaffirmation accelerates. Note also that the APT plans to “put itself out of business” in the near future. It will fulfill its charge and make recommendations to campus leadership about the composition and functions of a WASC Steering Committee, and whatever additional workgroups are established in the near future.

3. RESEARCH AND DATA GATHERING

The APT’s research and data gathering has focused on three main areas: (1) better understanding of the new reaffirmation standards and processes, (2) examining the experiences of other CSUs who have recently been reaccredited, and (3) gathering preliminary data from our own campus consistent with our understanding of WASC requirements to gain insight into our campus strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the reaffirmation process.

(1) Accreditation standards and process

WASC Senior College and University Commission has developed four Standards for Accreditation, with 39 Criteria for Review (CFRs) associated with these Standards (see [Standards at a Glance](#), [Handbook of Accreditation Quick Reference Guide](#), or the [Handbook of Accreditation](#) for increasingly detailed explanations of the [Institutional Review Process](#)). Stated briefly, for reaffirmation of accreditation:

All institutions need to demonstrate that they are in substantial compliance with the 2013 Standards of Accreditation and with those federal regulations that the Commission is required to oversee the implementation of. Within this context, the goal of the process is the improvement of student learning, student success, and institutional effectiveness.

Institutions can typically expect to spend two to three years pursuing reaffirmation of WSCUC accreditation. Briefly stated, the IRP [Institutional Review Process] involves an Offsite Review by the evaluation team; and an Accreditation Visit to the institution by the same evaluation team. These steps are followed by a Commission decision on an institution's reaffirmation of accreditation. (WASC IRP website, emphasis added.)

In contrast to the reaffirmation of accreditation in 2007-09, there is only one site visit by the evaluation team. In 2007-09, reaffirmation entailed two site visits, the so-called Capacity for Review followed by the Educational Effectiveness Review. The campus prepared two reports; the Capacity Report, followed by a site visit, and an Educational Effectiveness Report, followed by a site visit.

Currently, WASC has consolidated and compressed the Institutional Review Process. (Summarized [here](#).) We are expected to prepare a self-study with two major foci: (1) we must address the four standards and the 30+ CFRs of educational and institutional effectiveness, and (2) we must address any concerns or suggestions from our last reaffirmation visit. To quote WASC, “*the self-study provides the necessary preparation for later steps, but self-study continues throughout the two to three years of review for reaffirmation. A candid self-study, with broad engagement of the institutional community, provides the foundation for a high quality institutional report.*” (WASC IRP website)

Our first milestone in the IRP is a 2-4 page outline of our proposed Institutional Report, described by WASC as follows:

Outline of the Institutional Report: Approximately 15 months before the Off-site Review, the institution submits a brief (2-4 pages) proposed outline of its report that reflects findings from the self-study, which will inform the institutional report. The institution also indicates when it wishes the visit to take place. The interval between the Off-site review and visit may range from 6 to 12 months. WASC staff review the outline to determine whether it meets expectations in relation to required components identified for the institutional report, compliance, areas of strength, and plans for improvement. The staff liaison provides feedback typically within three weeks' time, either accepting the outline or requesting changes. (WASC Handbook of Accreditation: page 26.)

The Institutional Report is the principal document submitted by the campus in support of reaffirmation of accreditation. Typically, the Institutional Report is narrative of 12,000-18,000 words (50-75 double-spaced pages) organized in eight or nine predefined sections. This document is reviewed by the Evaluation Team. Its strengths and weaknesses are the subject of the Off-site Review (tentatively Fall

2018) approximately three months after its submission. Based on the Off-site Review, the Evaluation Team drafts a Preliminary Team Report. The campus then has 6-12 months to respond to any concerns raised in the Off-site Review, through an “Institution Response” to the prior Preliminary Team Report. The completion of our campus Response must proceed the Site Visit by the Evaluation Team (tentatively scheduled for Spring 2019).

A summary of the flow of documents and activities associated with reaffirmation of accreditation follows:

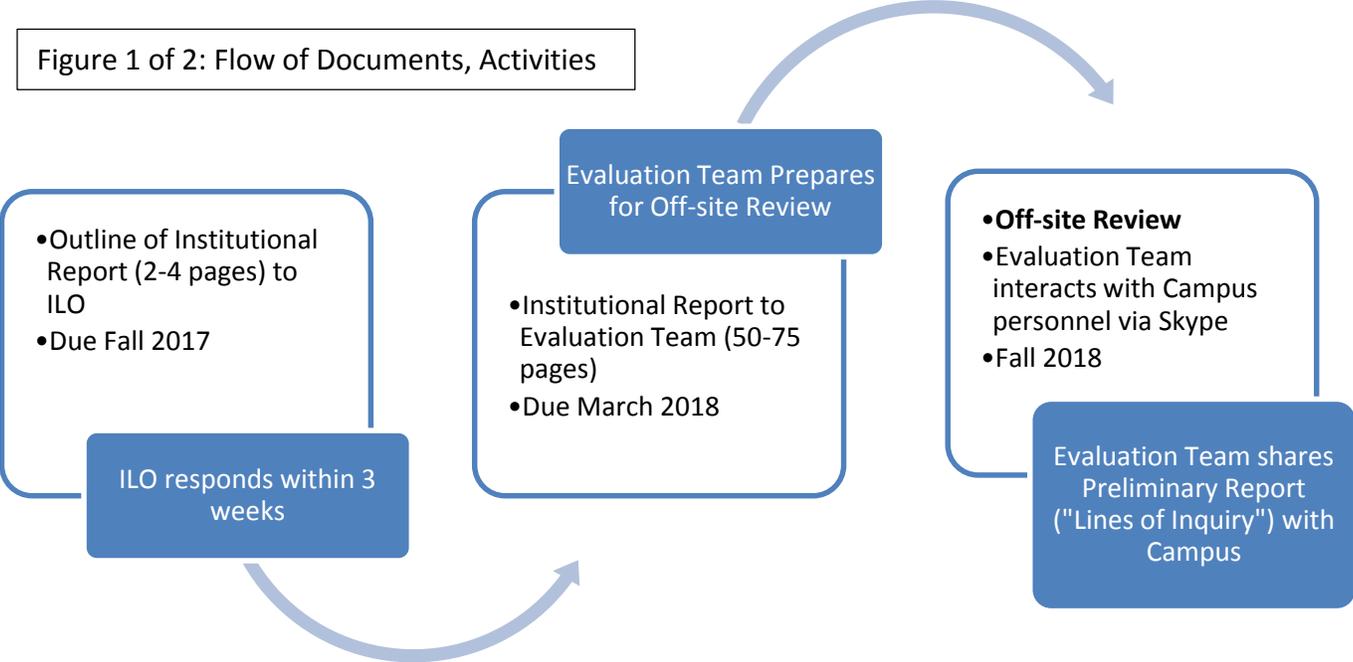
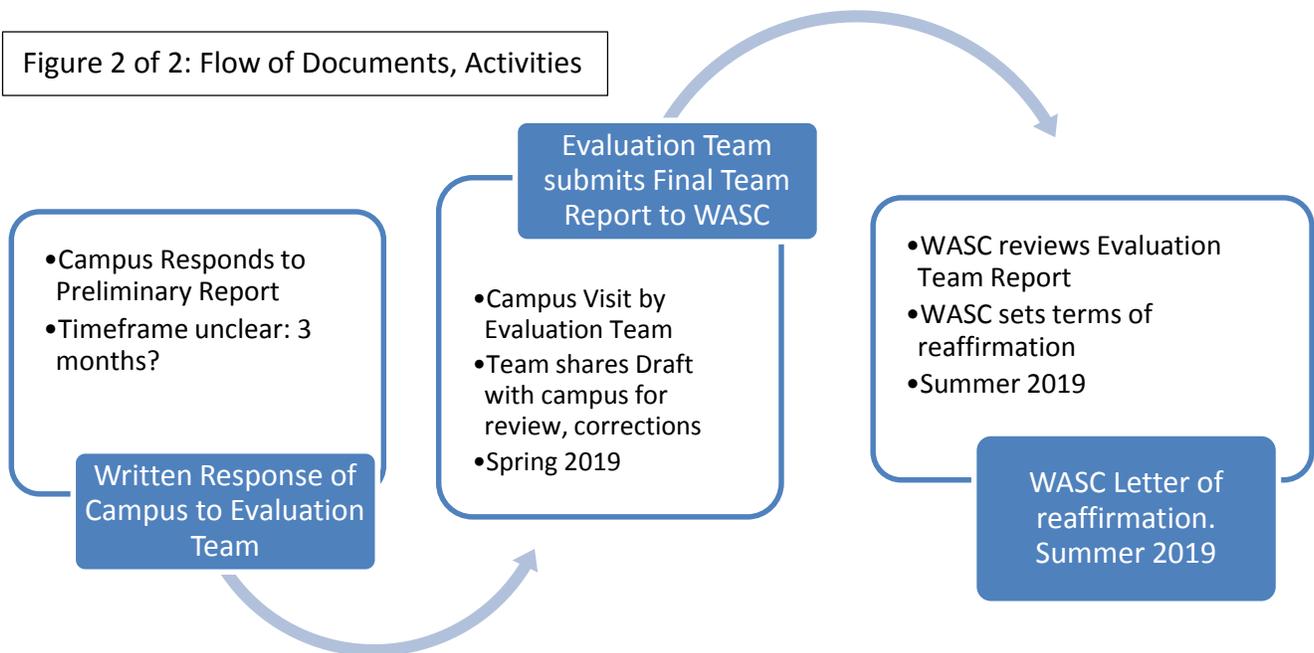


Figure 2 of 2: Flow of Documents, Activities



In summary, WASC expects the university to engage in a broadly participatory self-study process. Key elements of WASC Standards and Criteria for Review center on the assurance of learning among our students at or near graduation. We must demonstrate that our graduates have reached a level of proficiency consistent with a baccalaureate degree, a level we are enjoined to define. WASC has defined five [Core Competencies](#), learning outcomes viewed as fundamental to any baccalaureate degree. We must establish standards and measure student performance on these outcomes. WASC is also concerned that we demonstrate our university’s contribution to the public good – the social responsibility of all institutions of higher education. We must also demonstrate to WASC that the University is managed in a sound manner. That we honor the spirit of academic inquiry and shared governance, have processes in place to ensure financial sustainability, and evince an ethical approach to our fiduciary duties.

(2) Experiences of other CSUs

In an effort to learn more about the current WASC reaffirmation process, the APT examined the experiences of the CSU campuses with recent experiences or forthcoming interactions with WASC. Members reviewed a comprehensive chart for all CSU campuses and their current WASC status or action, which proved informative. First, there appeared to be some cautionary tales from some campuses where much shorter reaffirmations were awarded along with follow-up or “special” visits. Some cases had notes about the campus climate, shared governance, and strategic planning needing more attention, as well as Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and other campus initiatives. These areas or topics certainly are germane to CSU, Chico, so the team’s awareness was heightened. Second, the list was also used to identify campuses to contact for an informational interview. Nine campuses were identified as potentially useful and APT members contacted a total of seven. The informational interview followed an

open-ended question guide that could be augmented as needed. Members conducted the interviews in person or over-the-phone and field notes were taken, summarized and shared with the team.

Based on the shared insights across the completed interviews, the following themes were identified:

- Broad Participation
- Engaging the WASC Institutional Liaison Officer
- Potential of Institutional Learning Outcomes
- Report Style
- Participants and Knowledge
- Data Collection, Decisions, and the Allocation of Resources

Broad Participation

Ensure full-campus involvement throughout the process of preparing for and conducting the self-study, and presenting the campus to WASC for reaffirmation. Several interviewees with recent experience emphasized the important role the larger campus community should play in all steps of the process. This must not be overlooked. Examples included campus forums to generate, collect, review and/or comment upon potential report content. Another element included involving a key person who is very WASC knowledgeable to play a critical role in the process.

Notably, WASC expects the campus to continually engage in collaborative conversations and processes. Improved processes and programs should be the result of partnerships and cross-divisional input.

Engaging the WASC Institutional Liaison Officer

The WASC Institutional Liaison Officer is a critical resource that many interviewees highlighted. They pointed out this resource should be contacted to arrange a pre-process meeting as early in the process as possible. This resonated with APT members as questions have already consistently arisen that needed response or clarification from WASC.

Potential of Institutional Learning Outcomes

The potential for Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) was made apparent by several interviewees. There were several impressive implications for creating and implementing ILOs including: a broader campus representation of the student experience and learning objectives; integration across multiple programs and disciplines; as well as unity across academic units, Student Affairs, Advancement, Business and Finance, student government, etc. There was also caution regarding the process of crafting ILOs, in that it must be an open and transparent process, involving multiple stakeholders, that allows for dissent and strives for consensus. It will take time and can't be rushed. Most importantly, the motivation for, and actual creation of ILOs, must come from the larger campus community so there is the opportunity to embrace and buy-in to the outcomes as representations of the University.

Report Style

Across several interviews, it was noted that most organized their Institutional Report around the WASC standards and Criteria for Review (CFRs). However, some varied in style, where some were format-driven and others more narrative. The coherence and fidelity of the voice used in the final report needs careful attention as well. Several campuses recommended a final editor or main writer to achieve a unified presentation style.

Participants and Knowledge

The importance of broader-campus participation in the process was noted above. That theme is further developed here, in that those who directly participate in earlier stages of the planning and reporting process should also strategically participate in the other phases, when needed. To ensure continued learning and coherence across the phases of reaffirmation, selected individuals should continue participating so important connections and insights are not lost. For example, there should be some individuals who served in the planning phase also working with those on a WASC Steering Committee. Further, those on the Steering Committee should be well connected to the working groups formed. This ensures that knowledge is being shared intentionally, which also addresses one last quality. Any and all individuals participating in the reaffirmation process who will interact with the WASC Review Team must be knowledgeable of the report contents and findings. At some point, selected individuals will represent the campus community and with that comes the responsibility to be as knowledgeable as possible of all aspects of the self-study.

Data Collection, Decisions, and the Allocation of Resources

Most campuses have employed a digital system for the collection and possible presentation of relevant data. Chico has not yet transitioned to such a system for all assessment work, so this will need attention and may be enhanced by our current e-Portfolio exploration. It is important that the allocation of resources is based on the strategy and aspirations of the campus, as well as decisions informed by data. All divisions of the campus, at all levels, are expected to use assessment of programs or periodic program review to determine what is working and not working, perform gap analysis, and allocate resources. University-wide continuous improvement efforts—as well as data-driven decision making—are to be completed by all units and divisions. Collaborative problem-solving across divisions and units is preferred, and should be highlighted in the Institutional Report, whenever possible.

(3) Campus data gathering: EER Matrix and WASC Concerns Matrix

WASC Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Matrix Responses

In September 2015, departments within each division were tasked with completing self-ratings on the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Assessment Matrix. WASC defines educational effectiveness as the use of clear and appropriate educational outcomes and objectives. Further, WASC is concerned that institutions integrate findings about learning into planning and budgeting. The EER

Table is structured around the following major elements: Learning, Teaching and Learning Environment, Organizational Learning, and Overall. All elements except “Overall” are further divided into subareas and the subareas are linked to specific Criteria for Review (CFRs). Each unit on campus was asked to provide a rating as follows: 1=Initial, 2=Emerging, 3=Developed, 4=Highly Developed, or N/A.

Quantitatively, the vast majority of units provided average ratings of 3 on most items, indicating the perception that the campus generally falls into the “Developed” range on all items. This response may be an indicator of a lack of precision in unit responses, rather than a demonstration that the campus is perceived as “developed” in all areas. The reporting of averages also obscured variability in performance within divisions. Thus, analysis of the qualitative data will likely be more germane.

Learning

The Learning element includes the items about learning objectives, outcome, assessment plans, and kinds and levels of learning. A number of best practices are illustrated in the EER assessment:

- In the College of Agriculture, learning objectives are on all syllabi, and are available at the following link: <http://www.csuchico.edu/ag/degrees-and-options/Course-Syllabi.shtml>.
- The College of BSS indicates that all program learning objectives are similarly available: http://www.csuchico.edu/apr/program_portfolios/behavioral_social-sci/index.shtml. This data is matched by most programs on campus.
- Business Administration provides links to learning goals and a curriculum matrix: <https://sites.google.com/a/mail.csuchico.edu/aol/rubrics-and-handouts-badm/aol-reports>.

Teaching and Learning Environment

The Teaching and Learning element focuses on the extent to which educational experiences are aligned with outcomes. It further includes curricular and co-curricular processes and professional development. Observed best practices included the following:

- The spring Student Symposium provides a scholarly outlet for over 200 students engaged in independent, class-related, and/or faculty coauthored research. See: <http://www.csuchico.edu/bss/news/student-symposium.shtml>
- While programs most often lacked links to the relevant information, many have made required changes to keep up with specific accrediting bodies. For example, Art and Art History have made changes to the BFA and BA foundation classes and total units in the major to reflect the recommendations of their accrediting body, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

- Student Success Maps are designed to help students navigate options for study and extracurricular involvement available on campus, and indicate possible careers related to majors. They are available at: http://www.csuchico.edu/academicgps/student_success_maps/index.shtml.

Organization Learning

Organizational learning is most closely aligned with WASC Standard 4, *Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement*, which states that “the institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussion about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives.”

- Academic programs participate in a regular program review process: <http://www.csuchico.edu/apr/index.shtml>.
- Yearly assessment of program-level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) take place, with coordinators in departments reporting to their college. What is less clear is how these data are treated at the university level. Program assessment has been specifically funded by the division of Academic Affairs but is expected to be led by college deans, department chairs and assessment coordinators in each college with support from the Provost’s Office.

Overall

This element refers to perceptions of the institution as a whole.

- Few departments provided meaningful responses or evidence for this element. An exception was Undergraduate Education, which noted the recent “Possibilities Conversations” and the resultant Academic Plan: <http://www.csuchico.edu/futurepossibilities/index.shtml>.
- Also noted by Undergraduate Education was the Student Success Center and the REACH program: <http://www.csuchico.edu/cssc/>.

Lessons from the EER Matrix Responses:

- Most units provided ratings with brief verbal descriptions of examples or actions taken. Much more useful for the WASC team as it moves forward will be responses illustrated with links to their data. Creating and linking to data on the web is clearly a best practice. All units may have good data, but most have not made that data available/accessible. The evidence to back up ratings and reports will be critically important as we move forward.
- There is a need for improved data tools to provide evidence for the Institutional Report. Further, we need to carefully consider the kind of data-based evidence that will be required for this task. There is a lot of activity, but we lack the tools to aggregate this information and make it more actionable. The campus has just purchased Tableau data dashboard software and this may provide a useful tool for data access and analysis.

2009 WASC Recommendations Matrix Responses

In October 2015, the APT asked each division to review their progress regarding key areas that had been identified as concerns or suggestions by the 2009 WASC Evaluation Team. Those responses were submitted in November and reviewed by the APT. A summary of what was found follows:

Diversity

- Our campus in general and many of our individual programs have done much to increase and support student diversity. New programs, teams, and centers have been created in support of specific populations such as veterans, foster youth, AB 540 students, first generation college students, transgender students, etc.
- In terms of curriculum, the General Education (GE) program was revamped in 2010. All previous diversity courses were re-vetted at that time. There are almost 140 identified diversity courses within GE. In addition, several of the 10 GE Pathways specifically address diversity (Diversity Studies, Gender & Sexuality Studies, Global Development Studies, and International Studies).
- Challenges – all of our efforts have not necessarily succeeded in changing our campus culture, nor have we made as much progress in terms of the ethnic diversity of our career positions, particularly those of the faculty and upper management. Assessing whether we are truly achieving “Diversity” in the curriculum and GE continues to be a challenge. The Multicultural and Gender Studies program has struggled to find a “home” and consistent staffing. However, a tenured position has recently been approved.
- An important challenge, not addressed in this exercise, is closing the gap in retention and graduation between first-generation and/or under-represented minority students and other students. As the numbers of first-gen and URM students increase on our campus, this becomes a more and more pressing issue.

Assessment of Student Learning

- There are established procedures in place for assessing student learning at the program level. The Academic Assessment Council, comprised of representatives across Academic Affairs, functions as the principal source of guidance, information and oversight of student learning assessment. Assessment of student learning occurs routinely at the program level, but insufficient attention is paid to assessment results generally and to efforts at “closing the loop”– that is, linking assessment results and efforts at program improvement.
- Student Affairs also has a designated “Assessment Officer.” Student Affairs programs are reviewed on a regular basis, usually following Council for Advancement Standards (CAS) for higher education programs and services.
- Challenges – The assessment of student learning is pursued with varying degrees of enthusiasm and compliance. It is not clear whether or not appropriate adjustments are being made when shortcomings have been identified. The discussion of setting standards for degree quality are

nascent. The divisions of Business and Finance and University Advancement should not view assessment as limited to student learning. Focus on the assessment of their own, self-defined outcomes would be helpful and appropriate.

General Education

- From 2008 through 2012, the campus went through a major redesign and implementation of a new General Education program. This process was supported by grants from the AAC&U and is considered a national model.
- Program level assessment of GE is ongoing, with a high level of intentionality but varying degrees of success. Assessment has been extended beyond core competencies and Foundation courses.
- Challenges – GE assessment results are not routinely shared with campus constituencies in a meaningful manner. As a result GE assessment remains mysterious to many. Closing the loop remains a major challenge.
- Challenges – GE Writing and Capstone requirements are difficult to sustain in the current budget environment. An effort is currently underway to review writing requirements with respect to some of our current challenges.

First Year Experience

- The CourseLinks program mentioned by WASC has been largely abandoned with integrative learning now the product of GE Pathways and (more intentionally) in the newly developed U-Courses. Residential living communities include specialized housing for Honors students, Math and Science students, International students and students involved in intramural sports. Living-learning communities, however, remain elusive.
- The Wildcat Welcome (fall orientation program previously known as Getting Connected) has been expanded across campus as a stronger orientation to university life for incoming students in the fall. There is also a more concerted effort to orient incoming transfer students in spring.
- Model programs such as the Town Hall and Great Debate have shown great success and are recognized nationally as High Impact Practices. These programs reach virtually all incoming freshman and assessment results show consistent, significant impacts on retention.

Institutional Effectiveness

- The Division of Business and Finance now has a Director of Audits and Continuous Improvement. Student Affairs regularly reviews (every two years) the division's strategic plan. Academic Affairs revised its Academic Plan using a highly participatory process over a two-year period (Fall 2013-Spring 2015). Two new planks are being added to the University Strategic Plan. The Diversity Strategic Plan will be up for revision in 2016.

- The University is investing significant resources to improve the data infrastructure and provision of data for decision-making via Cognos and Tableau. These efforts are ongoing and have not yet borne fruit.
- Challenges – Implementing an improved data warehouse is still a work in progress, made more difficult by the complexity of information resources and data needs and the need to secure campus data in the face of increasingly sophisticated attempts to hack personal, financial and other data.

Distance and Online Technology

- Chico State has expanded online course offerings through academic technologies managed by Information Resources (Blackboard Learn) and supported by the Technology and Learning Program (TLP) and the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT). The campus demonstrated leadership in attending to quality of online and hybrid instruction through professional development opportunities for faculty (Academy eLearning and others) and the Rubric for Exemplary Online Instruction. The campus also continues to participate in the Quality Online Learning and Teaching initiative funded by the Chancellor’s Office.
- Regional and Continuing Education provides the infrastructure for delivering select online courses and distance education across the North State, the nation and the world.
- Challenges – Does the campus have a strategic plan and vision for online education? This appears to be the central question raised in the 2009 WASC report.

In general, responses to the two matrices reveal a campus with significant strengths and progress since our last reaffirmation of accreditation. SLO outcomes are routinely assessed and the campus has a faculty-driven infrastructure in place. In many cases, assessment falls short of informing institutional practices and strategic decision-making. While Academic Affairs and Student Affairs have systematically incorporated assessment as a routine practice, this is less evident in Business and Finance and University Advancement, at least based on these results. The responses to the WASC concerns regarding data-informed decision-making seem to be largely a work in progress. The results of these efforts remain to be seen.

The data gathering process itself had shortcomings. It is based entirely on self-assessment, and we have no idea if participants were using similar standards in assessing their progress on the various measures. The process of “rolling up” the data also obscured considerable variability across programs on the EER matrix; all measures tended to “regress to the mean” of a rating of 3. It is our hope that our goal of raising awareness of the WASC process and expectations was advanced by responding to these two matrices.

Finally, the campus is in the middle of a presidential transition with a new president expected to be named in early March 2016. As soon as it is possible, we will engage the new president in our planning efforts.

4. NEXT STEPS

APT Recommendations

1. **Engagement**

The campus needs to begin a sustained engagement with the reaffirmation process. The APT efforts to date have revealed potential strengths and weaknesses as we approach the WASC process. In reality, WASC expects all universities to be engaged in a process of continuous improvement rather than a periodic mobilization of effort around reaffirmation. Our preparation for WASC should be focused on ensuring that we have in place systems and infrastructure to monitor and assess our effectiveness and that our decisions are informed by this data.

2. **Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)**

WASC expects meaningful delivery and assessment of student learning at the institutional level. Our colleagues at other institutions have found well-constructed ILOs to be an effective instrument to this end. The APT suggests that the campus begin a dialog about exploring ILOs, which may also serve to better understand the Chico Experience and its evolution since 2009.

3. **WASC Steering Committee**

The APT recommends that a WASC Steering Committee be formed as soon as possible. The WASC Steering Committee should be a relatively small group (<10) with representation from all divisions. The Steering Committee will be responsible for overall coordination, oversight and monitoring of reaffirmation efforts and as such should include the campus ALO. Another key member of the Steering Committee is the Director of Institutional Research who will play a lead role in generating data for the Institutional Report. The Steering Committee will report to the President and Cabinet.

The APT further recommends that the campus consider forming Writing Committees organized around WASC Standards plus institutional specific themes. Each Writing Committee would be responsible for drafting specific essays along the lines recommended by WASC. One function of the Steering Committee is to coordinate and direct this writing process.

There also needs to be a concerted effort to mobilize campus participation in our reaffirmation of accreditation. This might be the responsibility of the Steering Committee, or a specialized group focused on communication and engagement.

The campus should investigate software tools to organize and manage the large amounts of information and data, track progress and assist those most directly involved in assembling the Institutional Report and related WASC efforts.

4. **Communication with WASC**

The campus needs to strengthen and intensify our communication with WASC to have a clearer understanding of WASC processes and requirements. That effort was initiated through our robust participation in the WASC Academic Resources Conference in April 2015. The campus also benefited from the participation of two faculty members (Susan Avanzino and Kent Sandoe) in the WASC-sponsored Assessment Leadership Academy in 2015. The campus should continue participation in the WASC Academic Resources Conference. We also recommend that additional campus leaders from faculty and staff participate in the Assessment Leadership Academy. We also look forward to our anticipated meeting with our Institutional Liaison, Dick Osborn, in February 2016. Dr. Osborn is renowned for his understanding and clarity of reaffirmation requirements and we anticipate much benefit from the workshop he will organize for our campus.

In summary, the campus is doing many things right and in a timely manner in preparation for the Institutional Review process. At the same time, we must proceed to ramp-up efforts, address shortcomings and otherwise engage in the processes that will strengthen Chico State as an institution of higher learning, while simultaneously preparing us for successful affirmation of our accreditation.