California State University, Sacramento

Nearly six decades after its founding, Sacramento State has evolved into a highly respected regional institution with more than 28,000 students. We provide access to an education of exceptional quality. Our graduates are leaders in their fields and in their communities. The university’s economic, social and cultural impact is powerful. One in 26 residents of the six-county Sacramento Region is a Sacramento State graduate. The university directly and indirectly contributes more than $900 million to the region’s economy annually. Sacramento State possesses even greater potential. Engagement in the WASC process will prove important in achieving that potential.

1.0 Introduction

The context for this report is a convergence of three major activities that occupy campus attention at this time: engaging in the WASC Process, pursuing Destination 2010, and creating the Strategic Planning Council. None of these initiatives can be considered in isolation from the others. All three focus on pursuit of the university’s mission. The WASC process is the mechanism whereby universities earn reaccreditation. Destination 2010 sets the ambitious goal of transforming Sacramento State into a destination campus of choice for prospective students and employees. The newly formed Strategic Planning Council (SPC) replaces the Council for University Planning (CUP) as the committee responsible for campus strategic planning.

1.1 Engaging in the WASC Process

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) requires that Sacramento State fulfill its core commitment to institutional capacity. In brief, Sacramento State must function with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and with purposeful organizational structures and processes. We must show that we comply with these requirements during the three stages of accreditation: 1) institutional proposal, 2) preparatory review, and 3) educational effectiveness.

The WASC Commission has defined four standards for accreditation:

1. Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives
2. Achieving educational objectives through core functions
3. Developing and applying resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability
4. Creating an organization committed to learning and improvement

The WASC standards provide a framework for self-examination and the search for opportunities for improvement within the context of critical internal and external consultation. Each of the four standards is broken down into specific criteria for review (CFRs). Relevant CFRs are listed immediately below the hypotheses in subsequent sections of this report.

WASC expectations, however, are not limited to simply providing evidence that institutions achieve the four standards and their respective CFRs. Such a requirement would imply a purely summative evaluation. Historically WASC evaluations were indeed largely summative. But under current WASC guidelines campuses are encouraged to engage in both summative and formative self-evaluations. Because these two forms of evaluation are somewhat contradictory in purpose, institutions face difficulties in constructing preparatory reviews. Reports must make two different arguments.
These two arguments might be described using the fanciful metaphor of dragons. Dragons can be defined as persistent problems that fundamentally threaten a university’s ability to provide quality instruction. A preparatory review, as considered for purposes of accreditation by WASC, must first demonstrate that the institution is not menaced by any big dragons. That is to say there are no problems of sufficient magnitude so as to render an educational community incapable of achieving the four WASC standards. Such a demonstration meets the summative requirements of WASC accreditation.

Regarding the more recent formative expectations of WASC, the metaphor is extended to the concept of little dragons. Little dragons are smaller-scale problems that limit, but do not vitally threaten, a university’s ability to provide quality education. Little dragons can be viewed as opportunities for constructive improvement, whereas big dragons are serious deficiencies requiring substantial devotion to remediation.

The dual chore for the university during the WASC process, therefore, is to document the absence of big dragons while simultaneously discovering and describing Sacramento State’s little dragons. Hence the placement of this report within the three phases of the complete WASC process: phase I (proposal) designing the process of searching for dragons, phase II (preparatory review) collecting and measuring dragons, and phase III (educational effectiveness) capturing and reforming the little beasts.

1.2 Pursuing Destination 2010

In the spring of 2004, Sacramento State launched Destination 2010. Destination 2010 will guide the university’s strategic planning with the ambition of becoming renowned by 2010. Sacramento State will be a university of choice for prospective students and employees throughout the West—a premier metropolitan university and a destination campus. Destination 2010 is built upon four interlocking objectives: (1) fostering excellent academic and student programs, (2) building a welcoming campus, (3) creating a dynamic physical environment, and (4) developing community support.

1.21 Fostering Excellent Academic and Student Programs

Universities earn reputations as destination campuses because, foremost, they are strong academically. Importantly, they also make student welfare a priority and provide a campus-community experience that is valued for life. Sacramento State places a premium on precisely these elements of the university education. Destination 2010 reflects our ongoing commitment to provide quality academic and student programs. Through Destination 2010 we will foster excellence in academic and student programs.