

October 4, 2008

TO: Campus Academic Community

FROM: Joseph F. Sheley, Provost

RE: Academic Affairs Update

We are a month into the fall 2008 semester and, with budget and enrollment data now in hand, some Academic Affairs updates are in order.

Budget. As you likely know, the Governor signed off on a budget that was painful for the CSU, but less painful than it otherwise might have been. We are grateful to the Alliance for the CSU for their hard work in getting our story told. We are grateful too to the members of UBAC who worked hard last spring and into the summer to provide recommendations to President Gonzalez that shaped campus budget decisions and eliminated our structural deficit at the University level (it still exists at many other levels). Yet, we are in no sense out of the woods (even for the present year, given the contingencies of the state budget). The global economy is not pointing to increased revenues for California in the next few years; we cannot assume that the Governor and Legislature will look kindly (relatively speaking) on us in successive years; we cannot take our enrollment picture for granted (see below). As I noted last year, we must plan three years out in order to assure a balance of classes for our students, IT and instructional equipment, and professional development for faculty and staff.

Enrollment. We have good news on this front. We achieved our enrollment goal this fall. We could not have accomplished this without the good will of our faculty, staff, and students. The deans and I appreciate it very much. Obviously, we cannot let up, for a slip in enrollment in the current economy would do much harm. We have multiple teams working on enrollment planning, and the deans (along with department chairs) and I are already at work on spring targets and schedule. Our goal is to achieve a level of stability (and well planned growth when things improve) such that our colleges and programs will not have to wait until census each semester to learn their fate. The predictability that we pursue will bring considerable system to budget planning as well. Again, thanks for your hard work on enrollment.

Strategic Plan Implementation. The president has designated various vice presidents to develop planning teams and draft implementation plans in pursuit of the various goals of our *Strategic Plan*. The draft implementation plans will now be studied by the Strategic Planning Council which will provide appropriate feedback. Even as this process moves forward, we have begun implementing the *Plan* by virtue of our efforts to inform budget decisions in light of its prioritized goals. Similarly, we have been focusing attention on retention and improving graduation rates (Goal 1) and assessment of learning outcomes (Goal 2) – see updates below. Further, I have asked the various units and programs under

the Academic Affairs banner to set their priorities more in line with campus *Strategic Plan* goals.

Retention Efforts. Last December, the Faculty Senate recommended adoption of a new advising policy; President Gonzalez accepted the recommendation. An implementation team is now at work on moving the policy forward. As you might imagine, given scarce resources, full implementation of a policy that emphasizes developmental advising (hands-on, every student) is costly. The implementation team is now gathering data to determine which pieces of the new policy are coincidentally already in place in our various programs and to set priorities by which to phase in the policy. At the same time, Academic Affairs and Students Affairs have joined forces in an effort to address the main predictor of student attrition at Sacramento State: second-year student probation. Students placed on probation are severely unlikely to graduate; second-year students are most at risk. To reach this population, we have increased our capacity to advise first- and second-year students, especially those on probation. Student Affairs has instituted a number of early alert mechanisms to identify students in academic distress early in the semester and is seeking to increase its focus upon students in high risk groups. I have asked our Student Academic Success program to direct more of its programming toward students on or seriously at risk of probation. In short, we are setting priorities and addressing the retention problem systematically rather than in shotgun fashion. Finally, Vice President for Student Affairs, Lori Varlotta, and I will work with the Faculty Senate and the units within Student Affairs to initiate a Retention Task Force later this fall by which to integrate the knowledge base and the efforts of our entire faculty and staff toward improved retention rates. The Task Force will be asked to develop practical, prioritized retention goals and plans for recommendation to the senate and the president.

Assessment. The past spring and summer produced significant leaps in our progress toward universal and highly practical learning-outcomes assessment plans at program level. We are now beginning to see actual application of assessment data to curricula. I am grateful to the deans, department chairs, and program assessment coordinators for their hard work. As well, initiated last spring, the Provost's Advisory Committee on Assessment and the Office of Academic Program Assessment (Terry Underwood, University Assessment Coordinator) have begun to assist Academic Affairs in focusing more systematically upon integrated assessment goals, meaningful assessment of general education outcomes, and applicability of our campus baccalaureate learning goals to our many programs.

Graduate Studies. The Faculty Senate recently endorsed the creation of a Graduate Advisory Council, a faculty body to advise the Dean of Graduate Studies in the recommendation and implementation of philosophies, practices, and policies pertinent to graduate education at Sacramento State. To this point, we have been operating without sufficiently focused oversight and planning in this area. In tough budget times, a system decentralized to the degree that ours has been is exceptionally vulnerable. I will ask the Dean and the Council to work with our many graduate and credential programs to develop guidelines and more sensible approaches to issues such as program size and managed growth, ratio of undergraduate to graduate enrollment, recruitment strategies,

program funding, learning-outcomes assessment, and credit for thesis supervision and other elements of graduate education.

General Education and Graduation Requirements. If you have not been part of the campus conversations regarding general education at our University, you have been missing something stimulating and important. On the heels of a program review, increased attention to assessment, and knowledge about innovations in other universities, many faculty members feel that the time is right to look at our general education curriculum. Janet Hecsh, Chair of the Faculty Senate's General Education/Graduate Requirements Policies Committee, is leading the GE/GR conversations; contact Janet to join an ongoing SacCT discussion of GE/GR; see also www.csus.edu/acaf/GE. I have pledged to Janet and to others that I will find ways to offset the impact of any GE/GR changes to colleges and departments whose economy has been built upon the extant GE/GR program. Beyond that, the subject matter content of GE/GR is up to the faculty though I would hope that the program becomes more interdisciplinary, features the talents and energies of many of our newly hired faculty members, and becomes something for which Sacramento State is known nationally, a magnet that draws students to our campus. I will know that we have succeeded when I hear students at commencement talking about GE/GR as part of the university experience that they've shared.

Information Technology. When I became Provost, I discovered that, assuming that our budget pressure would be short-lived, we had done little to plan for and to fund movement ahead on the IT instructional programming and equipment front and on the faculty and staff work-related IT front. We made strides this past year in replacing many of the older machines on people's desks and will continue in this vein. CIO Larry Gilbert and I have been combining resources and planning efforts to upgrade our IT packages for new classrooms coming on line. We also have been trying to work through new pressures on general and discipline-specific IT labs as open access demand and instructional demand for the same space have increased significantly at once. Finally, I have asked the deans, ATCS, CCE, CTL, IRT, and others to begin moving us forward regarding e-learning opportunities and options available to our faculty and students. We are in a good place in terms of the number of faculty members who now offer hybrid (part online and part not) courses. But the effort in this regard is not well coordinated and, thus, little more than the sum of its individual parts. We need systematically to facilitate our programs' (not simply individual instructors') efforts to offer segments of their curricula online, completely or in hybrid form. To accomplish this, we need to approach e-learning with priorities and funding firmly in place. This is a major Academic Affairs initiative for this and the next few years.

WASC. Finally, we are well along with our preparations for the visit this April of the WASC accreditation team. For reasons ranging from pride to enrollment to preserving federal funding, this is a big moment for Sacramento State. Jackie Donath has been hard at work with a number of planning workgroups and subcommittees writing the WASC report. Mike Lee, Don Taylor, Jackie, and others are developing methods by which to disseminate the draft WASC report to the campus community and to facilitate feedback

from that community. We ask that you become engaged in WASC discussions. They are more than something we must do. They represent an excellent chance to know ourselves better. Please watch for announcements regarding participation opportunities.

As always, I am grateful for your hard work. Thank you for your attention.