

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO



Institutional Report for Affirmation of WASC Accreditation

September 2016



SACRAMENTO STATE

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INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

California State University, Sacramento, the “Capital University,” is the sixth-largest of the 23-campus [California State University \(CSU\) system](#) and currently serves more than 30,000 resident and non-resident undergraduate and graduate students. Sacramento State, as it is known locally, was founded in 1947 and was first accredited by the WASC in 1951. It welcomed its ninth permanent president on July 1, 2015, when Dr. Robert S. Nelsen assumed the role. In an [op-ed](#) published in *The Sacramento Bee* on his first day on the job, and again in his inaugural fall [convocation](#), Dr. Nelsen reinvigorated a campus-wide commitment to put students at the center of the university’s educational and organizational initiatives. Sacramento State’s seven academic colleges offer 58 undergraduate majors and more than 50 master’s degrees, teaching credentials, and graduate certificate programs, as well as two independent doctoral programs – a doctorate in educational leadership and policy, and a doctorate of physical therapy – and a joint doctorate in Public History with the University of California, Santa Barbara.

This commitment to students aligned squarely with the expectations and mandates, outlined in the most recent WASC Senior College and University Commission visit, calling for the university to promote student learning and student success, and to think in a focused way about how faculty and staff could improve efforts to be student-centered.

To that end, Dr. Nelsen’s first-year initiatives brought definition to the campus community about what it means to be student-centered: to assume ownership and accountability for programs and efforts to increase freshman and transfer graduation rates; to decrease time to degree and thereby reduce student debt; to provide all students an online degree plan and in turn

provide the classes that students need to graduate in four years; and to close the achievement gap for underrepresented students.

By the end of President Nelsen's first year, the university had adopted a [Graduation Initiative Ecosystem](#) and a new [Finish in Four](#) campaign targeting first-time freshmen at summer orientation, resulting in approximately [two-thirds of students pledging to take 15 units](#) a semester to finish their degrees in four years. These efforts, the focus of campus implementation of the CSU system [Student Success and Completion Initiative](#) in 2015-2016, included the addition of more than 10,000 seats for fall 2016.

These initiatives directly addressed what WASC had identified in 2009 as "obvious barriers to timely graduation," namely, deficiencies in course scheduling. The initiatives also signaled nothing less than a change in the university's culture, a shift that is magnified given the demographic makeup of the university's student body.

This *Institutional Report* documents the continuing evolution of the university from a culture that is solely focused on completing required assessments toward one that uses the resulting data and evidence as an important component in decision-making and planning. At the core of this institutional change is the intentional effort to budget to priorities to improve academic excellence at the university; specifically, improving student learning outcomes and boosting research and scholarly activity. For example, during the 2015-2016 year, the university allocated \$969,000 in new funding for Student Success and Completion Initiatives, in addition to prioritizing \$1 million for new sections.

To further support student success, the University is planning to double its fundraising goals while engaged in a comprehensive campaign to raise much-needed funds for scholarships, high-impact practices, and capital projects that will enable curricular innovations.

The progress in the past year advanced the “new climate of collaboration, transparency, shared responsibility, and accountability” that had been identified in 2009. The result is that Sacramento State is now positioned to achieve a full transition to transformation, that is, to establish a new culture of higher expectations to provide students the highest quality education possible, with the achievement evidenced by ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes. The university is committed to improving performance on the access and use of institutional data as part of the ongoing effort to infuse the campus with a culture of assessment and improvement.

This report, then, documents the university’s educational enterprise, institutional mission and efforts to meet student success, diversity and inclusion, as well as health and safety goals in the university’s [Strategic Plan](#). The current reaffirmation process has allowed the campus to examine accomplishments, celebrate achievements, and identify areas that need attention.

The university’s strengths and challenges are addressed in more detail below, but the university is mindful of the imperative to dramatically improve retention and completion rates and to completely close the achievement gap, in accordance with new, mutually agreed upon stretch goals with the CSU system and Sacramento State.

Graduation Initiative 2025 Goals CSU Sacramento

Metric	2025 Goal	Most Recent Rate
Freshman 6-Year Graduation	60%	46%
Freshman 4-Year Graduation	30%	9%
Transfer 2-Year Graduation	38%	26%
Transfer 4-Year Graduation	81%	71%
Gap - Underrepresented Minority	0	8 % points
Gap – Pell	0	7 % points

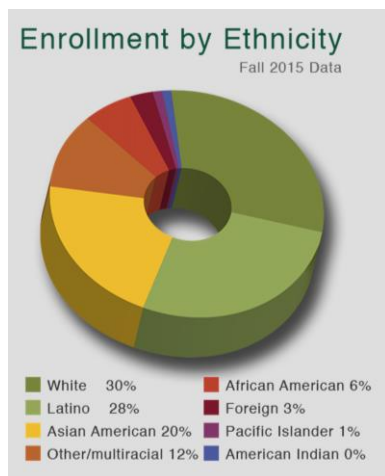
STRENGTHS

The strengths of Sacramento State are inherent in its people – the students, staff, faculty, and community it serves. Sacramento State’s priorities are clearly defined in its [Mission Statement](#) and [Strategic Plan](#). Institutionally, the language of the Mission Statement and Strategic Plan, and the actions of faculty, staff, administration, and students demonstrate the campus community’s commitment to access to public higher education, high-quality academic and student support programming, student success, diversity, and inclusion.

A distinguishing characteristic of the university is servant leadership to the region and the state. The campus was honored with a Carnegie Community Engagement classification in [2010](#). Since the university’s [Community Engagement Center](#) was founded in 1996, more than 50,000 Sacramento State students have volunteered in excess of one million service hours at more than 300 community partner sites around the Sacramento region.

The [University Staff Assembly](#) (USA) also strives to strengthen staff contributions to the campus community and supports the university's mission to extend the campus community beyond the classroom and workplace. For example, hundreds of staff members annually participate in a blood drive [in partnership with BloodSource](#), the leading nonprofit regional blood center.

A DIVERSE CAMPUS, A CAPITAL UNIVERSITY



Today, Sacramento State is the seventh-most-diverse university in the West, a campus with [no majority ethnic or racial group](#). In 2015, the university achieved a milestone in achieving recognition as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), following its previous designation as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI).

The launching of a new Diversity and Inclusion Initiative in President Nelsen's first year reaffirmed the centrality of diversity at Sacramento State. At the same time, the university is mindful that diversity efforts must focus on serving students, as evidenced by the HSI capacity building grant awarded to the campus by the U.S. Department of Education.

The university works from a position of strength, based on a strong foundation of shared governance. To fulfill its mission and responsibility as a member of the CSU system, and to remain accountable to students and community stakeholders, President Nelsen and his leadership team have renewed and strengthened the positive and consultative relationship with the Faculty Senate by re-signing a [Statement on Shared Governance and Consultation](#) as one of his first orders of business. Shared governance allows the university to develop a sense of collaboration and inclusiveness to demonstrate the values and vision that accompany the Mission Statement.

Another definitive strength is the commitment of Sacramento State faculty to high-impact, student learning-centered practices. The [Center for Teaching and Learning](#) (CTL) has played a central role in improving instruction and educational effectiveness. The [Faculty Learning Communities](#) (FLCs) that the center organizes and administers each year are powerful

instruments of reflection and action. The collaboration between the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Office of Academic Program Assessment has been productive, educating faculty to the variety of ways in which best teaching practices and assessment activities can lead to real enhancements of the classroom environment and meaningful student learning.

Separately, the university is emphasizing high-impact practices that improve persistence rates and lead to improved time to degree. Undergraduate research, for example, is one area where the university now has an identified strength, in particular in biological sciences. For example, teams of Sacramento State students won top honors three years in a row from 2012 to 2014 at the prestigious CSU Idea-to-Product (I2P) biotechnology competition. And our students are participating in faculty-led HIV prevention research as part of a [four-year, \\$425,000 grant](#) awarded by the National Institutes of Health.

COMMUNITY

Outside of the traditional classroom setting, Sacramento State has made significant progress toward its strategic goal of engaging students in a “comprehensive university experience” through its efforts to connect student learning and success to the university’s commitment to “engaging the community by building enduring partnerships that strengthen and enrich the region.” The campus location and mission have led Sacramento State to develop a number of signature programs and centers that take advantage of the university’s position in the state capital to provide learning opportunities for students as well as opening resources to the community. For example, the [Center for California Studies](#) oversees the university’s successful Capital Fellows Programs, which are consistently among the top internship programs in the nation.

The university also serves the region, the state, and the nation through its high-impact academic programming. Sacramento State provides the second-largest Criminal Justice program in the United States. The university's School of Nursing averages 200 to 250 graduates each year with an impressive passing rate of between 95% and 100% on the NCLEX nursing examination. Furthermore, the Construction Management Department has had a 100% job placement rate since 2011, with graduates managing construction projects in the service region and beyond. In addition, the university's [Office of Water Programs](#) is a global leader in drinking water and wastewater operator training, offering nearly 50 distance learning courses. In spring 2016, the [campus announced](#) the purchase of a building in downtown Sacramento to act as a planned School of Public Affairs, housing the [Capital Fellows Programs](#), the master's degree program in [Public Policy and Administration](#), the [Institute for Social Research](#), and the [Center for Collaborative Policy](#), which is already situated in a downtown location. Other related programs proposed for the new location include the [Sacramento Semester internship program](#), the [Project for an Informed Electorate](#), the [Executive Masters of Business Administration](#) program, the [Center for Small Business](#), the [Education Insights Center](#), and some certificate programs of the College of Continuing Education. With this effort to align a number of the university's policy and outreach resources closer to the Capitol, the university anticipates improving its accessibility to practitioners and policymakers while providing unique opportunities for students and faculty. These initiatives embody the university's mission in the broader community, expanding Sacramento State's influence beyond the confines of the university's campus. The focused attention on the community is particularly important given the demographics of the Sacramento region. Notably, one out of every 20 residents of the region is a Sacramento State grad. Our

alumni hold top offices in government, business, and economic development, and are dedicated to fostering vibrant, thriving communities throughout the city, county, and state.

CHALLENGES

In all the cycles of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (now WSCUC) accreditation process in which the campus has participated, Sacramento State has consistently demonstrated that the institution shares significant values with WSCUC. In particular, Sacramento State is committed to serving university stakeholders, developing and using evidence to underpin institutional decision-making, and demonstrating meaningful standards of educational effectiveness and student learning. The current review cycle has revealed that Sacramento State is an institution confronting a number of critical challenges, the result of several years of budget restrictions, transitions in leadership, and pressure to improve graduation rates while continuing to provide quality educational experiences.

In addition to these challenges, the university must confront a number of internal inquiries that were highlighted as a result of this self-study. These include the need for greater access to, sharing of, and use of institutional data, the need to institutionalize and infuse the campus with a culture of assessment and continual improvement, and concerns about the financial situation on campus, in the CSU system, and in the state of California.

While each of these challenges will be dealt with in detail in other sections of this report, it has become clear that Sacramento State is in a period of transition. For example, since the last WASC visit, there have been significant changes in the administrative leadership team, including a new president, seven new college deans, and four provosts (including two interim provosts). A recent nationwide search for a new provost was not successful; and during the 2016-2017 academic year, the campus will continue to be led by an interim provost. Similarly, transitions in

faculty and staff have had an effect on the campus's ability to serve students, both in the university's educational and support functions.

In part, the retirement of a number of faculty in the period from 2009 to 2015, coupled with reduced funding during the "Great Recession," led to a reduction in the number of full-time, tenure-track faculty staffing the campus. Furthermore, the diversity of the faculty on campus remains a needed area of improvement, to serve the diverse student population. The campus, however, has moved to reverse the trend and is hiring new faculty at a rate intended to increase the number and percentage of tenure-track instructors, with 51 new positions approved for the 2016-2017 academic year and 69 approved for the 2017-2018 academic year.

The hiring of new full-time faculty aligns with the increased emphasis from the California State University System Board of Trustees and the Legislature to ensure students receive high-level educational experiences in the face of ongoing budgetary stress points with which the campus must engage.

RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION LETTERS

Sacramento State took the Commission's action letter and team report very seriously, and by 2012, the university's interim report made clear that the campus had taken significant [action](#) in a number of important areas, including building support for and development of the EdD Program, promotion of student success, development of planning and budgeting, and assessment of student learning. Since the interim report and particularly since the arrival of President Nelsen, the university has made significant progress in its structures, policies, and measures to better evaluate the effectiveness of educational efforts, and has reinforced a sense of urgency and accountability toward the directives from the Commission.

CAMPUS WSCUC RE-AFFIRMATION ACTIVITIES

The Office of Academic Affairs established a Steering Committee and three working groups, which focused on the three major foci of the *Institutional Report*. The names of potential participants and committee charges were submitted to then-President Alexander Gonzalez, and the committees were configured, with [members](#) drawn from all parts of the campus community – faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The working groups immediately began work on the issues associated with the university’s efforts to improve its performance in the areas of assessment of core competencies; the meaning, quality, and integrity of Sacramento State degrees; and student success. The Steering Committee began biweekly discussions of the WASC Standards as a way to examine various elements of the university’s institutional organization, policies, and processes.

With the help of Academic Affairs, the Steering Committee organized a [WASC website](#) to provide a channel of communication with the campus and other potentially interested stakeholders, as well as several campus forums on core issues, such as the meaning, quality, and integrity of the degree; the university’s commitment to graduate education; and the role of department chairs. Additionally, the Steering Committee asked members of the President’s Cabinet, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, the membership of all the WSCUC working groups, as well as Steering Committee members to examine, analyze, and respond to the *Review Under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Standards Worksheet* as a way to identify areas of strength and weakness. The campus reaffirmation effort was also aided by a daylong campus visit by WSCUC Vice President Christopher Oberg in September 2015. Mr. Oberg met with President Nelsen, the President’s Cabinet, the Faculty Senate Executive

Committee, the Steering Committee, and members of Associated Students, Inc., and presented information about the re-affirmation process to a campus convocation.

These efforts have resulted in a campus-wide participation in the development of this *Institutional Report*. The report itself was a collaborative effort, drawing on feedback from Steering Committee members, the working group membership, additional faculty, staff, and administrators, and the President's Cabinet. The draft report was also sent out to the entire campus community for further input. Consistent with the WSCUC core commitment to institutional integrity, sustainability, and accountability at every level, members of the campus community have used the process to improve the campus's effectiveness in all aspects of its educational and organizational endeavors. The Steering Committee feels the report reflects a genuine commitment to both the WSCUC process and the values to which the institution is committed.

ESSAY 1/DEGREE PROGRAMS: MEANING, QUALITY, AND INTEGRITY OF DEGREES (CFRS 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2A, 2.2B, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10-2.13 4.1.-4.6)

EXPLORING MEANING

Sacramento State’s WASC [Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degree \(MQID\)](#) [Working Group](#) began its work ([Appendix 1: MQID Exhibits](#)) in late 2014 by first tackling the larger question of the meaning of the degree experience at Sacramento State. The working group began by reviewing university documents to create a foundational idea of what characterizes “meaning” at the university. These initial documents provided the working group with a list of common indicators and themes that could be used as a starting point for working group discussions and campus forums on “meaning.” In spring 2015, the MQID Working Group hosted a forum for the Faculty Senate and three student focus group sessions. The MQID Working Group created “meaning statements” from these initial forums and focus groups, and the recurring themes that were part of these conversations. The working group presented these statements during a campus [open forum](#) on “Exploring Meaning” in October 2015. The remainder of the fall 2015 timeframe was used to begin the draft of the “meaning” statement.

EXPERIENCE THE MEANING OF THE SACRAMENTO STATE DEGREE

Sacramento State’s Mission Statement is the foundation upon which the meaning of the Sacramento State degree experience is built. The most recent update of the [Mission, Vision, and Values Statement](#) recognizes the needs, ideas, and ambitions of the community and speaks to the commitment to a holistic educational experience that extends beyond the classroom. These statements, along with an examination of the Sacramento State culture and undergraduate and

graduate learning goals, became the basic underpinnings of the meaning of the degrees the university offers.

As a result of its investigation of these materials, the campus has determined that the meaning of the degree at Sacramento State is defined by five core areas: the undergraduate experience and baccalaureate learning goals; the graduate experience and graduate learning goals; experiential education; equity, diversity, and inclusive excellence; and a commitment to a sustainable environment.

THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE AND BACCALAUREATE LEARNING GOALS

The undergraduate degree at Sacramento State offers a common experience for students that includes both curricular and experiential education elements (e.g., [service learning](#), internships, undergraduate research, community service, volunteering) to prepare them for a variety of opportunities after graduation. In addition to the WASC-established core competencies – written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and critical thinking – students in undergraduate programs are expected to demonstrate competencies found in one major field of study and across a broad range of subject matters and skills.

The [Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals for the 21st Century](#), adopted in 2009 and adapted from the nationally recognized [ACC&U LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes](#), broadly define what students are expected to know and the skills that should be properly developed upon graduation. These goals emphasize the means of achieving knowledge and how to use it in specific contexts, as well as basic content acquisition. In summary, these goals communicate the university's expectations that the completion of an undergraduate curriculum

will allow students to prepare themselves intellectually, socially, and ethically to engage responsibly with the world around them.

THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE AND GRADUATE LEARNING GOALS

Students in graduate programs are expected to demonstrate a deeper level of learning in a specific content area; to develop intellectual and practical skills to an advanced level; to move from being consumers of knowledge to being producers and disseminators of knowledge; to strengthen professional identity; to be metacognitive, curious, and responsible; and to develop leadership skills and the ability to function autonomously. Sacramento State approved a [Graduate Learning Goals](#) policy in 2011-2012 that reinforced these expectations. The policy required all graduate programs to [create learning goals](#) for their programs. In the 2015-2016 academic year, this work continued, resulting in a revised [Graduate Learning Goals policy](#) that broadly defines what students are expected to know and be able to do upon graduation.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

At Sacramento State, experiential education and community engagement are of the highest value. The university provides opportunities to connect students with experiences beyond the classroom as part of a student's curricular (e.g., service learning, internships, undergraduate research) and co-curricular (e.g., community service, volunteering) experience prior to graduation. A major objective of these opportunities is to prepare students to assume roles as empathetic, courageous, engaged, and globally informed leaders who are ready to serve in their communities and at the state, national, and international levels.

Experiential education activities include four categories:

- [Tutoring/Mentoring](#)
- [Undergraduate Research](#)

- [Internships](#)
- [Service Learning](#)

The commitment to experiential education at the undergraduate and graduate levels is one of the distinctive practices that define the educational experience. Experiential education embodies the idea of “learning while doing.” The [Community Engagement Center](#) supports and coordinates educational partnerships with various organizations that want to work with Sacramento State. The center serves as a facilitative partner and resource for faculty, students, staff, and the community, and works to build and promote community engagement through thoughtful collaboration and partnerships with campus and community organizations. In addition to the Community Engagement Center, each college features distinct experiential education opportunities. Several centers cross disciplinary boundaries:

- [Center for Collaborative Policy](#): A center within the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies that teaches collaborative policy development and collaborative leadership to undergraduate and graduate students. Its main functions include providing services to government agencies, stakeholders, and communities to address complex public policy challenges through collaborative stakeholder processes and conflict resolution, collaborative public involvement, strategic planning, visioning, and training.
- [Center for California Studies](#): The mission of the Center for California Studies (College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies) is to bridge academia and government in the service of strengthening California’s democracy. The center administers four fellowship programs known as the [Capital Fellows Programs](#), offering students the opportunity to engage in public service and prepare for future careers, while actively contributing to the development and implementation of public policy in California.

The university, in partnership with donors and friends, has made a significant investment to support experiential learning, for example:

- [Simulation labs in Nursing](#)
- [A state-of-the-art "power" lab in the College of Engineering and Computer Science](#)
- [Maryjane Rees Language, Speech, and Hearing Center](#)
- [Sustainable Technology Optimization Research Center](#)

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

The diversity of the student body is one the most distinct features of the campus. The university is proud of this piece of the university's identity, and it places the highest value on equity and inclusion. One of the top priorities in the coming year is moving Sacramento State to an inclusive space for all students, staff, and faculty on campus.

Evidence of the extent to which equity, diversity, and inclusiveness are embedded in every part of Sacramento State is reflected in the following aspects of the campus experience: in the curriculum; through student organizations and leadership programs for the diverse student body; through centers focused on the creation of an inclusive campus environment; through the activities and programs of student organizations and the wider campus; through structures that promote advocacy and support for faculty and students; through programming that focuses on specialized groups; through outreach to diverse communities in recruitment and in service; and through the establishment of an [Office on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#).

In the 2015-2016 academic year, the [Professional Learning Communities](#) (PLCs) and [Faculty Learning Communities](#) (FLCs) included discussions that addressed issues of equity and diversity in the classroom and across campus. Furthermore, at the [CTL Summer Teaching Institute](#), programming focused on discussions and resources to increase equity within courses.

All new faculty are receiving training to better understand our student population, diversity, and inclusive teaching. Additionally, a Professional Learning Community [on equity and diversity](#) has been created and will be offered as part of the fall 2016 program.

Educational Equity Programs: The university is committed to student success through its [Student Academic Success and Educational Equity Programs \(SASEEP\)](#), a unit composed of a variety of student success support programs designed to increase student retention, persistence, and graduation, while working to close the achievement gap. Additionally, [college-based educational equity programs](#) provide discipline-based support resources for students.

Diversity and Inclusiveness in the Curriculum: Diversity enriches the multiple perspectives developed by a liberal arts education. For that reason, this value is explicitly reflected in the Baccalaureate Learning Goal for:

Personal and Social Responsibility, including: civic knowledge and engagement – local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence.

This goal is at the foundation of the campus's [General Education Race and Ethnicity Requirement](#), which provides students with perspectives from various cultures and backgrounds, and gives students the tools to analyze and explore how concepts of ethnicity, sexual preference, gender, age, class, ethnocentrism, and racism shape the experiences of people in the United States. The faculty and students at Sacramento State expect and demand a curriculum and learning opportunities that accurately reflect their history and lived experiences.

For several years, the campus has had the [One Book Program](#) (OBP) with the goal of igniting a campus-wide discussion of diversity, culture, and social justice. The selected books must encourage interdisciplinary thought and learning, and explore diverse cultural perspectives. The [One World Initiative](#) brings together and highlights the many global engagement opportunities at Sacramento State, both within the curriculum and within the broader campus environment. The

theme for the 2016-2017 academic year is “Global Perspectives on Inheritance,” and it will engage the campus community in discussion and activities based around the topic.

Diversity in Student Organizations and Leadership Programs: A great example of the way Sacramento State celebrates its diversity is through the many cultural student organizations on campus and the events they have throughout the year. Of particular note are:

[Student Organizations and Leadership](#)

[The McNair Scholars Program](#)

[Greek Organizations](#)

Specific populations of Sacramento State students are supported by a number of centers and services, including the [Serna Center](#), the [Multi-Cultural Center](#), the [Full Circle Project](#), [CAMP](#), the [PRIDE Center](#), [Guardian Scholars](#), the [Dreamer Resource Center](#), the [Veterans Success Center](#), the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Center](#), and [Services to Students with Disabilities](#).

A COMMITMENT TO A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

In recent years, significant efforts have been made to create a culture of sustainability on campus. As a result, Sacramento State is currently the [highest-rated CSU campus](#) for sustainability. There has been an increased effort toward sustainability in the areas of academics; dining services; energy; environmental health and safety; landscaping; planning, new construction, and infrastructure renewal; procurement; recycling/waste management; transportation; and water conservation.

Recent efforts have been made to involve students, faculty, and staff for the purpose of integrating sustainability into every part of the campus. Examples of distinctive educational experiences offered include:

- [The Sustainable Technology Optimization Research Center](#)

- [The Bioswale Environmental Project](#)

Together, these five core areas create a set of educational experiences that embody the university's traditions, values, and future plans as an institution of higher education.

“CONCLUSION ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “MEANING”

The [Policy on Degree Programs](#) provides definitions for all the undergraduate and master's academic degree program structures. Efforts are being made to update the policy to include doctoral-level program definitions. These definitions provide the framework for all Sacramento State degrees. They also provide the foundation for the Sacramento State Baccalaureate and Graduate Learning Goals. At the heart of the degree experience are the undergraduate and graduate degree requirements and their associated learning goals.

Sacramento State has been working diligently to clarify and communicate the expectations of the degree experience over the years. While the [General Education Program](#), along with the requirements of each major program, sets the minimum standards for each degree, broader expectations are rooted in the Baccalaureate and Graduate Learning Goals. The Sacramento State [Baccalaureate Learning Goals](#) and [Graduate Learning Goals](#) are two of the five core areas that define the degrees' meaning.

The campus culture is heavily informed by the student population – its needs, goals, and successes – and is framed by the university's core commitments to experiential learning, diversity and inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

THE QUALITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE SACRAMENTO STATE DEGREE EXPERIENCE

The underlying principles that guide the quality and integrity of the Sacramento State degree are rigor; a comprehensive and thorough approval process for [new courses](#) and [new](#)

[degree programs](#); a robust explanation of the rationale and need for the program; and multiple reviews on campus and in the Chancellor's Office to ensure high quality, attractiveness to students, measurable student learning outcomes, and evidence and assurance of adequate resources to support and sustain the program. Other elements that are designed to assure rigor include compliance with all degree program requirements set forth in [Title V](#), the Chancellor's Office [degree approval process](#), WASC review (where required), and strict adherence to the [Credit Hour policy](#).

Further, all existing degree programs are reviewed for continued quality, curriculum rigor and currency, faculty strength, and contribution to student learning and student success. [Periodic review](#) ensures that the trust placed in academic departments to deliver quality academic programs is reinforced and recertified every six years as stipulated in the [Program Review Policy](#). Also, the [annual assessment](#) of student learning outcomes provides a regular ongoing opportunity for departments to examine assessment findings as a basis to explore curricular redesign, pedagogical refinements, and advising that aids student progress to degree. Several of our degree programs hold discipline-based accreditation (e.g., AACSB, ABET, NASAD) that is regularly reviewed (every five to 10 years) to determine if accreditation standards continue to be met as required for the specific disciplines. In these instances, the discipline-based accreditation is accepted in lieu of university program review.

The university's policies, processes, and major initiatives support an ongoing effort to improve the quality of degrees. This effort is most evident in three areas that are the central mechanisms for ensuring the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees: the program review process, the program assessment process, and efforts to improve academic processes through

policy and practice. Two of these processes, academic program review and assessment, will be detailed in Essay 4: Quality Assurance and Improvement.

REFLECTIONS ON PROGRESS AND IDENTIFICATION OF CONTINUING ISSUES

Consistent and robust program assessment is requisite to the quality and integrity of degrees. Sacramento State has been active in its efforts to improve program assessment on campus as an element of an ongoing effort to define and ensure the quality of the baccalaureate and graduate degrees offered. In the past decade, university academic program assessment efforts have focused on the improvement of academic unit assessment for individual degree programs.

In recent years, Academic Affairs has turned its attention to determining the meaningfulness of the data collected from academic units. The [Office of Academic Program Assessment \(OAPA\)](#) concluded that the open-ended program assessment template did not provide the sort of data that could be used to effectively carry out the goals of the assessment policy or provide meaningful information to the campus and general public. As a result, a new [template](#) was used during the 2013-2014 academic cycle.

The university is making progress in establishing a structure for the [assessment of General Education](#), yet there remain challenges that complicate an accurate understanding of the state of assessment on campus. Among the most pressing concerns:

- The policy on academic program assessment is not used to inform or enforce current assessment practices. While the current policy clearly states the requirements for unit-level assessment, there are no explicit consequences for non-participation, or erroneous, false or poor-quality assessment efforts. Academic Affairs will need to determine what

data is most meaningful to what audiences for the reports and how it should be collected and used.

- Academic Affairs is working with the Faculty Senate to have difficult conversations about assessment, standards of performance, and faculty responsibilities so that genuine progress can be made toward creating an integrated vision of academic quality and how it is achieved and demonstrated by undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as students.

Despite these challenges, the commitment to the quality and integrity of programs and the degrees that result from these programs is genuine. Evidence of both quality and integrity, as well as ongoing efforts toward improved educational effectiveness, can be seen in the statistics presented in OAPA's most recent [report](#) on program assessment and the Dean of Undergraduate Programs' [Report on General Education](#).

ESSAY 2/EDUCATIONAL QUALITY: STUDENT LEARNING, CORE COMPETENCIES, STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT GRADUATION (CFRS 2.2A, 2.3-2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.40)

At its most effective, a university education is iterative, cumulative, integrative, and flexible. It is an experience that should also offer students the opportunity to experience relationships and projects (curricular and co-curricular, personal, and civic) that make use of their knowledge and skills. Consideration of what students are actually learning and what they should be learning remains central to Sacramento State's ongoing quest for educational quality and standards of performance at graduation. Certainly, since the last WASC review, the university has made significant progress in developing the structures, policies, and measures that allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of educational efforts. Nonetheless, the campus continues to evolve in its efforts to define student learning, how to measure it, how to support it in the classroom and at the program level, and how to ensure that it is relevant to the world in which students will find themselves. With these efforts, the university is focused on ensuring that degrees sustain the promise of a better life for all students, and that there is strong evidence of the institution's [value to the larger society](#).

At Sacramento State, student learning is increasingly being evaluated in the context of its alignment with the university's mission of preparing students "for leadership, service, and success." Two significant elements of the action plan associated with this mission are the enhancement of student learning and success, and the engagement of students in a comprehensive university experience. This is accomplished, on the one hand, by fostering innovative teaching, scholarship and research, and on the other hand, by a commitment to building a strong General Education Program. The General Education Program illustrates Sacramento State's efforts to offer quality student learning experiences at the broader university

level. In doing so, the campus seeks to enhance and amplify the educational effectiveness of the majors, and the integrity and quality of the baccalaureate degree.

GENERAL EDUCATION AT SACRAMENTO STATE

In the last General Education Program Review, in 2008, as well as the most recent WASC review, a number of weaknesses were identified and acknowledged. Primary among them was a lack of alignment between the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and the goals and outcomes of the General Education Program. One of the campus's major goals has been the dissemination and implementation of the Baccalaureate Learning Goals that were adopted by the Faculty Senate in 2009. Based on the feedback received in the General Education Program review and from WASC, a sequenced plan for improvement was developed: first, to review the structure and unit requirements of the existing General Education/Graduation Requirements to align with system-wide requirements, to simplify transfer and native student pathways through GE, and to provide opportunities for overlapping requirements so that students could complete their degrees in a timely fashion; second, to review and revise student learning outcomes for all GE areas so that they were more appropriately aligned and integrated with the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and provided assessable outcomes across a variety of course options; and finally, review, revise, and implement the GE/GR Assessment Policy to create a university structure for assessing and improving the General Education Program. This sequence is intended to provide the foundation for more deliberate, data-driven curricular decisions.

Structure: The California Education Code and the CSU system provide the overarching structure and required unit distribution of General Education subject areas for all campuses, while also permitting campuses to add graduation requirements and additional GE sub-areas to their local programs. In 2008, the Executive Order outlining the GE Breadth requirements (E.O.

595) was superseded by [E.O. 1033](#), which “identifie[d], for the first time, goals for CSU general-education student learning outcomes.” The CSU joined the LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) initiative sponsored by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) and adopted the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes (which are the basis for Sacramento State’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals). While the implementation of E.O. 1033 (superseded by E.O. 1065 and then E.O. 1100) appears to shift the focus of system-wide GE programs toward authentic and assessable learning outcomes, it also presents a challenge similar to the issues raised in the last WASC review and the disjunction between the LEAP Essential Learning outcomes and the Subject Area distribution model of minimum GE unit requirements, required by Title 5. For example, in the Executive Order, there is no explicit mapping between subject areas such as Area D (Social Sciences) and “Personal & Social Responsibility.” The goal is to develop a twenty-first century General Education Program that genuinely meets the LEAP goals while maintaining a structure that both satisfies the distribution requirements and is relatively consistent across the system. Another outcome is to improve the ease with which students transfer GE units among the CSUs and from California community colleges to Sacramento State.

In addition to the requirements set by the CSU system, over the years, Sacramento State has added a number of graduation requirements (e.g., second-semester composition, race and ethnicity in America, foreign language proficiency) and has subdivided some of the subject areas beyond what was required by Title 5. Such additions have, in some cases, added units to the General Education programs with potential risk in the ability to facilitate timely progress to degree. But more innovative GE pathways and improved advising to take courses that count for

more than one requirement have helped to reduce those risks as part of the initiative to achieve higher completion rates.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, the General Education/Graduation Requirements Policy Committee (GE/GRPC) offered a series of recommendations for changes in the structure and unit distribution of the General Education Program. The following recommendations were approved:

- Reduction of total units from 51 to 48 through the reduction of units in Area D: Social Sciences from 15 to 12.
- Alignment with extant Executive Orders approval of lab courses in B5 for lab requirement. (B5 is an additional Sacramento State sub-area that includes upper-division GE Science courses; however, prior to this alignment, only lab courses in B1 Sciences and B2 Life Sciences could satisfy the laboratory experience. This policy change increased opportunities for upper-division lab courses to count toward the requirement.)
- Simplification of Area C from four sub-areas to two sub-areas. (The sub-areas were also renumbered to be consistent with the system-wide numbering to reduce confusion, particularly for transfer students.)
- Simplification of Area D from multiple sub-areas to no sub-areas (with the requirement that students would need to take courses from at least three different departments). This change permitted students more flexibility in building breadth in the Social Sciences.

Moreover, the campus discussions regarding these actions provided opportunities for various stakeholders, including community members, to discuss the General Education goals, outcomes, and mission.

General Education Assessment: The primary goals for changes to GE assessment were two-fold: to produce area learning outcomes that were genuinely assessable and aligned with the Baccalaureate Learning Goals; and to move toward genuine programmatic assessment of authentic student work in General Education courses from across the university.

Area Learning Outcomes: In the past five years, the campus has engaged in the revision of all GE subject area learning outcomes and is currently engaged in a similar process for the additional graduation requirements. The activities have included the following:

- Faculty conducted a series of open [fora](#) to review “General Education Alignment of GE Areas with Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes,” [Baccalaureate Learning Goals](#) and appropriate AAC&U VALUE rubrics.
- Working groups of faculty from across disciplines drafted outcomes.
- The draft outcomes were disseminated across the university and revised based on campus feedback.
- The Faculty Senate adopted the Area Learning Outcomes.
- GE area course syllabi were reviewed and the new outcomes were appropriately embedded in syllabi and content of all courses in the specific GE areas.

To date, the university has completed outcome revision and adoption in four of five subject areas ([B](#), [C1-C2](#), [D](#), and [E](#)). See Area Learning Outcomes and supporting documents in [Appendix 5](#), and note that the university is nearing completion of the Subject A (Basic Skills) outcomes. Furthermore, according to the standing policy for periodic review of

syllabi, all syllabi from Areas B, C, D, and E have now been reviewed for the inclusion of the new Area Learning Outcomes, as reflected in their Area E syllabi and course content.

Additionally, the GE/GRPC has initiated a phased review, with an eye towards revision and alignment, of learning outcomes for the following graduation requirements; Second Semester Composition, Writing Intensive (satisfied through upper division coursework), Foreign Language, Race and Ethnicity in American Society, Information Literacy, and United States History, Constitution and American Ideals (commonly referred to as the American Institutions requirement). This process, begun in the 2015-2016 Academic Year, will continue until all campus graduation requirements have gone before the Faculty Senate for consideration.

Assessment Policies and Plans: In spring 2014, the Faculty Senate approved a [revised General Education assessment policy](#). The newly adopted policy, which went into effect in fall 2014, established a three-tiered assessment process as follows:

- The GE Course Review Subcommittee will continue to review all course proposals for inclusion in GE Areas, and conduct periodic syllabi review and Area Learning Outcomes Compliance review.
- Organization of GE Area Assessment Groups. These groups, with membership from representative departments that offer courses in that area, are charged to establish an assessment plan for the area; determine appropriate direct and indirect, qualitative and quantitative assessment tools and strategies; conduct assessment using representative samples of student work from across a variety of courses in the GE Area; contribute information about their data collection and analysis to an annual report on General

Education to be prepared by the GE Assessment Coordinator Council; and offer recommendations regarding curricula based on their assessment activities.

- An Area Assessment Coordinator Council will also to be established. It will be made up of the five GE Area Assessment coordinators, the dean of Undergraduate Programs, a representative from the Office of Academic Program Assessment, and a liaison from GE/GRPC. The council's role will be to oversee programmatic assessment activities for the GE Program, including the WASC Core Competencies as they relate to General Education and the Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

This ambitious new approach to General Education assessment is being implemented. Indeed, the GE Area Assessment Groups for Areas B, C, D, and E have drafted [five-year assessment plans](#), which have now been approved by GE/GRPC.

As the institution moves forward, Sacramento State recognizes that effective implementation will require building a cadre of faculty members in all areas who are able and willing to engage in the ongoing work of assessing the GE program, maintaining momentum, establishing clear processes and timelines for assessment plans and activities, and providing sustainable campus support for data collection and assessment activities, along with ongoing faculty development for assessment work. Although the university is making some progress on GE assessment, the need for greater enhancements to the process to achieve continuous improvements in the quality of the GE program is evident.

Curricular Pathways and Innovation: Over the past five years, conversations have been ongoing regarding curricular innovation in General Education. There is general agreement within the General Education/Graduation Requirements Policy Committee (GE/GRPC), supported by literature in the field, that conceptually, General Education has shifted from

“breadth” to “coherence.” To that end, the campus has also explored a number of innovations, including:

- A General Education Certificate for [Global and Multicultural Perspectives](#) (an upper-division sequence of themed courses in GE).
- [The Honors Program](#) adoption of a “Wicked Problems” framework (GE Honors is a cohorted GE sequence with three dedicated and integrated courses at the lower division and three courses at the upper division).
- The Center for Teaching and Learning hosted a Faculty Learning Community (spring and fall 2015) on “Wicked Problems: Innovative Curricular Design,” and the campus hosted an inter-segmental conference on “Threshold Concepts and Wicked Problems.”
- Transfer facilitation in cooperation with a local community college (this project included the submission of a portfolio that eased the transition into upper-division GE). The COSA (Cosumnes River College/Sacramento State) project is the second “COMPASS” grant to the campus for the implementation and dissemination of GE innovation, and an article on “ePortfolios” in [“Giving California Students a Compass.”](#)
- [Academic Learning Collaboratives](#) (ALCs). This project, also initially funded by a COMPASS grant, provided integrated, theme-based, team-taught three-course learning communities. The pilot, which began in 2011 with three ALCs, has since shifted toward first-year learning communities and learning clusters to give due consideration to issues of space and faculty workload.
- A cross-divisional evaluation of alternatives yielded a recommendation to purchase and implement CourseLeaf CAT software for course catalog workflow and publication, and CourseLeaf CIM software for course and program change management.

Sacramento State also has been the recipient of a number of grants and is a participant in a number of national projects focused on innovation in General Education and student success. Sacramento State was the only CSU campus to receive both COMPASS I and II grants as part of “Give Students a Compass.” The campus hosted the culminating conference for the project, “New Paradigms and Pathways in General Education,” in 2015. Sacramento State also has made progress in embedding high-impact practices in its GE program, particularly in its First Year Experience program. The campus was pleased to share this best practice experience at the 2015 WASC ARC conference with a presentation on “[Necessary Connections: Student Success and the GE Curriculum](#).”

Currently, Sacramento State is one of 20 participants in AAC&U’s Committing to Equity & Inclusive Excellence project. The project, titled “[Project LAUNCH: Learning to Advance Underserved Communities in Higher Ed](#),” focuses on improving student success in General Education/Intro to Major courses by improving access to and participation in high-impact practices and increasing achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students as revealed by direct assessment measure. The campus LAUNCH team has identified two specific assessment plans: one for [First Year Programs](#) and another for Service Learning – Writing Partners. Lessons learned in this project will transfer effectively to other GE and student success projects. Individual faculty members also have received funding for [course redesign projects](#) to redesign curriculum and pedagogy in many of the gateway GE courses, particularly for those with lower success rates.

Campus conversations are ongoing among the members of the GE/GRPC and program directors in the Office of Undergraduate Studies to explore other curricular pathways and innovations including: the development of a number of thematic pathways in GE; the ways in

which GE courses are developed, taught, and funded; the willingness to adopt alternative models such as using “backward design”; the adoption of an ePortfolio for student work; and the revision of institutional structures to facilitate a more coherent, outcomes-driven GE program that results in closing a solid GE assessment loop. The ePortfolio also is expected to strengthen the assessment of the core competencies.

THE CORE COMPETENCIES

In the 2013 revision of the *WASC Handbook of Accreditation*, CFR 2.2a affirmed that undergraduate programs, in particular, must “ensure the development of core competencies including, but not limited to, written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy and critical thinking.” The five competencies listed in the *Handbook* correlate with Sacramento State’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals, adopted by the campus in 2009. Since the university’s interim report, Sacramento State has regularly collected data on the Baccalaureate Learning Goals through the annual program report process.

[Table 1](#) shows the percentage of programs assessing student learning in written communication, critical thinking, and information literacy over the past three years. (Note: programs may assess more than one program learning competency in any given year.)

A critical campus goal has been to encourage programs to set standards of performance for their Program Learning Outcomes, including the core competencies. To assess the success of programs in meeting their learning outcomes, there must be a standard set so that programs can evaluate their progress in improving student learning. By the end of the 2015-2016 school year, 81% of the university’s programs had set the standard.

To examine student performance in the three core competencies, the university looked at the number of programs that both chose to report data for a core competency and set a program

standard for that competency. For those programs reporting data for a core competency that did set a standard, the percentage of programs in which the standard was met is shown in [Table 2](#).

After an initial attempt at this metric in 2013-2014, the university saw a need to allow programs to report partial success in meeting their program standards. This year, the university found that more than two-thirds of these programs reported success in meeting their standards.

Departments such as Communication Studies assessed written communication using the VALUE rubric, applying the rubric to papers from a senior capstone course. The program used the data to improve advising, referring students to existing support services on campus.

The [Theatre and Dance Department](#) measured critical thinking by adapting the structure of the Critical Thinking VALUE rubric to explicitly measure the analysis of live performance in theater and dance, and found a gap in students' ability to connect the conventions and structures of the discipline to the live performance before them. The program is now implementing changes across courses to improve student understanding and performance of this learning outcome.

Finally, the master's program in [Education Technology \(known as iMET\)](#) chose to investigate information literacy by assessing a capstone literature review. The program set a standard of 65% of students performing at a level of 3 or above on the VALUE rubric and found that 67% of students performed at that level in all areas. In this case, the VALUE rubric precisely aligned with the needs of the program (see other [examples](#)).

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Historically, the only campus-wide assessment at Sacramento State has been for written communication, as the CSU requires that students from all campuses “demonstrate competence at the upper-division level as a requirement for the baccalaureate degree” ([E.O. 665](#)). Sacramento State also has an upper-division “Writing Intensive” course graduation requirement. In 2009, the

university changed its Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) from a single timed test to a combination of the [Writing Placement for Juniors Exam](#) (WPJ) and the successful completion of the Writing Intensive course requirement. Writing Intensive courses are taught across the GE upper-division curriculum, but also can be taken in the major.

While the WPJ exam has a common rubric, and scoring is done by faculty members from across the university who have been “normed” to score consistently, there is no common rubric or standard for Writing Intensive courses across the campus. With the Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum Subcommittee (WRAC) of the Faculty Senate, the Core Competencies team decided to adopt a slightly amended version of the [Value Rubric for Written Communication](#) and piloted its use for reading authentic student written assignments from a representative sample (based on the percentage of students’ course-taking patterns) of Writing Intensive courses. The WASC Core Competencies Work Group asked [participating faculty](#) to provide all student essays from the identified course without student or instructor identification in spring 2015 and again in spring 2016. Experienced faculty readers who were trained in group scoring for the WPJ were introduced to and “normed” in the use of the rubric.

FINDINGS (WRITTEN COMMUNICATION)

These data show that about half of the students in Sacramento State’s Writing Intensive courses are currently performing at the [Milestone 3](#) or higher level; Milestone 3 is often regarded as an appropriate target for undergraduates. Because the analysis includes all essays from the Writing Intensive courses, it provides a picture of how students currently enrolled in Writing Intensive classes are performing. Writing Intensive courses enroll juniors, seniors, and fifth-year students. Because the purpose of Writing Intensive courses is to improve student writing, the

university suspects that the scores would be higher if it assessed only the culminating essays from the course.

The results of the two assessment activities suggest that there may well be a disjunction or misalignment between successful completion of the Writing Intensive course and the independent scores of the university-wide assessment. These findings will require further review and discussion by the campus Core Competencies group.

PLANS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS (WRITTEN COMMUNICATION)

The [Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum Subcommittee](#) (WRAC) already has taken a number of actions based on this assessment activity. First, the committee has continued to work on the rubrics – one for university-wide program adoption and one for course-based assessment. The plan of action (already approved by the GE/GR Policy Committee) is to test the rubric across various Writing Intensive courses with instructional faculty. Once the rubric has been tested, the subcommittee will bring it back to the policy committee for consideration by the full Faculty Senate. WRAC is also building learning outcomes for each of the composition requirements that have been organized across the four years of the baccalaureate degree.

Taken together, these efforts will enable Sacramento State to do the following: compare the assessment data gathered for this first iteration of the core competency evaluation with the next round; explore longitudinal studies for the writing sequences; revisit the campus's version of the [Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement](#) (GWAR); and transition from the WPJ/Writing Intensive fulfillment of the GWAR to a portfolio assessment for GWAR placement and/or certification. WRAC is committed to a full review of the WASC Written Communication assessment results and will be using their analysis to improve faculty development and composition curricula, as well as university-wide assessment. Having an existing pathway

through shared governance and a culture of faculty participation in, and shared responsibility for, writing across the disciplines will continue to facilitate improvement efforts in this area.

CRITICAL THINKING AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Unlike Written Communication, for Critical Thinking and Information Literacy, there were no pre-existing assessment structures or evaluation standards. General Education does include a Critical Thinking course requirement in GE Area A (Basic Skills: A3 Critical Thinking), and many of the major programs have included Critical Thinking in their curriculum maps and annual reports. Up until 2015-2016, a sampling of first-time freshmen and graduating seniors did participate in the Critical Thinking component of the [Collegiate Learning Assessment](#), but the campus community had concerns about the validity of the exam, the sample size, and whether or not the sample of participants was genuinely representative of the larger student body.

While GE program objectives include a statement that “upon completion of the General Education Program requirements, students will be expected to: find and use common information resources, engage in specialized library research, use computers, and seek out appropriate expert opinion and advice,” Information Literacy is not codified as required in any particular course or GE requirement as are Written Communication, Oral Communication, Critical Thinking, and Quantitative Reasoning. Again, as with Critical Thinking, while Information Literacy has been recognized as an important learning outcome and discussed in a number of annual assessment reports, it has not been incorporated into GE or other university-wide assessment measures, nor has the campus established a standard of performance in this area.

For both Critical Thinking and Information Literacy, therefore, subgroups of the WASC Core Competencies team reviewed and developed a variety of rubrics for [Critical Thinking](#) and

Information Literacy. The goal was to test the rubrics in assessment activities similar to the ones conducted for Written Communication. Furthermore, it was determined that the Office of Undergraduate Studies should collect a representative set of student work from senior capstone courses and upper-division research courses from across the campus. Given the wide diversity of assignments and content in projects from across the disciplines, the Core Competencies team created two reflective assignments – one for Critical Thinking and the other for Information Literacy – to piggyback on final research or capstone project assignment. Reflective assignments were used to allow students to consider and demonstrate learning from their final research assignments and capstone projects, regardless of the medium or genre. Graduating seniors and advanced students were able consider the ways in which a single assignment or project could illustrate multiple competencies.

FINDINGS (CRITICAL THINKING AND INFORMATION LITERACY)

Given that the student samples were collected by May 23, 2016, the deadline for assessing these core competencies has been scheduled for fall semester 2016. It should be noted that even at this preliminary stage, and as the process evolves, a more focused and developed plan to build a team of faculty readers will be necessary to sustain efforts as the quantity of samples that will be submitted for evaluation is enlarged.

PLANS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS (CRITICAL THINKING AND INFORMATION LITERACY)

Based on this initial phase of the efforts to assess the core competencies, the following adjustments to the process of assessing critical thinking and information literacy will take place in the 2016-2017 academic year:

- The two rubrics should be more widely disseminated for consideration, along with the preliminary results and analysis of the fall 2016 scoring.
- Another collection and reading should be completed in 2016-2017. Because the first collection and reading is likely to be insufficient for determining the efficacy of the rubric or the reflective assignments, a second iteration of the process will be implemented prior to any further revision of the process.
- A campus-wide discussion will be held through the shared governance structures (e.g., GE/GRPC and the Faculty Senate) to determine if the rubrics, the standards of performance, and goals that frame those rubrics should be adopted by the university.
- An assessment plan for periodic review of the core competencies with clear guidelines for the selection, collection, and review of student work will subsequently be developed.

CHALLENGES/REFLECTIONS

The work the campus has undertaken to assess student performance in the core competencies has revealed a number of challenges. Those issues will invariably require the campus to foster a shift in the campus culture toward:

- Faculty buy-in, relative consensus on standards and assessment activities, and ongoing faculty development.
- Consistent campus support, by the faculty, for broad-based assessment processes.
- Definition of general and measureable outcomes and standards that can be assessed across disciplines.
- Communication of outcomes, standards, and rubrics to students and other stakeholders to establish shared expectations.

- Development of processes for collecting, reviewing, and analyzing authentic student work for each of the core competencies.
- Development of a structure and processes for closing the loop, i.e., the establishment of clear lines of responsibility and support for improvement in response to assessment findings

Overall, the efforts will be designed to utilize best practices in the use of AAC&U VALUE rubrics such that more than a single assignment is needed to obtain valid data on the attainment of core competencies. Further, improvement in curricula and pedagogy will ultimately draw from more longitudinal and comparative data that illustrate the attainment of the mastery of skill levels over time.

ESSAY 3/STUDENT SUCCESS, LEARNING, RETENTION, AND GRADUATION (CFRS 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.10-2.14, 4.1-4.6)

DEFINING STUDENT SUCCESS

At Sacramento State, student success encompasses three broad areas. The first is the progression of undergraduate and graduate students toward timely graduation. The second is focused on student engagement in co-curricular and academic support programming. The third is creating a welcoming environment that engenders a sense of belonging for all students, with special emphasis on student safety and well-being. Focusing on these broad areas is an intentional response to the changing demographics of the student body, realities in student and university finances that resulted from the “Great Recession,” changes in federal and state regulations (e.g., Title IX), and the increasingly volatile political and cultural climate emerging on college campuses during the past few years. Working together, all divisions, colleges, and departments are actively engaged in a multitude of campaigns, initiatives, programs, and services aimed at increasing the success of Sacramento State students.

TIMELY GRADUATION

This area was initially shaped by the [Student Success and Completion Initiative](#) (formerly known as the Graduation Initiative). Starting in 2009, the goals of the system-wide Graduation Initiative were to improve graduation rates throughout the CSU. At the end of this initiative in May 2016, the university had increased four-year rates for transfer students (now 72%) and six-year rates for freshmen (now 46%), but the respective two- and four-year rates remained flat. Now in its second iteration, the Student Success and Completion Initiative aspires to increase student retention rates across all years; decrease time to degree; promote student success as

evidenced by the acquisition of a degree; and support the specific learning goals of students by 2025.

Upon arrival, President Nelsen quickly refocused the institution's efforts to substantially improve graduation rates and to eliminate the achievement gap for historically disadvantaged and low-income students. In response, faculty, staff, and administration have introduced a number of new and enhanced actions, placing the highest emphasis on those strategic initiatives that directly support increased student retention and graduation, and decrease time to degree. The CSU has also established new graduation stretch goals for 2025:

<i>Sacramento State</i>	<i>2025 Goal</i>	<i>Most Recent Rate</i>
<i>Freshman 6-Year Graduation</i>	<i>60%</i>	<i>46%</i>
<i>Freshman 4-Year Graduation</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>9%</i>
<i>Transfer 2-Year Graduation</i>	<i>38%</i>	<i>26%</i>
<i>Transfer 4-Year Graduation</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Gap - Underrepresented Minority</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>8 % points</i>
<i>Gap – Pell</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7 % points</i>

In support of the 2025 graduation goals, many new and/or enhanced student success initiatives are already underway. These include: efforts to establish more robust and comprehensive advising strategies; initiatives to increase college and transfer readiness with prospective students; integrated enrollment management planning between Academic and Student Affairs; development of new centralized and standardized data collection/analysis services; additional resources devoted to student academic success (e.g., tutoring, mentoring), personal support and well-being (e.g., case management, food and housing insecurity programs); increased internships and career readiness for students; establishment of better K-12 and community college alignment; and increased/enhanced physical space devoted to student success

(including the creation of a Dreamer Resource Center for undocumented students and a new Martin Luther King Jr. Center).

At the core of this work, Sacramento State is committed to providing access to education for students who have been historically underserved or may come from low-income families. Working with high schools and community colleges, the university strives to ensure students are better prepared for university-level work. Efforts like the [College Ready](#) and [Transfer Ready](#) Initiatives assist students who transition into the university from high school or community colleges. These programs offer a high level of content preparation to better position students for success in postsecondary education. College Ready and Transfer Ready programs include intensive student outreach, partnering with K-12 on college preparatory curriculum through the Center for College and Career Readiness, placement exam preparation, supportive resources (e.g., peer coaching, financial aid awareness), and partnerships with community college sectors.

As further evidence of the increased emphasis on timely graduation and student success, Academic Affairs has devoted considerable financial and faculty resources to adding the course sections that students needed, resulting in much higher average unit loads (14.2 for new freshmen); Student Affairs created [new division-wide goals](#) that will become the basis for work done in the departments and programs; Information Resources and Technology is collaborating with multiple divisions to establish a [Graduation Ecosystem](#); and, the university's new graduation-focused Executive Director of University Initiatives and Student Success worked with Public Affairs, Academic Affairs, and New Student Orientation to launch a new Finish in Four campaign. These final two efforts, the [Graduation Ecosystem](#) and the [Finish in Four](#) campaign, are highlighted below.

The [Graduation Ecosystem](#) is an integrated array of eAdvising tools that combine student monitoring, advising, and planning with faculty resources and classroom availability. The Ecosystem components and their interdependency are summarized by the following:

- **Smart Planner** – An interactive student planning software system that enables students to select courses from program roadmaps based on both individual preferences and efficiency to graduation. In October 2016, Smart Planner will be used by advisers and first-year students as part of mandatory advising for spring semester 2017 and will be provided to all students for fall semester 2017 registration (in May 2017).
- **Academic Requirements Report/Advising Summary/[Progress to Degree \(P2D\)](#)/Online Graduation Application** – All these tools are already in use. Progress to Degree (P2D) was created “in-house” at Sacramento State to provide students with progress meters showing their progress to degree and to registration priority for seniors.
- **Financial Aid Tracker** – Similar to P2D meters, Sacramento State is developing a new tool to give students a snapshot of how much of their financial aid has been used and how much is left. Such a tool provides a resource for degree completion by helping students to become more aware of the risk of extending their degree time or accumulating units and the impact on their financial aid. This tool will be launched in late fall 2017.
- **Platinum Analytics (course demand analytics)** – Sacramento State appointed a Platinum Analytics Strategic Scheduling Team in December 2015 to implement predictive analytics to identify student demand for courses. Platinum Analytics currently uses historical data, and in the future, Smart Planner data will help better predict course demand by interacting with the data housed in Smart Planner.

- **Astra Schedule** – Sacramento State has been using Ad Astra’s Astra Schedule for classroom scheduling for many years; however, with the focus on capacity building and the use of Platinum Analytics, scheduling classrooms will be improved to match enrollment and pedagogical needs.
- **CourseLeaf CAT and CIM** – CourseLeaf CAT (Course Catalog) and CIM (Curriculum Information Management) software programs will automate the process of creating the course catalog and modifying academic programs and courses. These tools will complement our eAdvising tools. The 2016-2017 course catalog will be published using CourseLeaf CAT. CourseLeaf CIM will be implemented prior to academic year 2017-2018.
- **EAB (Student Success Collaborative)** – Sacramento State is in the early stages of procuring a proactive student relationship management system. This software system records advising interactions, student issues, and their resolution, while identifying attributes that may place students at risk of falling behind or dropping out.
- **Illume** – This predictive analytic system uses multiple sources of data to provide actionable insights at the course, student, faculty, and administrative level. Illume will enable Sacramento State to identify the courses and interventions that have the greatest impact on student needs, graduation, and time to degree.

The [Finish in Four](#) campaign is intended to help students “Get Ready, Get In, Get Involved, and Get on Track” to their degree. As part of orientation, incoming first-year students were introduced to the campaign and then encouraged to make a commitment to “Finish in Four” with agreed-upon responsibilities and actions. For fall 2016, approximately 62% of Sacramento State students have undertaken the commitment to stay on track to finish in four years. Registration

data for these students demonstrated a corresponding increase in average unit load to 14.2 units (2016), up from 11.7 units (2011). See [Preliminary Results Data](#).

The Finish in Four campaign includes a “call-out” to students through telephone interviews and electronic messaging, encouraging progression through second and third year with a targeted emphasis on students with 84-plus units and those seniors who could graduate in four years (with a little help). This effort, combined with multiple intrusive advising interventions (by programs and academic departments) and the commitment from Academic Affairs to provide the course sections that students need, provides positive indications that Sacramento State should be able to meet and exceed the 2025 graduation goals.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN CO-CURRICULAR AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMMING

Often referred to as a commuter campus, Sacramento State offers increasingly rich campus life opportunities for the student body. This interaction is particularly important given the high number of first-generation and low-income students. Considerable research suggests that getting students engaged and invested on campus is positively correlated with retention and graduation. The university’s goal is for students to become active members of the Hornet Family.

Currently, about 1,700 students live on campus. A new residence hall will open in fall 2017, providing 420 additional beds. The university is also exploring the addition of another 1,000 to 1,300 beds adjacent to the south end of campus. Additionally, more than 5,000 students live in the communities closely surrounding the campus, creating the opportunity for a lively campus atmosphere. With nearly 300 student clubs and organizations, 3,000 students participating in

recreational sport programs and sport clubs, and a state-of-the-art recreation, health, and wellness center (The WELL), the campus has [multiple opportunities](#) for students to engage.

In addition to enhancing campus life, the university commits significant resources to academic support through [Student Academic Success and Educational Equity Programs](#) (SASEEP). Located in Student Affairs, programs within [SASEEP](#) are fashioned to serve the global needs of students-at-large in the university, as well as the needs of special program populations with a focus on underrepresented minority students, first-generation students and/or low-income students.

Broader university-wide interventions include a campus-wide mentoring program titled the Sacramento State [“U” Mentor Program](#), which pairs faculty and staff with students desiring career and academic major mentorship. The delivery of tutoring services through the [Peer and Academic Resource Center](#) (PARC) in a variety of formats also has included one-to-one support, supplemental instruction, workshops, evening tutoring support in [Student Technology Center](#) and [Housing and Residential Life](#) spaces, and [First Year Programs](#). To augment the delivery of services during non-traditional hours, the [Smarthinking](#) program provides tutoring 24/7 by trained instructors who assist Sacramento State students.

To make program support resources more scalable and open to a greater number of students, the university expanded efforts through the [Dedicated to Educating, Graduating, and Retaining Educational Equity Students](#) (DEGREES) Project, a comprehensive, university-wide retention and graduation effort that provides intensive coaching, advising, mentoring, and tutoring to nearly 1,000 students not participating in other programs. The DEGREES Project is an educational equity model that delivers services to all students on campus and is working to close the degree attainment gap.

Finally, to focus on closing the achievement gap and support the work of a collection of campus-wide retention programs, the [Campus Educational Equity Committee](#) (CEEC) has implemented the Educational Equity Scorecard. The [Equity Scorecard](#) (a college-level plan to close the achievement gap) is a model of excellence in higher education that utilizes a data-driven approach to calculate disparities in achievement across a variety of areas. The use of the Equity Scorecard resulted in the development of specific college-level actions that inform and revitalize retention programming. Outcomes from the Equity Scorecard can be accessed in [Exhibit C](#).

A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT, SENSE OF BELONGING, SAFETY, AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL STUDENTS

Sacramento State is focused on creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students. To do so, the university has taken a series of actions to increase attention to diversity, develop programs, institutionalize support (often initially supported through grants and/or gifts), and invest in population-specific programs. A few these programs include: [SASEEP](#), the [Full Circle Project](#), the [Serna Center](#), the [Dreamer Resource Center](#), [Active Minds](#), the [PRIDE Center](#), [Guardian Scholars](#), [CAMP](#), the [Martin Luther King Jr. Center](#), the [Male Empowerment Collective](#), the [Multi-Cultural Center](#), the [Veterans Success Center](#), the [Student Athlete Resource Center](#), and [Services to Students with Disabilities](#). In addition, these centers and programs provide academic and social support services to students from diverse backgrounds.

To kick off each fall term, Student Engagement and Success (SES) sponsors [Hornet Weeks of Welcome](#) to provide a welcoming community and increase student engagement. [Associated Students, Inc.](#) (ASI), the student government, leads the way with initiatives that support the total well-being of students. Recent ASI initiatives include endeavors in

sustainability, development of the [ASI Food Pantry](#) for students coping with food insecurities, and system-wide Impact Days that advance success for all students in the CSU system. ASI also provides financial support to student clubs, organizations, and some student support programs such as the [Student Emergency Grant Fund](#), which provides assistance to students in emergency situations. In 2015-2016, students were awarded over \$39,000.

During the past 18 months, Student Affairs staff have been developing a comprehensive strategy to help ensure the safety and well-being of students. Through collaborative strategies, staff in Student Conduct, Case Management, Victim Advocacy, and Student Health and Counseling Services have created partnerships with University Police, the Office for Equal Opportunity / Title IX, the University Counsel, and Academic Affairs to build a comprehensive set of strategies focused on student safety and well-being. Four of these strategies involve cross-department teams working on specific areas of concern and prevention. These programs are described below:

- **Crisis Intervention Team** – This team brings together the departments responsible for student safety and well-being across the campus to review and monitor worrisome student cases that have not met the threshold to go through the student conduct or Title IX processes.
- **Sexual Violence Awareness Team** – This team brings together the staff directly involved in Title IX implementation across the campus. Together they review our processes, procedures, and policies. This group also reviews and implements ongoing changes to Title IX.
- **Student Case Management** – This service was developed in Student Affairs and launched in fall 2014. The student case manager acts as a resource for all members of the

campus community for referral of student cases with significant challenges (e.g., sudden financial disasters, becoming homeless). The case manager works with these students and connects them with programs and services to help. The case manager is also a first point of contact for the campus community when a student exhibits unusual or disconcerting behavior. This position coordinates the Crisis Intervention Team.

- **Student Emergency Grant Fund** – This program, funded by students through a Dance-a-Thon sponsored by Alumni Affairs and donations to the President's Circle, raises money to assist students who have encountered a sudden financial crisis that could cause them to drop out. Students apply for support through the Student Affairs Case Manager (who coordinates the fund with the Office of Financial Aid) and may receive financial support within 24 to 48 hours.
- **Bias Incident Response Protocol** – This new initiative was born from the work of the Diversity Task Force and will be finalized and implemented in fall 2016. The intent is to provide more standardized strategies for responding to incidents of bias on campus and training for the campus community.
- **“Hornets Help” Bystander Intervention Program** – This program, set to launch in fall 2016, is focused on creating a Sac State culture of active bystanders who will take action when they see situations, such as sexual or dating violence, that threaten individual or campus safety. Hornets Help is coordinated by Student Health and Counseling Services, the Centers for Diversity and Inclusion, Athletics, ASI, and other campus partners. The program is supported by ASI grant funding.

- **Housing Insecurity** – In the coming year, the Housing and Residential Life department will be exploring potential options for students who may become temporarily homeless.

SUMMARY

Sacramento State has made a substantial investment in student success (timely graduation, co-curricular and academic support programming, and a welcoming environment that engenders a sense of belonging for all students, with a special emphasis on student safety and well-being). Sacramento State has positioned itself as an institution that cares about students and provides them a safe environment in which to learn. With the vision of President Nelsen and a committed faculty and staff, the university is focused on a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensuring that all students reach their degree aspirations. As the university continues to develop new approaches to student success, the use of technology, intensive advising, improved course availability, augmented faculty hiring to meet course demand, optimized space utilization, and a strengthened student-to-faculty/staff relationship will contribute to making Sacramento State a premier learning institution. Sacramento State remains committed to student learning and success while advancing the university's mission to transform lives by preparing students for leadership, service, and success.

ESSAY 4/QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT: PROGRAM REVIEW, ASSESSMENT, USE OF DATA + EVIDENCE (CFRS 2.7, 4.1, 4.3-4.7)

PROGRAM REVIEW

The primary purpose of an [academic program review](#) at Sacramento State is to seek pathways for furthering the quality of academic programs. The process is intended to be a comprehensive analysis of program quality by analyzing a wide variety of data. The goal of this analysis is to ensure program effectiveness and to address any challenges on a six-year cycle.

The policy governing conduct of program reviews at Sacramento State is recommended to the president by the Faculty Senate. While the responsibility for implementing the program review process lies with Academic Affairs, the program review policy and process is developed and managed by the [Academic Program Review Oversight Committee](#) (APROC). Specific procedures guiding the process are outlined in the university's [Program Review Manual](#). The manual is developed and revised by APROC, and any substantive changes to the policy or manual must be approved by both the Curriculum Policies Committee (CPC) and the Faculty Senate. University policy requires that the policy and manual be reviewed at least once every three years to ensure the efficacy of program review structures and procedures.

Program review at Sacramento State has undergone a number of changes since the last WASC review cycle. During the 2013-2014 academic year, APROC recommended an overhaul of the program review policy and the *Program Review Manual* based on the following findings:

- The [Academic Program Reviews policy](#) was found to be ineffective and inefficient by APROC and CPC.
- In 2007, when APROC/CPC requested that the university pilot a new program review process, the Faculty Senate authorized a pilot study, which would expire in spring 2014.

- Prior to 2007, Program Review Self Study required 70 questions to be addressed. In 2006, CPC reviewed numerous self-studies from the 1990s and 2000s. These self-studies were not only highly descriptive in nature; they also generally failed to address substantive issues. Many units undergoing review did not address all of the required questions in the policy.
- Since 2007, units had overwhelmingly selected the Focused Self Study over the old program review or a hybrid.

The policy and procedure revisions proposed by APROC included the recommendation that the Focused Self Study, one of three options in the Pilot Program Review, become the only option for future program reviews. This option was based on the Cal State (Poly Tech) model, which APROC and CPC found to be superior. APROC and CPC concluded that the Focused Self Study template provided opportunities for greater program analysis, addressed substantive curricular problems and issues, and focused on programmatic assessment.

The current [self-study standard](#) requires all academic units to include the following three areas:

General information about the academic unit and its degree programs, e.g., data on students, faculty, staff, facilities (most of which is supplied by the Office of Institutional Research); the program should also provide a summary overview of responses to the recommendations set forth in the most recent program review.

A summary of learning outcomes of each degree program (majors, concentrations, graduate, and credential programs required; minor and certificates normally are optional), the means of assessing them, and results of assessment efforts.

The results of a focused inquiry addressing issues of particular interest/concern to the academic unit, in the context of what is currently important to the college and university.

Additional changes were made to the [Academic Program Reviews policy](#) and the university's [Program Review Manual](#) to clarify and separate policy from procedures. Procedures were moved to the Program Review Manual. All of the proposed changes underwent a lengthy consultation process, and the revised policy was adopted in November 2013.

As part of this self-study process, APROC and the various committees and working groups tasked with working on the institutional self-study have identified three areas of concern in the current process:

- **Timely completion of the program review process.** Due to campus-wide issues with timely program review completion, Academic Affairs has taken action on the matter, and APROC is also reviewing its procedures.
- **The appointment of external consultants.** Academic units can recommend up to three candidates who will be reviewed by Academic Affairs; one will serve as an external reviewer. This procedure has been questioned in the past, and the campus needs to come to a common understanding of the role of the external consultant programs.
- **Follow-up on review conclusions and recommendations.** University policy states that program review is intended to be relevant at the college and university levels, with the college dean and the provost expected to be fully engaged in the process. APROC is looking at ways to [formalize the process](#). The deans are tasked with consideration of the program review recommendation as they prepare their annual budget requests and long-term plans.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Since the last WASC visit, the practice of academic program assessment at Sacramento State has progressed to include the following elements:

- **Academic Unit Level Assessment Plans:** All academic units must have assessment plans that contain the following elements: goals of each program and expected learning outcomes for students, direct assessment methods for assessing progress toward these learning outcomes (capstone projects, portfolios, and key assignments), and a timetable for the assessment process.
- **Ongoing Unit Level Assessment:** All academic units must engage in their own in-house assessment on a regular basis. These assessments should reflect both university goals and the unique requirements of a particular program. Assessment data should be used to improve student learning.
- **Annual Assessment Reporting:** On an annual basis, academic units are asked to provide Academic Affairs with a report on the assessment activities that have occurred during the academic year. Currently, this report has been standardized by the Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA). The [*2016 OAAPA Academic Assessment Summary Report*](#) includes the most current report template.
- **Unit Level Assessment Evaluation and Feedback:** Each fall, OAPA evaluates each [*academic unit's assessment report*](#) and uses the results to inform Academic Affairs and college deans of the status of each unit's assessment activities. In addition, detailed feedback is provided to academic units. OAPA also provides technical support to the Office of Graduate Studies by reviewing and providing feedback on the graduate programs' assessment activities.

Most recently, OAPA has taken a proactive educational approach when consulting with programs about their assessment report, educating faculty on the use of assessment data to improve student learning and success through the following activities and initiatives:

- **Formalized Assessment Resources:** Through OAPA and the Center for Teaching and Learning, Academic Affairs has invested considerable resources for workshops and faculty learning communities on assessment. OAPA also publishes a [newsletter](#) twice per year.
- **Office of Academic Program Assessment Annual Academic Assessment Summary:** Each academic year, OAPA completes an [assessment summary](#) that communicates the overall status of academic program assessment.
- **Integration with Program Review:** In 2009, APROC started to experiment with a new program review process that changed its guidelines to include assessment as a part of the program review. The practice is now formally a part of the program review process.

However, the [summary report](#) of the Office of Academic Program Assessment prepared for the WASC Steering Committee and university [assessment reports](#) make it clear that despite significant improvements since the last WASC review and committed leadership by the director of OAPA and her faculty consultant team, academic assessment activities at Sacramento State are fragmented, and this situation makes assessment information difficult to generate, access, and use in meaningful ways: OAPA facilitates academic program assessment at all degree levels, and the Office of Undergraduate Studies facilitates the assessment of the General Education Program. Each office uses its own processes and practices.

USES OF DATA AND EVIDENCE

To meet the CSU system [reporting requirements](#) and in recognition of the importance of data for decision-making and continuous improvement, Sacramento State benefits from the responsibilities of the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). The activities of OIR include but are not limited to the following:

OIR manages university-level and program data; designs and produces both routine and special reports for internal and external stakeholders; and plans, executes, and reports on a variety of surveys each year. On its home page, OIR offers links to important university data resources such as the [University Performance Indicators](#), [University](#) and [Department](#) Fact Books, the [Common Data Set](#), and [IPEDs](#). In addition, OIR is the portal to some [university-level program assessments](#) and [survey result reports](#). As part of its commitment to data-driven decision-making, the university has provided a clearinghouse of disaggregated data through OIR. Commonly produced reports include retention and graduation rate data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, department, and college, as well as [Quick Fact Reports](#) to ensure the accessibility of data and its appropriate breakdown for each cohort year.

In addition to these disaggregated data sets, the university performs a survey of Campus Climate and conducts qualitative analyses to capture the student experience at the university. Findings from the most recent [Campus Climate survey](#) reveal that the majority of students felt that professors were equally supportive of all students, regardless of gender (82%), minority status (80%), age, (80%), or disability (77%). Other regular surveys enrich campus efforts to understand students' perspective, such as [The First College Year Experience Survey](#), the [Graduating Student Survey Report](#) and the university's participation in the [National Survey of Student Engagement](#) (NSSE).

MEASURING STUDENT SUCCESS AND IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The university assesses student success university-wide and also at the level of individual programs, departments, and colleges. Furthermore, Sacramento State's Office of Analytics and the Information Research and Technology-Data Warehouse offer information and analysis not only on traditional outcomes, such as graduation and retention rates, but also on student learning, resilience, and post-graduation employment. In addition, because of the multi-year timespans between initial enrollment and graduation, these offices report on intermediate measures of progress to ensure that students are on track every semester. Finally, to ensure that all groups of students have an opportunity to succeed at Sacramento State, the offices of OIR and Analytics, Information Research and Technology-Data Warehouse, and Enrollment Management assess outcomes not only for the student body as a whole, but also disaggregated by demographic subgroups, such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status (e.g., Pell Grant eligibility), disability, and academic preparation such as remedial status.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Concerns have arisen about university assessment practices in the midst of significant transitions in the campus's culture. In 2009, the provost established the Provost's Advisory Council on Assessment (PACA) and the Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA) as assessment support groups.

Recently, the Faculty Senate has indicated an interest in rethinking the overall structure and reporting bodies for all academic assessment. At present, the Curriculum Policies Committee, a standing subcommittee of the Faculty Senate, is working on a proposal to restructure the governance and configuration of academic assessment. Recently, the university

brought together a working team with representation from OIR, Enrollment Management, Information Research and Technology-Data Warehouse, Analytics, and Academic Assessment to inform and coordinate data gathering, data definitional standardization, data access, and data reporting responsibilities/services.

ESSAY 5/SUSTAINABILITY: FINANCIAL VIABILITY, PREPARING FOR THE CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT (CFRS 3.1- 3.4, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7)

OVERVIEW

Beyond revenue from tuition, the main source of funding for Sacramento State comes from state budget appropriations to the Board of Trustees of the California State University (CSU) system. In turn, the CSU makes an annual allocation to the Sacramento State campus determined by a set of formulas that may or may not result in marginal cost increases to the base operating budget of the university. Other revenue sources include student fees (state, non-resident, application, etc.) and supplemental funds such as auxiliary, self-support, capital, trusts, and other sources designated for special purposes. Privately secured funds from donors provide the extra margin of excellence that have funded state-of-the-art equipment and certain capital costs that allow for curricular innovations to take place. Together, these funding sources serve the overall annual operations of the university and any set-aside contingency funds.

As a publicly funded university within the California State University system, Sacramento State's fiscal environment is invariably shaped, in part, by the strength of the California economy and state funding priorities in the context of immense competition for scarce public funds. Indeed, during the 10-year period between 2006 and 2016, California experienced severe downturns in its economy, resulting in significant decreases in the percentage of state funding available to the CSU, including Sacramento State. Shrinking revenues to the university resulted in a structural deficit for the campus at a time of growing demand for services and a physical infrastructure in desperate need of repairs and updates. Moreover, the revenue reduction occurred in a highly volatile environment for higher education, which included unpredictable pressures on student enrollment, greater attention and accountability toward student success,

increasing concerns about rising student debt, the need for technological improvements in learning spaces, changing demographics of the region, concerns about full-time/part time faculty ratios, public scrutiny about the contribution of higher education to the public good, and greater demands by accreditation agencies for increased attention to continuous improvements, staffing, and program quality as central to the educational effectiveness mission of colleges and universities.

These challenges notwithstanding, Sacramento State put in place robust measures to ensure fiscal sustainability in an environment characterized by financial vulnerability. With a focus on financial planning, the [University Budget Advisory Committee](#) (UBAC), with campus-wide representation, undertook a transparent process to identify strategic priorities based on enrollment assumptions to achieve a balanced budget while assuring best practices, quality improvement, and stability. Those measures have enabled the university to withstand a number of financial challenges, allowing Sacramento State to develop greater attention to fiscal efficiencies, improve sources of funding from private sources, and ensure commitment to the core mission.

Meanwhile, as the state has continued to increase, albeit gradually, its percentage of funding (from 2008 levels) over the past two years, newly appointed President Nelsen has instituted important internal budget restructuring requirements to ensure sound financial planning and fiscal sustainability far into the foreseeable future. Recognizing that the budget is a moral document, the president has outlined the [criteria](#) for annual budget requests. Specifically, funding requests must (1) align with the top university priorities enunciated in the university [Strategic Plan for 2012-2020](#); (2) achieve a renewed focus on graduating students in four years based on a strategic initiative to “Finish in Four,” as the cornerstone of student success; (3) reflect a new

focus on diversity, inclusion, and safety; and (4) demonstrate a continuing commitment to scholarship, research, and creative activity.

RESOURCE ALIGNMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

Critical to meeting the goals of the campus [Strategic Plan](#), Sacramento State has established institutional priorities within the campus plan to shape the future direction of the university. With a structured resource allocation process that encapsulates the Strategic Plan, President Nelsen has put in place student success as the fundamental building block to drive resource allocation across all units of the campus. This approach now ensures closer alignment of planning and budgeting around the core priorities of the university.

Under the current leadership of President Nelsen, the allocation of resources has evolved into a process of having each unit present budget proposals that clearly align with strengthening graduation rate goals. In the new format, Cabinet members present their overall budget plans in the presence of other divisions and representatives from Associated Students, Inc. (ASI), the Faculty Senate, and the University Staff Assembly. Each submission necessitates the submittal of data elements to showcase outcomes in support of student success and to support any new requests or ongoing processes with evidence of both feasibility and potential impact on campus success rates. Presentations are made to UBAC based on the [Campus Operating Fund Budget Call for Fiscal Year 2016/17](#) and the feedback received in the preliminary stages of the budget's submission.

Overall, it is clear that the financial resources are being used to advance knowledge, develop human capital, and allow the institution to learn, adapt, and thrive even during periods of transition and change. In a number of cases, these efforts extend beyond the campus to include collaboration with the wider education community in Sacramento to improve college readiness.

For example, early work has begun on the development of a P-16 Council to strengthen student success throughout the educational pipeline, including K-12 and community colleges.

On the development front, [fundraising](#) efforts have increased significantly, and the provision of scholarships helps to build fundamental support for students to advance their degree attainment goals. The overall student experience is enriched from private funding sources that result in dynamic classroom experiences, modern [campus](#) infrastructures, real-world learning through service learning projects and internship opportunities, as well as through the development of a wide array of support programs and services that promote student success. A volunteer board composed of administrators, faculty and student representatives, and donors provides the strategic and operational oversight for [The University Foundation](#) at Sacramento State, the campus's main philanthropic auxiliary.

Taken together, the university has made major refinements to the planning and budgeting process that have resulted in improvements to resource allocation decisions based on the mission, and student and academic needs.

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CHANGING ECOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Sacramento State continues to evolve as a leader in higher educational practice by adopting and implementing innovative approaches to the changing landscape of higher education. Among the major innovations are development of the Sacramento State [Graduation Ecosystem](#), new technologies for enhanced course delivery and course redesign, greater attention to diversity and inclusion, and the pursuit of comprehensive internationalization.

As a more integrated Graduation Ecosystem of curricular planning has begun, the institution has adopted systems to foster an increasingly data-driven culture. For example, the

campus has made use of predictive analytics to acquire a composite of the student experience in the form of actionable data for retention and graduation purposes. Additionally, recent work with Illume/Civitas, a top solution-oriented product that gathers the strength of university data to move key decisions, is being launched on the campus in 2016-2017. The work of implementing new technologies supports the dynamic needs of the institution.

In the same vein, the campus is adopting new technologies to support student learning and student success. Such enhancements include greater utilization of SacCT/Blackboard to enhance course delivery and communications. Moreover, through the [Center for Teaching and Learning](#) (CTL) and the [Academic Technology and Creative Services Center](#) (ATCS), the university is making innovative strides with online teaching and learning by building capacity to design and build online courses that will be systematically assessed and certified by [Quality Matters](#), an external peer-review process. CTL is also piloting presentation and course templates that are research-based and suggest greater transparency of instruction and assessment to a diversity of learners.

The institution's rapidly changing demographic makeup paints a clear picture of the continuous change in the student body and the larger landscape of higher education. Recognition of this change is fundamental to the campus's commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels of the educational enterprise. In the fall 2015 semester, 30% of students were Caucasian, 28% were Latino, 20% were Asian American, 12% were reported as "other," 6% were African American, 3% were foreign, 1% were Pacific Islander, and less than 1% were American Indian. Comparative data from 2009 reflected a different demographic picture. At that time, the institution was 44% Caucasian, 15% Latino, 19% Asian American, 12% other, 7% African American, 2% foreign, and 1% American Indian. With a shift in the demographic profile, the

university has recently obtained status as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). Overall, greater attention to serving the underrepresented students has received wide campus involvement, with an overt goal to reduce the underrepresented minority and Pell Grant gaps to zero.

Other efforts include a renewed focus on comprehensive internationalization, which within the past two years has led to the full restructuring of global education on campus. A new, modern center situated at the center point on campus now houses the offices of [International Programs and Global Engagement](#) (IPGE) and features some new programs such as the [One World Initiative](#), expansion of University Partnerships with universities abroad, establishment of a U.S. Passport Office on campus, and greater attention to expansion of study-abroad programs for Sacramento State students. The goal is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values to be competitive global citizens.

ENSURING FUTURE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

There can be little doubt that Sacramento State, like other public comprehensive universities, is at a moment in history that will require new tools, skills, and sensitivities to meet the demands of the changing landscape of higher education. Some of the more notable skills for which there is a clear need include:

- Movement from an input model to an output model that emphasizes what the sum total of the Sacramento State experience means to students, their families, and employers when they hear “Made at Sacramento State.”
- Emphasis on transformative learning experiences that explore new ways of teaching and learning, especially with the use of technology. For example, the campus CTL has recognized the need for data-informed decision-making and evidence-based pedagogy for

improving learning and student success. In 2015, the university responded to this need by strategically planning and seeking resources for a Learning Analytics Center that will be focused on addressing equity issues in courses, programs, and institutional structures. In October 2015, Sacramento State was awarded a \$2.4 million Developing Hispanic Serving Institution grant to begin this work. CTL is also piloting presentation and course templates that are research-based and suggest greater transparency of instruction and assessment to a diversity of learners.

- Development of budget models that give greater opportunity to align resources with priorities, especially in the context of strong competition from private colleges that emphasize vocation and relevance to work. This change may be particularly critical, given the university's commitment to access, and the pressures that are arising from program impaction and the quest for heightened accountability and transparency measures in the context of shrinking public funds.

In addition to these areas, the university is making major advances toward strengthening the vibrancy of [research culture](#), improving the physical plant with the development of a new [campus master plan](#), recording national awards on environmental sustainability efforts, and growing involvement of [University Enterprises, Inc.](#) (UEI) in the campus effort to foster increasing financial contributions and support of the academic enterprise.

ESSAY 6/CONCLUSION/REFLECTIONS AND PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

REFLECTIONS AND PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Sacramento State, under the leadership of President Nelsen in his first year, made significant progress in tackling many substantive issues while facing a number of challenges. There is much work still to be done. With a new president bringing a renewed sense of energy and excitement for change, this self-study for re-affirmation of Sacramento State's WASC accreditation has given the campus the opportunity to reflect on institutional efforts and strengths as well as improving performance in the coming years.

Institutional Distinctiveness: In achieving the status of “destination campus” that was the foundation of former President Gonzalez’s vision for Destination 2010, the university is taking strides toward being more than just the campus of choice for students in the region. In the past year, the campus pivoted from focusing on making Sacramento State a top choice for local students to building a university “where students are first.” Detailed below are the specific actions currently being undertaken as a campus community not only to celebrate the diversity on campus, but to become a university known for its inclusive and welcoming environment.

Sacramento State is aggressively pursuing a significant increase in graduation rates, as the university has developed the unfortunate reputation of an institution where students do not graduate in a timely manner. For over 30 years, four-year graduation rates have stagnated between an abysmal 8% and 10%. That must change. Essay 3 on “Increasing Retention and Graduation” includes the specifics of the Graduation Initiative Goals and the new [Finish in Four](#) campaign.

The university is investing in its students by expanding and building new structures on campus. This fall, construction will begin on a state-of-the-art science building. In addition, the university is erecting new parking structures on campus, developing the [Solar Nest](#) as a learning space, and making plans to build an event center on campus. The campus is adding new student housing to increase the number of students living on campus and continue to move away from Sacramento State's former reputation as a "commuter campus." Finally, plans are being formalized to expand the student union to include increased space and access to the [student food pantry](#) organized by the student government, Associated Students, Inc., to address food insecurity and hunger on campus. As a result of the effort to become a more environmentally friendly campus, Sacramento State recently was named the [most sustainable campus](#) in the California State University system. The university continues to cultivate the campus atmosphere of an urban oasis with more than 3,500 trees on 300 acres – a peaceful place for students to learn, study, and feel a sense of belonging.

A distinguishing feature of Sacramento State's undergraduate education is the [General Education Program](#). The curriculum is designed to fulfill the goals of Sacramento State to provide students with a holistic education that includes emphasis on the shared Baccalaureate Learning Goals: Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World, Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility, and Integrative Learning.

The university is particularly proud of its community outreach programs such as the [Renaissance Society](#), the [Community Engagement Center](#), the [Sacramento Promise Zone](#), the [Oak Park Promise Neighborhood](#), the [65th Street Corridor Community Collaboration Project](#), and the [newly purchased downtown site](#) for a proposed School of Public Affairs. In 2010, and again in 2015, Sacramento State's community commitment was recognized with the [Carnegie](#)

[Community Engagement Classification](#) by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement for Teaching. This honor recognizes the institutional culture and university-wide programs that reach out to and embrace the community. With only 240 universities and colleges receiving this distinction in 2015, it is both an honor and a reminder of the responsibility of the university to the greater Sacramento region.

Diversity: As part of the values and goals outlined in the [Strategic Plan](#), the campus is working to “promote a strong University identity” and “excel as a place to learn, work, live, and visit.” These goals cannot be achieved unless the university is an inclusive environment that nurtures and celebrates its diverse student body. In 2010, Sacramento State received designation as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). The campus used the funding to establish the [Full Circle Project](#), which assists AAPI students through their college careers. In 2015, the university was [awarded a Hispanic-Serving Institution grant](#) of \$2.4 million to increase the success of Hispanic and low-income students attending Sacramento State. In 2016, the campus used a [five-year, \\$2.37 million grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Migrant Education to re-establish a High School Equivalency Program (HEP). The grants and designations help Sacramento State invest in students and their success.

One of the most obvious features of Sacramento State is its diverse student body. With [70% of students](#) self-reporting as members of minority ethnic populations, the university is committed to providing an inclusive and respectful campus for all students. In spring 2016, the president appointed Dr. Robin Carter as the [Interim Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#). She is working with the Diversity Task Force and its [recent report and recommendations](#) to create the first Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion on campus. She

also will establish a Diversity Council and provide recommendations for the hiring of a permanent diversity officer and resources needed for the office.

While the primary focus must always be on the students, the faculty and staff of Sacramento State are looking at themselves to determine what can be done to strengthen the role of diversity and inclusivity on campus. The university has serious work to do in terms of diversifying its faculty. As detailed in the 2015 [University Factbook \(Table 1\)](#), only 23.8% of faculty are from minority populations. A [recent report](#) by the California State University system highlighted how tepid the university's hiring of diverse faculty has been. Sacramento State hired 45 new faculty members in 2014, of which only 8.9% were minority males and 6.7% were minority females. The campus has committed itself to improving diversity in faculty ranks by requiring an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity representative on each hiring committee, and by requiring enhanced training for any faculty serving in that role. The expectation of inclusivity is emphasized by including a segment on diversity and inclusive teaching in new faculty and lecturer orientation. Furthermore, the university has already begun implementing some best practices, as recommended in the CSU report noted above, not only for faculty hiring, but for hiring across the board.

The university also is developing a [Hornet Honor Code](#) for fall 2016. The honor code will underline and emphasize the behaviors of respect, honesty, integrity, and care that are expected from every member of the campus community. The university is setting the tone and behavior for all students, staff, and faculty to achieve a truly inclusive environment for everyone.

Educational Effectiveness: Sacramento State is focused on teaching and learning, as evidenced by a clear commitment to ongoing faculty development. The [Center for Teaching and Learning](#) provides opportunities for faculty to achieve teaching excellence and build connections

with their colleagues. Faculty Learning Communities, teaching institutes, funding for pedagogical innovation, grants for faculty scholarship and creative activities, and a variety of professional development activities support the university's emphasis on this core value. The dean of Undergraduate Programs organizes and encourages faculty to apply for grants from the California State University system that provide funding for course redesign. Sacramento State faculty have been successful in being awarded grants of over \$30 million. This year, the provost will make recommendations regarding better integration of ATCS and CTL to improve the faculty experience.

CHALLENGES AND PLANS MOVING FORWARD

Increasing Retention and Graduation Rates: To achieve its overall [Graduation Initiative Goals](#) by 2025, Sacramento State has demonstrated significant progress in current factors and indicators highly correlated with future positive outcomes.

Recent indicators suggest a positive trend in four-year freshman graduation rates beginning with the graduation cohort of 2017, and significant improvement in the four-year freshman graduation rate in 2019 and 2020. In summer 2016, promotion began for the [Finish in Four](#) campaign to further increase 15-unit course loads in the first semester and successful 30-unit course load completion in the first academic year (including enrollment in winter intersession and summer session). Students in the 2016 first-year freshman cohort were offered an opportunity to participate in the [Finish in Four commitment or \(pledge\)](#) by enrolling in 15-unit course loads and participating in more frequent advising sessions.

The primary focus of the campus at this time is on the improvement of retention and graduation rates. While initiatives such as Finish in Four will help the campus get there, there is clear recognition that these initiatives must be partnered with programs to target the specific

needs of specific student populations. Currently, Sacramento State has programs such as the [Full Circle Project](#), the [Serna Center](#), the [Dreamer Resource Center](#), the [PRIDE Center](#), [Guardian Scholars](#), and [CAMP](#) that provide focused attention and support for students from migrant or farmworking families; Asian American, first-generation, and Hispanic students; students from the foster care system; and students of any sexual orientation or gender identity.

In addition to [SASEEP](#), the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Center](#) opened on campus to provide support for African American students, and the Division of Student Affairs established the [Male Empowerment Collective](#), which focuses on eliminating the achievement gap for males in higher education and helping to increase the number of young men who achieve degrees. Programs like the [Peer and Academic Resource Center](#) (PARC) and [Peer Assisted Learning](#) (PAL) allow students to engage with their peers as mentors and facilitators to support learning and build confidence.

The university believes that the intense focus on creating an inclusive and supportive environment will increase retention rates. These programs and services, coupled with an emphasis on finishing in four years, taking a 15-unit course load, and ensuring course availability on campus, will not only increase graduation rates at Sacramento State, but can also improve the educational experience for every student.

Sustaining Meaningful Assessment: Since the last WASC visit, the campus has been making slow but steady progress on assessment efforts. The past five years have seen the revision of the General Education subject area learning outcomes, and the campus is working to develop a similar process to address the graduation requirements. The General Education/Graduation Requirements Policy Committee (GE/GRPC) is reviewing the learning outcomes for graduation requirements. In 2014, the university moved from department-driven

program review to a three-tiered process for review. Five-year assessment plans for four of the five GE Area Assessment Groups have been developed, and plans are being finalized for Area A. The plans for Areas B, C, D, and E have not yet been approved by GE/GRPC, but progress and implementation are anticipated by next fall. The assessment plans are ambitious, and there is a focus on improving the infrastructure for the process. With appropriate support and focus in the next year and a strong directive from the president, the goal is to move from developing assessment plans to implementing them. This initiative also will be a top priority for the new provost once hired.

Improving Data Access and Analysis: Upon his arrival at Sacramento State, President Nelsen quickly determined that the campus would need to shift from a decentralized data model to a centralized process that would eliminate the multiple sources of data. After review by an outside consultant, the president determined that there were significant issues regarding the effectiveness and organization of the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). After hiring Jim Dragna, Executive Director of University Initiatives and Student Success, OIR was moved under his supervision. Dr. Dragna has worked steadily with the office over the past couple of months to repair its reputation, increase cross-campus cooperation, and establish a process to validate and ensure that the data disseminated by the office are accurate and consistent. While OIR is not yet operating at the level required by a university of this size, improvement is steady, and there will be ongoing redevelopment in the coming year.

The implementation of Smart Planner and Ad Astra's Platinum Analytics module are major steps in the improvement of the campus's ability to retrieve and understand useful data for decision-making. Smart Planner provides an online tool for students to navigate their course planning to create a more efficient path to graduation. Students will be able to personalize their

course schedules based on their requirements, and the tool will allow them to use predictive technology to make a plan for their future semesters. Platinum Analytics is a significant change in how the campus will schedule courses. Historically, courses have not typically been scheduled based on predictive technology, resulting in students often being unable to get into classes they desperately need for graduation. The new technology will enable the colleges to determine which courses will be in demand in coming semesters and how many additional sections will be required to meet student demand, and to provide those sections at times that are most likely to meet students' needs. Not only will the newly created Graduation Ecosystem enable the campus to provide students with more appropriate course offerings each semester, but students will graduate more quickly as they will have better access to the courses they need to fulfill degree requirements.

TRANSFORMING LIVES: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LEADERSHIP, SERVICE, AND SUCCESS

As Sacramento State moves forward with new goals and initiatives, there are challenges, but there are also exciting plans for the university's future. One of the greatest opportunities of the president's first year on campus was leading the effort to recognize the need to foster an inclusive educational environment and experience for students, and to build a culture of trust, collaboration, and communication among divisions.

While the university is not where it ultimately hopes to be, this self-study highlights many of the areas the campus is currently working diligently to improve. The top priority this past year has been student success and improved graduation and retention rates. If the university is not graduating students in a timely manner, lives are not being transformed. There is a significant effort to reduce the need for remediation through the [College Ready Initiative](#) and the

[Early Assessment Program](#), and through ensuring the adoption of the [Expository Reading and Writing Course](#) and [Fourth Year Math Course](#) at area high schools. The university is heavily promoting the [Graduation Ecosystem](#) to ensure that the campus community and external stakeholders understand the holistic approach to the Finish in Four campaign. Degree-planning and analytical software is being used to analyze course offerings, seat allocations, and fill rates to optimize schedules with student need.

The campus is working to foster student success by making Sacramento State an inclusive and welcoming environment. This past year, a top priority was the hiring of a diversity officer to lead the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and institute a permanent Diversity Council. The campus is implementing recommendations from an ADA consultant and the campus community to improve the campus experience for students and employees with disabilities. In the past year, there have been [regular forums](#) and [frequent communications](#) regarding current campus and national events, thereby providing a venue for the community to be heard and unite. Finally, new faculty and staff are receiving training on issues of diversity, understanding the student population, and inclusive teaching.

Sacramento State has improvements and change still to be made, but as evidenced in this self-study, the university is making the decisions that position it to continue the pivot toward true student success and providing the best educational experience for all students. Sacramento State exists to transform lives, and together the campus community is making that happen.