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Office of Academic Affairs

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TO: Sacramento State Academic Community

FROM: Joseph F. Sheley, Provost

SUBJECT: Mid-Year Update

Enrollment figures at census for Spring, 2009 were what we had hoped for. We achieved our targeted FTES, the critical element of campus funding from the state/CSU, while staying well within allowable over-enrollment levels (under two percent). I am grateful to everyone who worked hard to make this happen--Student Affairs and Academic Affairs personnel working together; Space Management and Parking staff; Media Relations professionals who got the word to the region about enrollment openings and deadlines; our retention professionals; chairs, faculty and staff members, and administrators who have maximized course enrollment in challenging circumstances; our IT instructional personnel; and, obviously not least, our students who are coping with larger classes and crowded schedules.

The positive enrollment news provides an opportunity to update everyone on various situations and happenings on the Academic Affairs side of the house.

Budget. On everyone's mind, our budget situation is becoming clearer but is not yet definitive. The recent state budget signed by the Governor must still be sorted in its specifics in order to identify exactly how much funding comes to Sacramento State. The sum is dependent in part on the outcome of the Federal Stimulus Package and on voter sentiments to be known in May. In this still uncertain environment and relying upon the budget proposed earlier by the Governor, UBAC recently recommended to President Gonzalez that the campus reduce its baseline budget by three percent over the next 18 months: one percent from this year's budget and two percent from the 09-10 budget. Some of this reduction can be mitigated in the short term through judicious use of one-time, carried forward funds (not renewed annually; gone for good once spent).

There is no point in pretending that the proposed cuts will not be painful. However, I believe that UBAC has pointed us in the right direction and that, done wisely, the reductions can be handled. I have asked the deans to project the outcomes of cuts of between one and three percent for the Colleges and Library. I will be working with Academic Affairs unit managers to address reductions in their budgets. The various reduction plans will be shared with UBAC and with the newly created Academic Affairs Budget Advisory Committee (membership: three chairs, three faculty members, a dean or associate dean, a College/Library budget staff member, an administrator from among the Academic Affairs units, a CCE representative, and one student). I expect the plans to be revised well into next year to accomplish as much as we can with the least pain. I ask your patience as we work through this, and I ask that you continue to view our own financial situation in the context of what others are experiencing locally, statewide, nationwide, and globally.

Futures Initiative. Budget difficulties notwithstanding, we are entering into a very positive campus conversation about what we wish our University to be ten years hence. This past fall, President Gonzalez asked the Strategic Planning Council (SPC) to initiate a process by which the entire campus community could work together to produce a vision of Sacramento State's future, a vision that, in turn, could inform strategic planning efforts for years to come. Much as it did in leading the effort to craft the University's *Strategic Plan*, SPC has spent the past few months making ready the campus *Futures Initiative*. This has entailed analyzing trend data, understanding our current situation and its challenges, and preparing a process by which to engage as many people as possible in creating a vision for the coming decade. We recently have begun focus group activity to sharpen our sense of conversation content and process. Soon, SPC will launch a broader campus dialogue (town halls, forums, interactive IT communication, smaller unit meetings and conversations). Please stay tuned, and please participate. The best response to our present challenges is a firm sense of what we want our community to be in the future.

WASC. We remain highly focused on the visit this April by an accreditation site team from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Recall that WASC has been working with us for some time to assess our capacity to set and to achieve our campus goals. The site team will now be examining the effectiveness of our efforts to accomplish these goals. As with the *Futures Initiative*, the WASC visit and ultimate accreditation decision involves our future. Please become an active participant in the accreditation process.

Retention. Foremost among the goals that we have set for ourselves and articulated for WASC is improvement in our student retention and graduation rates generally and specifically regarding differential rates among our many student subpopulations. Many people are involved in this effort. A retention task force of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs personnel will report on proposed retention priorities later this spring. We have recruited additional counselors and have directed current staff attention toward advising students most at risk of probation. I have asked the deans to foster college-level conversation about advising as part of the professorial role. I have also asked them to design model strategies by which to refer students who do poorly in "gateway" courses to the proper advising venues; we cannot invite the students into the classroom without also being there for them as they exit that classroom.

Assessment. Together with WASC, we have focused attention on defining the competencies with which we wish our students to graduate, on improving how we assess our progress in this regard, and on adjusting what we do on the basis of the assessment data that we produce. My appreciation goes to everyone who has been working on the "learning outcomes assessment" initiative. We are observing considerable pride within programs that have moved further in the assessment direction and have found that, indeed, they are accomplishing much--and are able now directly to demonstrate that accomplishment--in terms of the student learning outcomes to which they have committed their curriculum.

General Education. I hope that you have been part of the very impressive discussions regarding general education and graduation requirements that have been occurring on campus lately. An outgrowth of the GE program review, the discussions have been focusing on core competencies that we wish our students to acquire and on potential clusters of thematically related, interdisciplinary offerings that would permit faculty members to enjoy each other's intellectual company in new ways. A number of faculty members have been leading the GE discussions. My thanks to them, and special appreciation

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goes to Janet Hecsh, chair of the Senate GE Policies Committee, who has personally recruited faculty, staff, and students into serious conversations about a GE curriculum potentially so dynamic that it attracts students to Sacramento State. As I have stated many times, I believe that we can accomplish this while holding fairly constant the contemporary enrollment (funding) flow to colleges over the next several years. Please join the GE conversation.

Graduate Studies. Much is changing in our approach to graduate studies at Sacramento State, foremost in the sense of greater attention paid to graduate programming than has occurred in the past. Now in place are a Dean of Graduate Studies (interim), a Graduate Advisory Council, and the Senate's Graduate Studies Policy Committee. The Office of Graduate Studies has done much to improve the quality and timeliness of its services over the past two years. Among topics now receiving attention are the prescribed writing competency of our entering graduate students and appropriate remedial paths for those who enter below the required writing level. Soon to be addressed are more systematic methods of considering proposals to offer doctoral degrees; these will remain rare but are being discussed more frequently within the CSU. Finally, we have begun discussion of the appropriate balance between graduate programming and undergraduate programming at our University. This discussion necessarily entails greater attention to managing the costs of graduate curriculum delivery and thesis supervision without simply passing those costs to the undergraduate side of the house (and, by definition, pitting graduate against undergraduate education). These obviously are not easy issues to consider, but the time is right to do so. I invite your participation in these conversations.

E-Learning. For the past many years, Sacramento State has accomplished much in the area of e-learning, with a wide range of fully on-line, hybrid, and televised courses, all with varying degrees of synchronous and asynchronous delivery. We have done so primarily by assisting individual faculty members in developing IT-based courses. We will continue doing this, but I have asked ATCS, CTL, and the deans to begin fashioning a more systematic, departmentally based approach to e-learning. We seek to create e-learning options for high-demand departmental offerings, whether GE or major. The objective is to use to better advantage the strengths, interests, and competencies of our newer faculty members, offer our students more scheduling options, and relieve congestion in prime-time use of larger classrooms.

In closing, I want again to thank everyone for sacrifices made as we address the impact of the state's financial crisis on our institution. These are hard times. When we come out of them, we should take pride in the manner in which we met our challenge proactively and together as a community. I wish you the best for the spring semester.