Appendix A. Learning as an Institution: Case Study Approaches

Introduction

In October 2007 California State University, Northridge submitted an Institutional Proposal for re-accreditation to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The Institutional Proposal was accepted in December 2007 and the University began to ready itself for the next step in the re-accreditation process, the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR). As part of the CPR process, three Task Force teams were formed to examine the University’s overarching theme, Learning as an Institution, each focused on one of the following subsidiary themes:

- Student Success through Engagement in Learning
- Faculty and Staff Support for University Success, and
- Learning as an Institution

The Theme 3 Task Force - Learning as an Institution - chose a case study approach to explore how and why some campus-wide initiatives were implemented, and whether organizational principles that emerged from those initiatives could be used to move other campus initiatives forward. Three campus-wide initiatives which had involved faculty, staff, administrators and students in their processes were chosen for study, including

- the Graduation Rates Task Force
- General Education Reform
- the Campus Master Plan process

(Excerpted from Graduation Rates Task Force Case Study Report, p. 3. The other two case study reports contain similar introductions.)

The case-study approach was chosen in an effort to understand why certain campus-wide initiatives were implemented while others were not, what the campus has learned from the implementation of these initiatives and what may have contributed to the success or failure of certain initiatives. Ultimately, the goal of the Theme 3 Task Force was to understand the success of an initiative in order to, as the IP relates, “replicate it and multiply successful effects.” To accomplish this, five thematic research questions were developed that would be addressed for each of the previously mentioned campus-wide initiatives:

A: Which aspects of the processes used to advance an initiative contributed to its fate?
B: Did the University devote core resources to the initiative? If yes, how were they used?
C: Did the initiative feature committees or partnerships bridging divisions and units? Were these consciously established or unplanned coincidences?
D: What evidence do we have of the relationship between selected common characteristics of initiatives and their success? How has this knowledge been used and how will it be used to increased success and efficiency in the future?
E: What roles do Program Review and accreditation play in institutional transformation?

(Excerpted from General Education Reform Case Study Report, p. 3.)

The following pages provide an overview of the methods employed by each of the case study teams. The text is excerpted for the summary reports prepared by the three teams. Full copies of these reports will be available in the Team Room at the time of the September site visit and are available on request at any time.)
Graduation Rates Task Force Case Study

Study Group:
Ballard, James David, Associate Professor, Sociology
Prager, Mary Ann, Associate Vice President, Student Access and Support Services (Study Group chair)
Garcia, Hilda, Assistant Director, Student Development and International Programs
Hogen-Esch, Tom, Assistant Professor, Political Science
Vargas, José Luis, Director, Educational Opportunity Program
Athanasia Medenas, Graduate Research Assistant
Karunya Jayasena, Graduate Research Assistant

During the 2008/2009 academic year, the two graduate student assistants undertook a case study of the Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF) as part of their work for the GRTF Case Study Group in preparation for California State University, Northridge’s Capacity and Preparatory Review. When they concluded their preliminary case study, they noted that there was further work to be accomplished in order to fully answer the questions posed in the study. In Fall 2010 members of the GRTF Case Study Group completed the work begun by the graduate assistants.

Section One

Working under the direction of the GRTF Case Study Group …we began this project in Fall 2008. By investigating the outcome of the GRTF and conducting formal research investigations, we were able to critically analyze the GRTF process and outcomes, determining whether what emerged held lessons that had been applied to other campus-wide initiatives thereby helping to move them forward (pages 3-4).

In December 2008 we were hired as graduate assistants to assist the Theme 3 Task Force in their work for the reaccreditation process of the University. During January 2009 we received extensive training, led by committee members and guest experts who taught us the essentials of case study design. We were instructed by researchers who specialize in collecting data for case studies and were taught the proper methods to conduct focus groups, interviews and to gather and analyze historical documents.

Next, we prepared a list of potential interviewees from the Graduation Rates Task Force membership. We went to the library archives and went through the official reports of GRTF meetings and gathered the names of the participants in the meetings. Once an extensive list was created of the names of people who had some type of involvement in the work of the GRTF, we took it to the case study members for approval. We were guided by our case study group to interview those who were still on campus and to create focus groups that had some commonality in their membership. Once we filtered out those who were either no longer on campus or who had minimal involvement, we set up focus groups and interviews.

On March 25, 2009 we conducted our first focus group with members of the GRTF. The second focus group was held on March 26, 2009, and the third and fourth were held on April 2, 2009. In addition, as not everyone was available for a focus group, five individual interviews were carried out during the months of March and April. Each of the focus groups was an hour long; the individual interviews were approximately 20-30 minutes each.
List of Interviewees (page 19)

Members of the Graduation Rates Task Force

Dr. Margaret A Fieweger, Associate Vice President, Emeritus
Dr. Penelope Jennings, Associate Vice President, Faculty Affairs
Dr. William Jennings, Dean, Business and Economics
Dr. Gloria Melara, Professor, Computer Science
Dr. Michael Neubauer, Coordinator, Developmental Mathematics
Dr. Harvey Rich, Professor, Sociology
Dr. Terry Piper, Vice President, Student Affairs
Dr. Diane Schwartz, Associate Dean, Engineering and Computer Science
Dr. Merill Simon, Associate Professor, Educational Psychology and Counseling
Mr. José Louis Vargas, Director, Educational Opportunity Program

Academic Advisors
Ms. Frankie Augustin, Director, Health Sciences & Math Advisement
Ms. Fariba Farzan-Schmitt, Special Programs Director, Liberal Studies
Ms. Shelly Thompson, Director, Student Services Center/EOP
Ms. Maria Valiton, Director, Arts, Media and Communications Student Resource Ctr/EOP
Mr. Todd Wolfe, Coordinator, Advisement, Social and Behavioral Sciences

The following questions were asked in each focus group and interview in order to elicit responses to our overarching research questions:

1. In considering the process of the GRTF can you describe the elements that advanced the outcomes for students? For faculty? And for the institution?
2. In considering the process of the GRTF can you describe the elements that hindered the outcomes for students? For faculty? And for the institution?
3. Were resources available to implement the recommendations? Was anything lacking?
4. Were there any ways in which cross-divisional collaboration contributed to the success of the initiative for students? For faculty? For the institution?
5. Were there any ways in which cross-divisional collaboration hindered the success of the initiative for students? For faculty? For the institution?

By conducting extensive document analysis as well as individual and group interviews, we discovered different perspectives from a variety of campus constituents that had involvement with the GRTF process and outcome. Also, going through the files of the GRTF meetings allowed us to formulate questions that would help us find out how the GRTF influenced CSUN in efforts to learn as an institution (pages 5-6).

In analyzing data from the focus groups, interviews and documents, we discovered five recurring themes had emerged through the interviews we conducted. These themes help to clarify which aspects of the GRTF advanced or hindered the goal of decreasing the time to graduation at Cal State Northridge, from the perspective of those interviewed (page 7).

- **Theme 1**: At the time of the formation of the Graduation Rates Task Force, the campus did not have a strong culture of support for decreasing the time to graduation.
• Theme 2: GRTF highlighted the need to increase campus awareness about the time to degree and what could be done to address this.
• Theme 3: GRTF created a cultural change that encouraged everyone to be involved in helping students to succeed and graduate in a timely manner.
• Theme 4: GRTF highlighted the need to improve advisement.
• Theme 5: The process was a collaborative one which helped to alleviate tensions within the campus community and created an opportunity for the implementation of the recommendations.

Section Two

The preliminary case study concluded with suggestions from the graduate student assistants for further research. In the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report, members of the site visit team echoed those suggestions and recommended that the GRTF Case Study Group extend their inquiry into the following areas:

1. Analyze the outcome of GRTF recommendations that had been implemented;
2. Investigate the resources devoted to the work of the GRTF, including an analysis of faculty release time and staff contributions; and,
3. Delve into the use of focus groups by the GRTF and implementation of their recommendations.

This [section] contains a report of the work undertaken by the GRTF Case Study Group during Fall 2010 to answer these questions.

The GRTF Case Study Group conducted five additional interviews with campus administrators responsible for implementation of some aspect of the GRTF recommendations. Those interviewed were:

• Cynthia Rawitch, Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Students
• José Luis Vargas, Director of Educational Opportunity Programs
• Suzy Babikan, Interim Director of Admissions and Records
• Ann Morey, Director of the Career Center
• Kirin Dosanjh Zucker, Director, Center for Innovative and Engaged Learning Opportunities

In addition, a thorough study of the use of focus groups by the GRTF was conducted as well as an investigation of resources devoted to the GRTF initiative. Finally, the GRTF Case Study Group undertook an analysis of a number of policies, websites and other documents to determine the status of implementation of the GRTF recommendations (pages 19-20).

General Education Reform Case Study

Study Group:
Costin, Cathy, Anthropology
Hammond, Debra, Director, University Student Union
Pedone, Vicki, Chair, Geological Science
Rodriguez, David, Chair, Chicana/o Studies
Schwartz, Diane, Engineering & Computer Science (Study Group chair)
Bradford, Joshua, Graduate Research Assistant
Gomez, Carlos, Graduate Research Assistant
A preliminary report of the GE Reform Case Study was completed in June 2009 … and was included as an Appendix to the CSUN 2009 WASC Capacity Preparation and Review (CPR) Report. We knew that there was more work to be done to complete the GE Reform Case Study, including additional campus interviews, a campus survey and an analysis of earlier GE reform efforts. The conclusions from the preliminary report suggested further avenues to explore. In addition, the WASC Visiting Team (Feb. 2010) suggested that we include a fuller description of the case study methodology, use additional data sources to support our conclusions on what factors contributed to the success of our initiatives and create a list of common success factors for the campus initiatives under study.

During the EER phase of the WASC reaccreditation process, we completed the GE Reform Case Study. We carried this out with additional interviews, a review of historical documents from University committee meeting minutes and did a campus-wide survey of attitudes toward the GE Reform process. We also compared the 2003-2005 GE Reform initiative process with earlier GE Reform processes from the 1990s to determine why the later one succeeded and the earlier one failed (pages 1-2).

**Part I: Preliminary GE Reform Case Study**

This particular report is the result of the research of two graduate students, Josh Bradford and Carlos Gomez, in consultation with the faculty and administrators…who make up the WASC Theme 3 General Education (GE) Reform Case Study Group. This study group dealt specifically with the process of GE reform over the last 20 years. The Institutional Proposal (IP), the first step in CSUN’s re-accreditation process, clearly relates the justification behind an examination GE Reform:

GE Reform has been attempted several times in the last 20 years. All such efforts have resulted in often publicly spectacular failures—except the finally successful reform launched in Fall 2006. In each case, detailed reform plans were developed, but only the most recent one survived.

As such, the purpose of this report is to address several of the thematic questions developed in the IP for the particular case of the most recent successfully passed GE Reform effort (pages 3-4).

Our first step in addressing these thematic questions for the particular case of GE Reform was developing what methods would be used to accomplish our task. After receiving extensive training, provided by the Theme 3 Task Force, in document analysis, in how to conduct focus groups, on how to write case studies and in how to conduct interviews, we concluded, in consultation with the other members of our group, that document analysis and interviews would yield the best results. Through document analysis, we would receive a broad background in the history of GE Reform, the processes used to reform it, and an overall understanding of the philosophies and practices of both General Education and GE Reform. Through interviews, we would receive further elaboration of these broad patterns as well as a more detailed account of the most recent GE Reform effort.

Our process began with an analysis of all available documents relating to the most recent GE Reform effort, past GE Reform efforts, and relating to General Education overall. These included everything from the initial proposal for the most recent GE Reform and all the new models or plans of General Education the related Task Force developed; to committee notes from the Task Force, the Senate, and other relevant committees; to documents concerning past GE Reform efforts. We also examined documents and texts related to the philosophy behind General Education, both nationally and in terms of CSUN’s program. While our analysis of documents primarily focused on myriad aspects of GE and GE Reform, we also examined documents related to the overall meaning of CSUN as a *Learning-centered*
University and documents related to CSUN’s past reaccreditation process, the most recent process and the process of reaccreditation itself.

Once our analysis of relevant documents was complete, we began the development of interview questions that would ultimately address the thematic questions. These questions were developed, with the assistance of the members of the GE Reform Case Study Group, to address the thematic questions in a richer, more detailed manner than asking the questions to interviewees directly would achieve. While some of the questions are applicable to a broad audience, others arose in tandem with the process of selecting a large pool of potential interviewees and relate specifically to certain groups of potential interviewees.

The pool of was created with the goal of gaining a detailed, emic view of the process undertaken to advance the most recent GE Reform initiative, as well as a broader etic view of the process, while considering both of these in the context of older, unsuccessful GE Reform efforts. Accordingly, the pool of interviewees began with those most intimately involved in the advancement of the initiative: the 2003/2004 GE Reform Task Force members and other key faculty and administrators who were directly involved in the most recent GE Reform initiative. Next, we attempted to derive an unbiased opinion and more external view from those farther away from the initiative itself by randomly choosing a few members from certain groups within the campus community. These groups included the Council of Chairs, the Educational Policies Committee (EPC), College Deans, Associate Deans, Admissions and Records, the Faculty Senate and a few individuals who participated in earlier GE Reform efforts.

This initial pool of potential interviewees contained over 60 individuals. However, only 39 were selected to be interviewed because some were known to be no longer available or were discarded in the random selection process. Once this final pool of potential interviewees was selected, they were first contacted through email by Diane Schwartz, a faculty member and a member of our GE Reform Case Study Group, who explained that they would be contacted by two graduate students interested in interviewing them about their role in, knowledge of or opinion on GE Reform as part of the WASC re-accreditation process. Of the 39, only two declined to be interviewed, while 18 did not respond to the initial emails or to a follow up email requesting participation. This left 19 individuals who were willing to participate and who one of us eventually interviewed, a success rate of approximately 50 percent. All interviews were recorded and then summarized with regard to the initial thematic question (pages 4-6).

**Part II: Campus Survey On the 2003-2005 GE Reform Process**

We conducted a campus-wide survey of faculty and administrators to assess opinions of the GE reform process that occurred from Spring 2004 to Spring 2005. This survey was designed to give us a broader perspective than we got from the preliminary GE Reform Case Study, which relied primarily on interviews with those directly involved in the GE reform process. As related in the GE Reform Case Study Preliminary Report, “there was a consensus among the interviewees that broad representation and participation and effective communication were the primary factors contributing to the success of GE reform.” The goal of the survey was to examine if this conclusion is shared by the larger campus community. We gathered data from those who were not directly involved in the GE reform process, who may not have been aware of the GE reform process or who may not have had the opportunity to participate in the process, as well as to supplement the Preliminary Report with further data on fundamental questions regarding the success of the initiative, the success of the process and the reformed GE plan (pages 23-24).
The survey questions and answers were designed by the two graduate students, Josh Bradford and Carlos Gomez, on the GE Reform Case Study Group with input from the entire group. An electronic survey, created using an online survey service and distributed through email, was chosen as the best means. Using an electronic, web-based survey also allowed the survey to be adaptive; some questions were displayed only when preceding questions were answered in a certain way. The use of an adaptive survey avoided redundant questions and answers of “not applicable,” and created a more user-friendly design.

Once the survey was created, a member of the Case Study Group emailed a link containing the survey to the Associate Deans of each College with instructions to forward the link to the faculty and staff of their respective Colleges. This was done with the belief that an email from the Associate Dean of a faculty member’s College, rather than a mass email from a possibly unknown sender, would increase the survey response rate. The survey itself consists of 16 questions, beginning with three basic demographic questions, followed by 13 questions related to GE reform. Respondents were not required to answer every question and the adaptive nature of the survey did not present every question to every respondent. Ultimately, there were 142 respondents, while only 132 (93 percent) completed the survey. However, for 42 (29.8 percent) of these respondents, the survey ended with the first question, which dealt with when respondents were employed at CSUN, in order to remove respondents who were not employed at CSUN during the GE reform process (pages 24-25).

[See Appendix E for a discussion of survey findings. The overall responses are summarized, as are differences among faculty respondents who do and do not teach GE courses.]

**Part III  Comparison of GE Reform Initiatives at CSUN**

GE Reform has a long history at CSUN, beginning with a very substantive change in the GE program in the early 1980s. The reasons we periodically undertake GE reform are both external and internal. The external forces generally arise from new CSU system-wide requirements on the size and pattern of the GE program; the internal ones come from curriculum, pedagogy or assessment reform efforts championed by some members of the faculty or administration. In our self-study for the 2011 WASC reaccreditation, we studied the most recent GE Reform effort (2003-2005) which was widely considered to be successful. We then looked at the campus GE reform efforts in the 1990s. Those efforts were generally recalled by the campus community as being valiant but ultimately unsuccessful (page 38).

In contrast to the 1990s GE Reform efforts, the 2003-2005 GE Reform initiative was generally deemed successful by the campus. What were the differences between the two initiative processes? To determine the differences between the two GE Reforms processes and to identify factors contributing to the success and failure of these initiatives, we collected evidence from the following sources:

2. Review of historical campus records on GE Reform since 1993.
3. Fall 2009 survey of faculty and administrators who were on campus during the 2003-2006 GE Reform Initiative to solicit their opinions about the GE Reform Process.
4. Interviews with faculty and administrators who participated in the older GE Reform process of the 1990s (page 40).
Campus Master Plan Case Study

Study Group:
Michael Barrett, Librarian, CSUN Library
Colin Donahue, Associate Vice President, Facilities Development and Operations
William Jennings, Dean, College of Business (Study Group chair)
Julia Potter, Executive Administrative Assistant to the Dean, Tseng College of Extended Learning
David Saldana Jr., Graduate Research Assistant

Section 1 (prepared by David Saldana)

The methodological approach of a case study method is used in the instance of this research for testing the hypotheses and research question(s) in order to evaluate its effectiveness or lack thereof of the campus wide initiative concerning the California State University, Northridge Master Plan.

Subjects were contacted via e-mail and phone, and asked to voluntarily participate. Respondents were chosen specifically based on involvement and knowledge regarding the Master Plan and involved processes. Respondents were asked to answer a set of open ended questions specific to their knowledge. Two sets of questions were compiled, one for administrative, consultant and community subjects, the other for students with a base of knowledge (page 3).

The first set of respondents were asked to address the following questions:
1) How did you become involved in the master plan for CSUN?
2) What specific role did you play in the master plan process?
3) Did you feel your input was helpful during the process?
4) How was communication among team members?
5) Were there any disagreements? (If so, what were they?)
6) Were there any processes you feel could have been improved?
7) Were there any major concerns from the surrounding community?
8) Did you feel the University devoted the necessary resources needed to properly to see the master plan through?
9) Were their specific resources which you felt were not available, such as access to appropriate documents or technologies?
10) When resources were utilized, was it done effectively?
11) Were you aware of partnerships which occurred for the master planning process?, i.e. board members, community, campus, etc.
12) What do you feel may have hindered the advancement of the master plan?
13) Do you have any closing statements you would like to make? Or any questions you would like me to answer (page 11).

The mode of data acquisition for the purposes of this research was tape recorded interviews (when accepted by subjects) and shorthand memo notes. Also, prior forum minutes regarding the California State University, Northridge Master Plan were analyzed and noted for this study. The respondents, prior

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1 The four student respondents were asked a shorter set of questions, which focused on their awareness of the master plan and their views of the physical campus and the associated planning processes (see page 12 of full report).
to being interviewed, were read an “interview statement” briefing them on the background regarding the Campus Master Plan and also read the “statement of confidentiality.”

The subjects for this research study were fully informed of my intentions via the “interview statement” and a “statement of confidentiality.” Identification of these subjects will be via “pseudonyms” in order to ensure confidentiality. The respondents were at all times aware of what was to be discussed. If interview respondents did not feel safe or comfortable answering any questions or related inquiries at any point, I stopped such a query with no further persistence (page 3).

**List of Interviewees (page 13)**

**Faculty Respondent(s)**
- William Jennings: Business Department Chair (Prior WASC chair)
- Michael Neubauer: Director of Developmental Math

**Consult/Contract Agency Respondent(s)**
- Susan Painter: Consultant and Planning- AC Martin

**City Councilman Greig Smith Office (Los Angeles County-Northridge Area)**
- Hannah Lee: Councilman Greig Smith Office/Associate Planning and Transportation Deputy

**Northridge (East) Neighborhood Council Respondent(s)**
- Steve Patel: Northridge East Neighborhood Council/ President
- Robin Kellog: Northridge Community Member
- Forum (Respondents 1,2,3*)

**California State University, Northridge Student Respondent(s)**
- Valerie Yu: CSUN orientation Leader/ 5th year FCS Major/Betty Editor (CSUN FCS newsletter)
- Renee Taira: 4th year CSUN student/Psychology Major
- Kim Nguyen: 5th Year CSUN student/FCS Major
- Steven Baiz : Student Services Representative

Scheduling was at times difficult due to the nature of respondents’ fields or profession. Tape recording via digital means is not reliable. Shorthand notes and memos were effective tools during the interviews. Making sure to code and transcribe as much as possible directly after the interview so data remains fresh and easy to remember was key. Outlines in place were helpful and effective as well as updates to assure everyone was up to speed on progress … (page 9).

**Section Two**

In its review of the initial phase one case study data, the Master Plan Task Force identified the need to obtain additional data regarding the implementation phase of the master plan since 2006. The task force considered this data crucial to assessing the University’s development as a learning institution. In the first quarter of 2011, we conducted seven additional interviews in preparation for the EER. The interviewees
were selected based on their knowledge and continuing involvement in the University’s master plan process since the late 1990’s. The case study questions were designed to gain perspective on the contrasts between the 1998 and 2006 master plan initiatives, and to provide data on how the University has used lessons learned from these initiatives in its master plan implementation since 2006.

Multiple members of the study group interviewed the following during this second phase:
1. Jolene Koester, President CSU Northridge
2. William Watkins, Vice President for Student Affairs, CSU Northridge
3. Harry Hellenbrand, Provost and V.P. for Academic Affairs, CSU Northridge
4. Mohammed Quayoumi, Vice President for Administration & Finance at CSU Northridge from 2000 through 2006
5. Deborah Wylie, CSU Northridge campus architect from 1995 through 2002
6. Steve Patel, Northridge community member and President of the Northridge East Neighborhood Council
7. Phyllis Winger, Chief Planning Deputy, Los Angeles City 12th District Councilmember Grieg Smith (page 15)

Interviewees were advised that the Task Force did not expect them to be able to answer all questions and were asked to simply indicate a lack of knowledge in any particular area. We clarified that the questions were focused on the implementation of the master plan since its adoption in early 2006. We asked respondents to speak openly and feel free to critique, since both negative and positive assessments are equally important; the key issue for the task force is to obtain robust, accurate data.

All respondents were asked to address the following rather detailed questions:

1. Comparing the 1998 and 2005 campus master plan update processes, how did these initiatives differ and in what ways did CSUN demonstrate use of "lessons learned" in the "Envision 2035" master plan study?
2. Initial research indicates improvements in collaboration, outreach and engagement contributed significantly to success in the development of the Envision 2035 master plan. Do you concur? Have these improvements been leveraged in the subsequent implementation process?
3. What key issues have contributed to successes or difficulties in Master Plan implementation since March 2006? How do these issues relate to CSUN’s development—either positively or negatively—as a learning-centered organization?
4. Consider specific recent master plan building projects such as Student Housing Phase I, the G3 Parking Structure, Chaparral Hall (Science 5), Faculty/Staff Housing, Valley Performing Arts Center, Student Recreation Center, and East Campus Roads. How has the implementation process—including planning, design, environmental assessment, and construction—differed from pre-Envision 2035 projects? (Please feel free to address projects collectively or individually)
5. Where has the University succeeded or struggled with regard to: a) technical implementation of projects; b) campus & community outreach and collaboration; c) adhering to master plan guidelines and principles throughout the design and construction process? What do you consider to be CSUN’s current strengths and weaknesses in these areas, and how do these differ from your historical assessment of the campus? (pages 16-17)
Appendix A cont’d. - 11

References

As requested by the Site Visit Team, we have provided a list of references below, with special attention to the general sources on case study methodology that helped anchor our process. Some were used directly by the study team to train and guide the graduate assistants during inquiry and analysis.