

October 24, 2003

CHAIR ALISON GALLOWAY
Academic Senate

Re: Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)
Preparatory Review Draft

Dear Alison:

I am happy to write you on behalf of CEP concerning the draft WASC essays. There was extensive and lively discussion of the essays; I will note below several of our major concerns.

First, we very much appreciate the quality of the WASC committee that will be visiting UCSC over the next few years. Our first crucial suggestion is that, in rewriting the essays, we take our readership seriously. A great number of claims are made about the strength and vitality of UCSC's programs, some of which may well indeed reflect the institution, but very few concrete, appropriately referenced data are provided to support, tease out, and make more compelling these assertions. The tone is in many ways somewhat grandiose, and the match between tone and empirical substance is not made. These are serious and knowledgeable visitors, and they certainly will have the experience and sophistication to recognize ungrounded and insufficiently specific arguments. We have a great deal of real value to say about the campus, as a great deal of real, and quite specific, value is being done here; we should make that case clearly and honestly.

A number of lists and summary statement appear at various points throughout the document. For example, many of our committee members are quite familiar with most of the Senate and other (e.g., Millennium Committee) documents that have been circulating; none of us could identify the likely origin of UCSC's "educational objectives" as listed on the first page of Standard I, particularly troublesome as the formation of any such objectives should include CEP. As we understand it, the WASC essays are intended to represent clearly positions that both administrative officers and the Academic Senate have developed; why not turn to extant sources rather than come up with a new document for which no source is given? Again, it is not necessarily the case here that we take issue with any of the goals stated (although in some cases we might well do so); it is rather that they do not seem to come from ongoing collegial labor and do not represent accords already achieved on campus.

A further specific concern – and one that might serve as an exemplary case of de novo claims combined with inadequate discussion and documentation - has to do with the foregrounding of UARC (University-Affiliated Research Center) as number one in the list of partnerships (page 4 of standard 1). Why is this highlighted? How relevant is it to ongoing and emergent campus teaching and research? To the extent that UARC is understood by CEP members, it appears that UCSC will be serving primarily as a broker for bespoke research for NASA and possible other agencies, connecting them with contract research groups. Neither the generation of the research ideas nor the execution of the research will necessarily have anything to do with what we as a campus are

pursuing, and it is very unclear what pedagogical benefits there might be. While, arguably, such a brokerage role has other benefits, especially financial, for the institution, to foreground it as our number one partnership struck the committee as a whole as misguided and some members as dangerous. We strongly recommend foregrounding those successful partnerships that already exist, for example, our very strong and effective partnerships with community colleges.

Several CEP members argued that the essays, while attempting to trumpet our accomplishments and promise, actually made us sound mediocre, that the language and content of the discussions made us sound like yet another example of the ordinary research university, a comparison group vis-à-vis which we might not actually fare that well. The essays determinedly downplay some elements that have been and continue to be singular and distinctive about the campus: the academic role of the colleges (which is given very short shrift throughout), the dual grading system that now combines easily comparable grades with the much more thoroughgoing (and widely appreciated) kinds of performance review that other institutions may well come to emulate, the considerable success of the writing program (a program which in many ways constitutes the model on which the much touted Princeton system is based, albeit in their case with far more resources), and the very real (but inadequately demonstrated rather than claimed) degree of engagement of undergraduate students in serious research enterprises, both individual and collaborative. These are only a few of the high points of who we are – and what we do – beyond our more usual and far from negligible accomplishments.

We want and need to be straightforward about the campus, recognizing its singularities, the remarkable successes and recognition of our faculty, students, and grads, and some of the core issues with which we are now struggling. Our account of the present needs to be honest, drawing upon shared senses and statements of institutional goals and values, and deeply rooted in real empirical data. Our vision of the future needs to be both clearly articulated and as optimistic as those of us on CEP think circumstances warrant. We have a great deal of appreciation for both where the campus has been and where, with concerted effort, we are going. CEP fears that the present essays capture neither the reality nor the promise as they now stand.

We look forward to seeing the revised essays as soon as they are completed.

Sincerely,

Donald Brenneis, Chair
Committee on Educational Policy