



**California State University, Sacramento  
Office of Academic Affairs**

6000 J Street • Sacramento Hall 230 • Sacramento, CA 95819-6016  
T (916) 278-6331 • F (916) 278-7648 • [www.csus.edu/acaf](http://www.csus.edu/acaf)

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TO: Sacramento State Academic Community

FROM: Joseph F. Sheley, Provost

SUBJECT: Academic Affairs Update

I would like to focus this update upon four of the many items likely of interest to members of Sacramento State's academic community. These are, I believe, the big-ticket items of this and the coming several years: Strategic Planning, Academic Program Learning Outcomes Assessment, Graduate Studies, and Budgeting (including hiring) and Enrollment Planning.

### **Strategic Plan**

The highlight of the year for many on campus was the Strategic Planning Council's (SPC) major revision of our campus *Strategic Plan*, accepted formally by President Gonzalez in December, 2007 ([www.csus.edu/acaf/strategicplan121707.pdf](http://www.csus.edu/acaf/strategicplan121707.pdf)). The *Plan* places prioritized attention on five strategic goals. Since they are the two highest priorities, we are directing immediate attention to Goals I (recruitment, retention, and graduation rates) and II (assessment; see following section). Working with the Faculty Senate, we have established a team to begin initial implementation planning for the campus's new advising policy. The team will move quickly. A similar team has begun work on the broader areas of retention and success to graduation. Both teams will study Sacramento State data (of better quality and quantity than at any time in recent memory), seek sound practices relevant to our University's situation, and sketch potential directions for implementation. These initial sketches will form the basis for larger campus discussions and, ultimately, formal plans to improve advising, retention and graduation rates, and student success overall.

The challenge now is to hold to our commitment to the new *Plan*. It cannot become simply a shelf document. Far from being expendable in light of budget pressures, it should help us focus as we address those pressures. It should also supply direction and motivation in our efforts at "doing better" beyond the resource issue. Indeed, given the attention to student success that characterizes much of the *Plan*, we can move our campus far forward through pursuit of our strategic goals, no matter our resources.

### **Assessment**

It is time to turn the notion of "accountability" to our advantage. Accrediting bodies, state legislatures, and federal offices have made it clear that we must demonstrate that we are accomplishing what we say we do, i.e., educating our students. They ask not for assessment of what individual instructors do, but of what our programs do. At Sacramento State, learning outcomes assessment is mandatory across programs (including GE), though programs have considerable leeway in shaping assessment activity.

I have asked the deans to bring efforts in our colleges to fruition (establish goals and measurement) by semester's end. We want the colleges to develop their individual "signatures" in this regard. We ask minimally that each program articulate the four or five major learning outcomes (skill sets, content sets, personal development, etc.)

that their students should take away from enrollment in that program and then to determine whether or not this is occurring. Assessment will advance our efforts to attract students to our campus. We can demonstrate to them positively (i.e., brag) what they will learn from us. I invite you to participate in what can truly be a very positive experience -- talking about your disciplines and about your aspirations for your students. I will soon send you a more detailed memorandum describing what Academic Affairs has put in place to advance assessment efforts.

## **Graduate Studies**

I am very grateful to Acting Dean of Graduate Studies, Chevelle Newsome, and the faculty members of the ad hoc Graduate Studies Work Group for their initial review of our graduate education efforts, present and future. Their report and my response to it are available on the Office of Graduate Studies webpage ([www.csus.edu/gradstudies](http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies) -- “*additional resources*”).

Of key interest to many parties is the status of the position of Dean of Graduate Studies. The Work Group recommends we formally establish the position as “permanent.” I agree, though I tie my support to the development of a Graduate Council with more macro-level attention to graduate education than we now have. I have asked the Work Group to collaborate with the Faculty Senate to develop a proposal in this regard. In the interim, I have requested the Work Group to act in the Graduate Council’s stead in advising the Acting Dean as she works with the graduate program coordinators, the Senate, deans, and me.

Considerable interest also persists on campus in more directly crediting faculty members for thesis supervision. Again, I support this in principle but acknowledge that it is not a simple issue. We must place it against elements of our work and goals that we might have to exchange or postpone in order to accomplish it. To do this well, we must fashion a financial plan to support graduate programming; it has developed overall without much planning during the past several years. Yet more generally, we need to identify what graduate education should be about in a comprehensive university like ours, how it should be delivered, and what qualifications should characterize those delivering it (a matter of considerable concern to accrediting agencies).

Please read the Work Group’s report and my response. I invite your participation in what will be important and stimulating discussions this semester.

## **Budget and Enrollment Planning**

Now to what is on everyone’s mind: the budget. We are challenged, to say the least. We carried into the present year a \$4.5 million structural deficit. It is exacerbated by a state revenue shortfall next year of \$14 billion. Absent remedies still to be negotiated, the Governor has proposed major cuts to state funding, reductions that will translate to decreases to the CSU of between \$300 million and \$400 million dollars. Beyond this, we know little and may know little until as late as next October.

With both ambiguity and the relative certainty of serious pain on the horizon, on the recommendation of the University Budget Advisory Committee (UBAC), President Gonzalez has called for proposals from all campus divisions to address a scenario by which baseline (ongoing, committed) funding is reduced by 7% (\$10 million) over the next two years. I applaud this approach since it makes clear that we are talking about a *scenario* rather than an immediate reduction plan. It also moves us beyond “small-cut” talk to more systematic budget planning. In many ways, we have been addressing financial shortfalls since 2003-04 with a “wait-it-out” mentality that has resulted in unplanned, cumulatively larger reductions throughout the colleges and the Library. It is highly unlikely that the state’s and our financial prospects are going to improve significantly in the next few years (i.e., no one is going to bail us out). We need to plan.

I have asked the deans to construct 7% prioritized reduction scenarios and plans to phase them in over two years with the help of whatever other (carryover, trust, etc.) funds might exist in their colleges. We do not assume reductions must occur across the board. (In this regard, however, everyone needs to recognize that no one has been living high-on-the-hog and solutions will not simply reduce to “tax the other party first.”) The deans and I will integrate the scenario responses and submit them to President Gonzalez at the close of February. He will accept, reject, return, or otherwise modify them before sending them to UBAC for discussion and recommendations.

Please understand that the scenarios may be adjusted upward or downward depending on the eventual state budget. With this in mind, I have asked the deans to have at the ready (but not to include in their current phase-in plans) a sense of how they would deal with an additional 3% cut should the budget news be worse than the UBAC scenario suggests or our financial difficulties persist for longer than two years. I want us to know ourselves better and to be prepared. I do not want to have to keep coming back to you for another percent, and then another, and so forth.

Please note too that we will be able to make changes in how we address the various scenarios throughout the coming months as we receive new information or rethink our proposals a bit. Everyone will have the opportunity to weigh in. Nothing will be written in stone, but we will be much closer to ready when the final state budget is released.

Looking ahead, we will be pursuing in 2008-09 the same FTES target that we pursued this year, as the Chancellor has ordered. This will be very difficult with shrinking resources, but we must extend ourselves to accommodate our students, and we must place their success above our other concerns as we have pledged to do in our new *Strategic Plan*. We must also recognize that, literally, every unrealized FTES increases our structural deficit.

Should the 7% scenario prove accurate, we will need more spending flexibility next year. We also will want to cushion the blow to our part-time lecturers as much as possible in the face of the pressure to address our budget shortfall through radical cuts to that important segment of our faculty. For these reasons, I asked the deans to postpone filling 20 of the 70 positions for which searches were allocated this year. This is painful, I know, for I too want to increase the percentage of our faculty that is full-time (we are now at about 60%). Further, each of the positions for which a search was postponed addressed a real need at the department level. We plan to reinstate those searches next year.

Finally, we likely will have little choice but to adjust our budget substantially. Of necessity, we will be focused on cuts. I urge everyone, however, soon to begin focusing less on what we are unable to do and more upon what we can do, with quality, if we put our considerable collective talent for addressing challenges to work. None of us wants to be sitting in the same spot two years from now.

### **On a Positive Note**

I want to thank the deans, the chairs, and the leadership of the Faculty Senate for their serious efforts to move from traditional silos and to approach our challenges as, indeed, challenges to the entire University. SPC and UBAC have been doing exceptional work. The transparency and available information now characterizing decision making on our campus is unprecedented. Despite the budget situation, we are advancing the University forward in a manner that should be a source of great pride.

Thank you for your attention.