

April 8, 2002

George Blumenthal, Chair
Academic Senate Office
Santa Cruz Division

RE: WASC Certification

Dear George,

The Committee on Planning and Budget has reviewed UCSC's Institutional Proposal to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and we welcome the opportunity to offer comments and raise our concerns. Overall, we appreciate the care which has been taken to place this accreditation process within the broader framework of the ten-year planning process and the efforts to establish mechanisms by which to assess the effectiveness of the programs and strategies to be implemented. We applaud the efforts to improve departmental and program review procedures. We also like the significance of graduate education in the proposal and the exploration of a graduate college.

In identifying the campus goals, the proposal intends not only to increase graduate student enrollments and to develop programs of excellence, but also to "develop programs that meet the academic needs of today's students and prepare students for a broad array of careers in a global environment." This raises two different questions. First, the primary training of doctoral students is in research, which generally means preparing students for the academy. Later in this proposal, section 6, these programs are referred to as "value added." We think it important to stress in this section that primary graduate education will continue to be in research and teaching. Second, the goal of meeting "the needs of today's students" is just as applicable to undergraduate education, arguably more so, and this should be a consideration in devising strategies for improving undergraduate programs.

In the discussion of graduate education (Sections 6, topic 1), there is a conflation of diverse forms of educational programs without any clear distinctions drawn among them. Graduate education does indeed encompass doctoral programs and masters' programs, professional programs and academic programs. However, consideration of these programs should be separate; distinctions among doctoral, professional, and masters' programs should be drawn, and appropriate goals and strategies developed for each. The development of strong professional programs is a laudable goal for a university, particular one funded in part by the state, but, as presently written, the proposal is characterized by a tendency to overlook research-driven doctoral programs as less relevant, and therefore less valuable, to the university. Basic research sits at the core of all university endeavors; without strong commitments to that core, the institution will deteriorate.

Additionally, under the heading of graduate education, there is one problematic statement, one that is repeated (Section 7, Topic 1): "the interests of our students will be paramount in designing curricula that prepares students for a broad array of careers." This could be misunderstood as an expectation that the often ephemeral interests of potential or enrolled students would be the main driving force behind curriculum development. If the issue is the relevance of programs to non-academic employment, the argument might

be more usefully reframed in terms of the needs of the state/the society. However, the ability to prepare students for a range of careers seems more appropriate to undergraduate education. Moreover, if the goal is the recruitment of the very best students, then we believe that this discussion misses the mark. Our experience is that graduate students are attracted to a particular program because of the reputation of the faculty, the program, and the university. To attract more graduate students, the campus must build excellent programs; the discussion of graduate groups and interdisciplinary programs, with their ability to concentrate faculty strengths, speaks most directly to this. No amount of value-added experiences will draw top-flight students to a less-than-stellar program. Still, we agree that such experiences can be extremely useful in preparing students for their ultimate employment.

In terms of undergraduate education (Section 6, Topic 2), we find the focus upon undergraduate research opportunities, improved advising, and faculty-student interaction to be quite compelling. One minor quibble is the pairing of individual research opportunities and internships. Internships are frequently central components of an undergraduate's experience, but, as is noted in Section 7, most are not research oriented. Opportunities to work in social service, education, and community activism, for example, should be pursued and rewarded as they stand, and the programs should be expanded. But this discussion should distinguish between them and dedicated research.

Finally, we are concerned about the proposed 1-2 unit undergraduate seminars proposed in Section 7. The idea behind this brief paragraph, as discussed at PAC, is a set of seminars to be taught by faculty on overload for minimal compensation. By the same token, significantly increasing individual research opportunities and internships for undergraduates will require not only additional staff support, a need predicted in the proposal, but also additional faculty support. Particularly at this time of budget strictures and increased enrollments, the campus should not be developing strategies that demand more of the faculty. This suggestion, which has not been vetted by the Senate, should be dropped from a document that should reflect settled campus commitment.

In looking at the academic document as a whole, we are taken with one emphasis upon building research opportunities for undergraduates counterposed to programs that take graduate students out of the research lab. In fact, the specific proposals should be balanced to place research at the core of graduate and undergraduate experience alike, with a recognition of the need to incorporate professional training into both arenas.

Sincerely,

Bob Meister, Chair
Committee on Planning and Budget

Cc: CEP Chair Freeman
GC Chair Williams
COT Chair Cooperstein
CAFA Chair Tamkun

