Appendix E

Preliminary Results of the Case Studies Being Undertaken for Theme #3

Case Study #1: The Graduation Rates Taskforce

Case Study #2: GE Reform

Case Study #3: Envision 2035 – The New Master Plan
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 over arching theme, Learning as an Institution, each focused on one of the following subsidiary themes: 1.) Student Success through Engagement in Learning; 2.) Faculty and Staff Support for University Success; and, 3.) Learning as an Institution.

The Theme Three 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 Campus Master Plan, Graduation Rates Task Force, and General Education Reform.

This case study focuses on the work of the Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF) and results from research conducted by us. Working under the direction of the GRTF Case Study Group composed of faculty and administrators including David Ballard, Mary Ann Cummins Prager, Hilda Garcia, Tom Hogen-Esch and Jose Luis Vargas 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.

Graduation Rates Task Force – An Overview

At the annual Faculty Retreat in January 2001, Provost Louanne Kennedy presented information about the low graduation rates (i.e., the percentage of students who graduate within 4, 6 and 8 years from the date they entered as freshman or within 2 or 4 years of the date they entered as transfer students) at California State University, Northridge, and announced the formation of a Graduation Rates Task Force (GRTF). Co-chaired by the Provost and then Faculty President Diane Schwartz (later by Faculty President Michael Neubauer) and composed of faculty, staff, students and administrators, the Task Force was charged with reviewing retention and graduation data, current academic policies and practices, best practices, and barriers that might prevent students from graduating in a timely fashion.

During the 2001-02 academic year, three Task Force subgroups were formed to focus on university policies, advisement and pedagogy and asked to develop and propose recommendations. A fourth group - the research subgroup - reviewed fifty-seven articles and several books and reported on what the literature said about impediments to graduation.

In January, 2002 the draft recommendations of the Graduation Rates Task Force were presented at a plenary session of the Faculty Retreat. Responses from this session were shared with the Task Force, they
revised their recommendations and in March 2002, the “Graduation Rates Task Force Preliminary Final Report” was distributed to the campus community for review. After receiving, reviewing and incorporating extensive feedback, a revised draft report was distributed to the University committee in September, 2002. Between September, 2002 and January 2003 the Task Force continued to review data, literature and solicit comments and suggestions. In February 2003 the Task Force concluded its work and submitted the final report with recommendations to President Jolene Koester.

Methodology

In December 2008 we were hired as graduate assistants to assist the Theme Three Task Force in their work for the reaccreditation process of the University. During the month of 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 that 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 with 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. The focus groups were led by graduate assistant Athanasia Medenas and recorded by hand and audio by Karunya Jayasena. In addition, as not everyone was available for a focus group, five individual interviews were carried out during the months of March and April 2009. Each of the focus groups was held for an hour and the individual interviews were approximately 20-30 minutes each.

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.
Results

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. The overall results demonstrate that the GRTF was a strategic planning process that supported a “learning-centered” emphasis within the institution. GRTF comprehensively addressed initiatives and plans that hindered timely graduation. It helped raise awareness of the need to create a culture of support for diminishing time to degree, campus collaboration, improved academic advisement and student empowerment and engagement in learning. The themes also highlight the immediate and long-term institutional challenges, which may have hindered the implementation of GRTF recommendations.

**Question A - Which aspects of the Graduation Rates Task Force advanced the goal of improving graduation rates? Which hindered it?**

**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.**

When the GRTF was first formed, many of those interviewed believed that there was a “culture” that did not necessarily support the need to decrease time to graduation. Students routinely took longer than six years to graduate, in part because they were allowed to repeat an unlimited number of classes to improve their grades. A typical student might spend an average of one semester repeating courses. For instance, as one respondent stated:

“Before GRTF there was an unlimited repeat on grade changes. Students were taking up resources by repeating courses for grade forgiveness. Students also repeat the courses to increase the GPA to get into Stanford and other Ivy League….It was not a conducive environment because it was part of the ‘rotten culture’…a culture that was delaying graduation. So, GRTF came along and began limiting that culture to get people out faster….”

Those we interviewed inferred that while individual faculty and staff might deplore the time it took for students to graduate, it was not a pressing issue. The campus community seemed to accept that students often took a very long time to graduate. Before the formation of the GRTF, there wasn’t an examination of the institutional structures, policies and behaviors that contributed to a culture that was comfortable with the lengthy time it took for students to graduate.

**Theme 2: GRTF highlighted the need to increase campus awareness about the time to degree and what could be done to address this.**

Through cross-divisional collaboration, the task force helped raise awareness about the time it took for students to graduate. With the creation of the GRTF, for the first time the campus community addressed this major barrier to student success and many individuals from various parts of the university became aware of the low number of students who graduated within six years. A campus administrator said:

“It was very helpful to get the input and feedback from various groups on campus: the career center, advisement center director, college of engineering etc…they were all able to raise different issues that could be examined with regards to graduation rates…..”

The data also indicates that the outcomes of the GRTF positively influenced a change in focus for the faculty, particularly in terms of pedagogy. The GRTF process, in concert with other campus initiatives emphasized a learning centered university, helping to engage faculty in efforts to improve the university’s graduation rate. One administrator stated that,
“It helped make this university a ‘learning centered university…’ GRTF also focused on teaching in terms of how students are meeting all the course requirements, what are the course objectives, what are the students learning and what the faculty is trying to achieve in terms of their objectives…. It improved communication among faculty across different majors.”

GRTF allowed the university to ask what was needed to assist students to graduate in a timely manner. The university took on more responsibility for student learning and as a result there was increased awareness about what could be done to positively impact time to degree.

Theme 3: GRTF created a cultural change that encouraged everyone to be involved in helping students to succeed and graduate in a timely manner.

It was evident that the GRTF created an environment that improved joint collaboration in support of student success. The task force worked hard to obtain input from the student body and to go beyond the data groups to find out what was hindering students from graduating in a timely manner. Respondents believed that while the data gathering process took awhile, it was necessary in order to obtain a broad picture of why it took such a long time for students to graduate. As one respondent noted:

“Sometimes the university policies don’t always keep students in mind but the GRTF wanted what was best for the students. It was a crucial process to get everyone to collaborate but it gave a sense of pride at the end. We made a difference in our campus and it was not a waste of time. Recommendations were put into motion in multiple perspectives. Not one single recommendation by itself changes something… It was the cumulative effort that made a difference. We changed the campus culture and it became more focused on student’s success.”

The interview results indicate that the university learned to work more collaboratively by changing work habits. There were interdivisional committees developed to get everyone involved in the strategic process and to build a close relationship with one another. One administrator stated:

“We learned how to do things better than we had done before….No one part of the university can solve the issues without being on the same page… GRTF brought the university together to solve an issue… communicating across the university in new and very important ways. We found a way that we could draw many people into the conversation of GRTF; online chat room, feedback, brown bag lunches…We wanted people to know that we considered their point of views…”

There were strong indications of a systematic collaboration between all departments across the campus. One participant stated,

“All the Vice presidents were involved. University advancement was involved. Process was continuously going and you will see cross divisional support….Implementation and task force both were involved.”

By all accounts it seems that the GRTF had a significant impact in changing the campus culture, encouraging all staff, faculty and administrators to support measures that would decrease the time students needed to obtain their degree. As a result of collective collaboration, relationships and opportunities were built with student success on mind. Encouraged by the process unleashed by GRTF the campus learned new ways of doing things that benefited the students.
Theme 4: GRTF highlighted the need to improve advisement.

The results demonstrate that the work of the GRTF brought about the realization that the campus needed to improve advisement. In fact, it was one of the recommendations put forth in the original GRTF report. According to some of those interviewed, the GRTF put a spotlight on the problems that advisors had been talking about for many years. As a result, the Provost and others administrators invested more resources into advisement. As one respondent stated:

“Now there is more pressure for students to graduate because of the GRTF. We can thank the graduation task force and now it has become a task that the whole university should care about…even though there were not really specific resources available, the number of staff who does advisement has increased…. They brought serious people together to make it happen….”

In order to implement the GRTF recommendations, it was necessary to direct more faculty time to student advisement than had been true in prior years. The data showed that in order to incentivize faculty members, sometimes grants were given out for reassigned time, online teaching etc. But, one of the faculty members who previously served on the task force stated that “It was not always monetary but was a redirection of faculty time to truly help the students and not just put on a facade…” Overall there was a perception that the increase in faculty involvement greatly helped to improve advisement.

In addition, those interviewed noted that the recommendation to create four-year graduation plans allowed advisors to shift their time and focus to areas that needed special attention.

Looking back, some of the advisors interviewed noted that while much had gone well, some of the suggestions the community of advisors had made had not been accepted, in spite of their professional expertise. As one advisor stated:

“The one thing that came out was that there was a lot of confusion because there were so many policies from different parts of the university…for example, the Academic Advisement Reconciliation Committee (AARC) had a website to interpret the policy but it was confusing and was interpreted totally differently. In addition, the AARC website was not updated so students were being bombarded with wrong information….They paid a lot of money for assessment for a consultant company but if they listened to the advisors they would have saved the money…..”

Nonetheless, the overall results indicate that the GRTF not only highlighted the concerns of academic advisors but also helped improve academic advisement.

Question B-Did the University devote core resources to the GRTF and if so, how were they used? Did the University devote core resources to the recommendations of the GRTF?

We discovered that most of our interviewees thought time and human resources were stretched further as a result of the GRTF recommendations. They did not necessarily point to the need for additional funding but spoke of the extra demands on time and increased workload. For example one of the advisors interviewed stated:

“I think what I remember is the communication aspect of it trying to get the different offices and programs to communicate better. Time as a resource issue and how different faculty and staff were going to be assigned to different tasks. And for what I recall the committee had really wonderful ideas. Afterwards some of those were trying to be implemented but then it went away. It wasn’t monetary in a sense; it was more of a time issue. The staff was stretched already and how were you going to find time to do all these things.”
We found that most of the comments about resources were related to advisement. For example, one of the members of the GRTF stated: “The one area that required a lot of resources was on advisement. To improve the advisement system would take a lot of resources to make sure more students interfaced with it.” Additionally, among those who believed that the GRTF recommendations were implemented correctly and successfully there wasn’t much discussion about resources. In contrast, if the person being interviewed did not think that the implementation process of the GRTF was a priority for the University, they felt that resources were lacking, especially for advisement. As specified by this interviewee:

“There were not enough resources available to implement the recommendations brought forth by the GRTF. Which lead to the issues of addressing training needs of the advisors. It was not a monetary issue it was just a matter of finding the time. There were no resources implications thus time, as a resource was an issue. In addition, how different staff and faculty were assigned to do things was also an issue. Another hindrance was the lacking of leadership to implement the recommendations. Furthermore, other things such as enrollment issues took priority over the implementations of the GRTF. We started it but then we lost it somewhere and did not keep up with the speed.”

Question C-Was the GRTF a collaborative effort which featured committees or partnerships bridging divisions and units? If so, was the collaboration consciously established or unplanned and what are the implications?

Theme five- The process was a collaborative one which helped to alleviate tensions between the campus community and created an opportunity for the implementation of the recommendations.

Throughout the interview process we discovered a unanimous feeling that the GRTF process was collaborative. There was a positive attitude toward working together among the former members of the GRTF that were interviewed. “It was a great opportunity to hear other people’s perspectives and what their issues were and to work together to solve them,” mentioned one of the respondents. This attitude resonated throughout the interview process, and it gave us the sense that the CSUN community was working together to try to resolve an issue that affected the University as a whole. One interviewee said, “by having the Provost and the faculty President as co-chairs, I think it sent a strong message that ‘oh, this is collaborative, a collaborative effort.’”

As explained by this respondent, there was a conscious effort among the members of the GRTF to collaborate in a new manner:

“I think it really marked a point of departure for us. Lots of change in the vice presidential positions, so it was a time for a lot of change for the institution, in addition to people being changed, I also think we changed processes. As we went along during that time trying to implement the cross divisional consultation with as many stakeholders as possible. And not just talking to people and putting their comments away and proceeding like we already knew the solution, I think we were genuinely interested from that point on to not go in with a preconceived idea that we know what the end result looks like. But let’s see what we can actually accomplish and what needs to be done and where the real problems are.”

While not many of the interviewees would talk much about how the campus was before the establishment of the GRTF, there was some implication that the campus was divided and that there was not a campus wide standard of how to implement important changes. The GRTF seemed to break down barriers and helped to alleviate lingering tensions. Not only did the process of the GRT help to clarify what could be done to positively support graduation in a timely manner, it also helped to teach the members of the GRTF how to relieve tensions in order for the process to be productive and successful. As one interviewee said,
“Well, I think at that time everyone was still not willing to give up their little piece of things and trying to hang on. We were in the process of moving into a different model. But that was certainly still evident, the advisors thought they owned advising, the faculty thought they owned the curriculum and while those statements are true in face value, it’s how you view the ownership. I own it but I’m willing to share it or I own it and it’s none of your business how I do it. I think those barriers had to be broken down still at that time. It was not as smooth. With the GE reform it was much easier, you can’t do the GE reform without the advisors without the associate deans, you need to have the people at the table that know about this and who will be affected. The GRTF I think it was a little tougher, a little learning of how to do that.”

The GRTF “served as a model” for the “first attempt of doing things right.” It helped that the members of the Task Force were a wide range of campus officials and faculty that were genuinely interested in the goals of the task force. “It certainly took the campus community together to talk about the information. It was a great opportunity to hear other people’s perspectives and coming together to solve things; a campus wide initiative,” was how another respondent commented about the collaborative efforts of the GRTF. The process seemed to not only ignite interest in improving student time to degree, but also to unite the campus to work on a project together as a single unit.

Conclusion

After a thorough investigation of the process and outcomes of the GRTF we came to realize that the process had a lasting impact for the Northridge campus, influencing a cultural change within the university. We found that the process created a collaborative union that became a part of the consciousness of the students, faculty, and the institution. This began with the acknowledgement that there was a problem with the graduation rates on campus and that something had to be done to correct it. One participants stated this succinctly, informing us that the "people who are in power now know we got a problem and we have to do something about it." Gathering data to analyze and solve this problem was the first step in an effort the institution took to develop its ability to learn from past mistakes. Using a process that valued collaboration and allowed all university constituencies to be engaged was an important component of the success of the initiatives. Listening to those who had previously not been heard allowed the GRTF to gain credence. Finally creating an environment that embedded a cultural change within the campus was an important component of the process that allowed subsequent campus initiatives such as general education reform, to succeed.

Further Research

As noted previously, this case study represents preliminary work undertaken in Fall, 2008 and Spring, 2009. During the course of writing up this case study, it became apparent that there were areas that required further exploration. For example, the work of the Research Subgroup of the GRTF was not extensively explored, nor the data that was gathered from focus groups held by a consultant hired to explore perceptions of graduation rates. We would like to look more closely at research question three to better answer what resources were available and whether lack of resources impeded the work of the GRTF or the implementation of recommendations. An analysis of the change in time to degree needs to undertaken in order to understand the impact of the recommendations that resulted from the GRTF. Finally, we would like to interview members of the Task Force and key faculty and staff that we were unable to schedule this year.
Introduction

Every ten years the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) requires schools within its jurisdiction to be re-accredited. One of the first steps in the re-accreditation process is the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR), in which the school prepares a report that demonstrates the school’s capacity and ability to address preselected themes. In the case of California State University—Northridge (CSUN), this overarching theme is Advancing as a Learning-centered University, which is further divided into three themes that are more specific: Student Success through Engagement in Learning, Faculty and Staff Support for University Success, and Learning as an Institution. As part of the CPR process, a Task Force was created to examine each respective theme. The Task Force for Theme 3: Learning as an Institution consisted of faculty, administrators, and five graduate students and undertook a case study approach to examine recent campus-wide initiatives, which included Coordinated Campus-wide Planning Efforts, Reform of the General Education Program, the Graduation Rates Task Force, the Campus Master Plan, and Rethinking Disenrollment Procedures and Practice. 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 is 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 the 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?

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—Cathy Costin, Debra Hammond, Vicki Pedone, David Rodriquez, and Diane Schwartz—who make up the WASC Theme 3 General Education (GE) Reform Case Study Group, which dealt specifically with the reforms of the GE program 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 recently passed GE Reform effort.

**Methodology**

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. Whereas 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, which can be found in Appendix A, 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 thematic 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 potential interviewees 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, which included the Council of Chairs, the Educational Policies Committee (EPC), College Deans, Associate Deans, Admissions and Records, the Faculty Senate, and, finally, a few individuals who participated in earlier GE Reform efforts.
Ultimately, this initial pool of potential interviewees contained over 60 individuals. However, only 39 of these 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. Soon after, we sent an email further explaining our interest and requesting an interview. Of the 39 individuals in the initial pool, 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. A complete list of those interviewed can be found in Appendix B. All interviews were recorded and then summarized with regard to the initial thematic question.

Results

By far, the interviews yielded the most data for the first three thematic questions, Questions A, B, and C, which were our main concern while conducting interviews because Questions C and D are more suited to a comparative analysis across initiatives. Herein, we sequentially address these three thematic questions, drawing on both the recorded interviews and relevant information that was related when the recorders were off, which was a common, yet not unexpected, occurrence.

Question A) Which aspects of the processes used to advance an initiative contributed to its fate?

Of all the thematic questions, we received the most data on Question A. Overall, there was near consensus from those we interviewed that the most recent GE Reform effort was a success, if only because GE was reformed, unlike many attempts in the past. Although many interviewees had differing opinions on exactly how this success could be measured or, more specifically, what criteria should be used to measure success, the most basic measure of its success was noted by many to be that the new GE Reform initiative was passed and was implemented. One interviewee who was a member of the Faculty Senate, commenting on the 48 to 6 vote to pass the GE Reform initiative in the Faculty Senate, related, “If the Senate had a resolution that tomorrow the sun will come up, I’m not sure we could pass it 48 to 6.” While many of the interviewees had myriad and contradictory opinions and beliefs on what caused this most recent GE Reform effort to succeed when so many others had not, some consensus and several broad patterns emerged on certain aspects of the GE Reform process that many believe led to this fate.

Broad Representation and Participation

The most common aspects regarded the advancement of the GE Reform initiative related to us by interviewees were the broad representation of Departments and the campus-wide community on the GE Reform Task Force itself and the participation of the campus-wide community and all interested individuals in the reform process. These were also cited as the primary reasons why the most recent initiative succeeded while so many others have failed. Almost all interviewees, with a few exceptions, believed that every Department and College that needed or desired to be involved in the process of GE Reform had a representative on the Task Force. Even those interviewees who believed that there were some groups who did not receive the representation they should have, often remarked that the Task Force may not have succeeded the way it did if it had been any larger. Furthermore, other groups besides Departments and Colleges, such as Associated Students and the EPC, were represented or, at least, had their opinion heard by the Task Force.

Connected intimately with the broad representation of interested parties, was the broad participation in the process the Task Force received. This is one of the ways in which the Task Force created an atmosphere where, as one interviewee related, “everyone had their say.” The broad participation in the
GE Reform process came as a result of many factors, although the Task Force’s constant request for participation was the most cited cause. As one interviewee related, the Task Force went “begging” for participation and comment from any who may be interested. Furthermore, each member of the Task Force was required to obtain comment and participation from individuals in their respective Departments and Colleges, which they were then required to bring back to the Task Force. Each representative was also required, in consultation with his or her Department or College, to develop a GE model and present it to the Task Force, which further increased direct participation.

Communication and Transparency

Two often cited and connected aspects of the process used to advance the GE Reform initiative were effective communication and the transparency of the GE Reform process, which were also causes for the effectiveness of the previously mentioned broad participation. Effective communication existed not only between the Task Force members but also between the Task Force and the campus-wide community. In contrast to many groups and committees that attempted GE Reform in the past, the atmosphere of the 2003-2004 GE Reform Task Force was often described by interviewees, who were members or who witnessed meetings, as “congenial” or as “collegial.” Although, as one interviewee related, “there were some tensions” between members of the Task Force, effective communication ameliorated these tensions.

One of the most effective aspects of this communication was its multi-directionality. Both the Task Force members and individuals from the campus-wide community who commented on the process or voiced their concerns ultimately saw a response to their comments and opinions. As one interviewee related, “[The Task Force] actually came back with proposals that reflected what people had told them,” which resulted in a general feeling “that [the Task Force] is listening to us.” Above all, this process and all the actions of the Task Force were transparent to the campus-wide community, who were kept constantly updated on the progress of the Task Force, and transparent to other groups such as the EPC, top-level administrators, and to the Faculty Senate, all of which the Task Force kept regularly updated.

Strong Leadership and Clear Goals

Many interviewees commented on the strong leadership of the Jennifer Matos, Chair of the Task Force, and her ability to keep the Task Force focused on the clear-cut goal to reduce the number of GE units to 48, as major positive influences on the advancement of the GE Reform initiative. Matos also effectively mitigated tensions between Task Force members and created an atmosphere in which everyone was allowed to “put their ideas on the table,” without allowing meetings to deteriorate into the bickering and fighting that epitomized committees who had previously attempted GE Reform. While the initial goal to reduce the number of GE units was a product of the Graduation Rates Task Force, and having this goal alone was often cited as a possible cause of the GE reform initiative’s success, many interviewees commented that Matos was essential in keeping the Task Force focused on this goal. Although the consensus among Task Force members was that GE had become “untenable,” and “cumbersome,” a few members believed that GE units should be increased. As such, Matos’ guidance and ability to explain this goal to members was necessary.

Administrative Reassurance and “Share the Pain”

The reduction of GE units to 48 meant that nine units had to be cut from the GE program that was in effect before the 2003-2004 reform effort. Because this was the clear goal that the Task Force hoped to accomplish, it was understood that some Departments and Colleges would lose required GE units, and, therefore, lose resources and enrollment numbers. GE units are often thought of as “cash cows,” as one interviewee related, and the loss of any courses would have a negative impact on certain Departments and Colleges, especially those that provided numerous GE course. Many interviewees related that the prospect of losing resources, students and, ultimately, courses led to the failure of past GE Reform
initiatives. As one interviewee stated, representatives of Departments and Colleges working on past GE Reform efforts were told by those they represented to “do whatever you need to do to maintain our share of the pie.” In the case of the most recent GE Reform initiative, two major aspects prevented this from occurring as it had in the past.

On one hand, this problem was ameliorated from an administrative standpoint; while on the other hand, it was dealt with by the Task Force itself. Many interviewees commented on the administration’s ability to frame the reduction of GE units in “a nonthreatening manner” and their ability to reassure Departments, Colleges, and Task Force members that no single Department or College would face major losses. This reassurance that no single Department or College would face loss led to a feeling on the Task Force that every Department and College would “share the pain” of any losses equally. This, although not solely, prevented much of the Departmental fighting that epitomized past GE Reform efforts. One interviewee stated that this reassurance, along with the success of the process, made people realize that “you can have curriculum reform without the…ideological battles of the past.”

“The Time was Right” and Putting Students First

The final aspects responsible for the successful passage of the most recent GE Reform initiative are less concrete that many of the others, yet they were no less important to the ultimate fate of the initiative. Many interviewees commented on facets of the atmosphere that existed among faculty and administrators on the CSUN campus at the time. Almost unanimously, interviewees related ideas similar to “the time was right” and “change was in the air.” Although recreating such an atmosphere may be impossible, several interviewees related more concrete causes for why this atmosphere existed. Some commented that a much younger generation of faculty and administrators were present on campus, which had very different ideas about General Education and embraced change. Furthermore, many of those involved both directly and indirectly with the most recent GE Reform process strongly believed in “putting students first.” This, according to most, was in stark contrast to past processes, especially attempts at GE Reform, in which, as previously mentioned, many of those involved put the interests of their respective Departments and Colleges first.

Question B) Did the university devote core resources to the initiative? If yes, how were they used?

For the purposes of this study, resources were defined specifically as staff and faculty support, time reassignments, and materials supplied towards the support of the GE Reform initiative prior to the process, during the process, and in the implementation phase of GE reform. Resources were differentiated from resource allocation, the latter having to do with fiscal concerns. The question of devoting resources to the initiative was answered in distinct ways depending on the position of the interviewee or their role in the GE Reform process. Answers also depended on their view of the process itself and on their opinions regarding the success or failure of the initiative. When asked about resources, most interviewees quickly correlated resources to time reassignments but proceeded to stress the resolve of the Task Force to accomplish their task as the primary cause for the ultimate success of the initiative. Nevertheless, many of the interviewees believed that reassign time should have been considered in many cases. At one level, the issue of counseling and advising seemed to be taken for granted, while at another level, it was passed on to individual Departments and Admission and Records during implementation.

Resources Utilized by the Task Force

There was really no consensus among those interviewed as to what the GE Reform Task Force was given in terms of resources. Many interviewees specified that Task Force members were given large amounts of clerical and informational resources to support the process. Clerical and informational resources generally consisted of documents and a book that was used to study current, national educational reforms. Some Task Force members commented that the Office of Undergraduate Studies
supplied them with resources in terms of copies and materials. One staff member stressed how materials and copies came out of her Department for the most part.

In addition to documents and material resources, it is clear that technological resources, such as e-mail, were used by the Task Force, but some interviewees believed that the Task Force did not fully take advantage of technological resources. As one Task Force member stated, “A lot of trees were killed in the process because… paper was flowing all over the place.” Technology such as e-mailing and blogging was available at the time. Therefore, the issue is not that technology was not present and available but that it was not utilized effectively. The Task Force was using it to some degree, but there was still heavy reliance on conversations, phone calls, and the exchange of documents rather than electronic or computer based communication.

It was clear from all Task Force members we interviewed that time spent on the Task Force was generally voluntary, and most members put time reassignments as a secondary priority. A few interviewees related frustration regarding the University’s failure to recompense those that clearly devoted their valuable time and effort throughout the entire process. As one interviewee commented, “When faculty have other responsibilities in the University and within their Department, it becomes real difficult to devote yourself completely to the process, even though we did.” Most Task Force members did receive some release time to work on the initiative, but what they received was limited. The responsibility and resolve in getting the task done was put squarely on the shoulders of the Task Force members.

**Resources Devoted to the Implementation**

The main resource used in implementation, according to many of the Task Force members, was the dedication of the GE Reform Task Force and their long periods working on the initiative in terms of informing their constituencies by attending the Task Force meetings. In the Colleges, they had various advisement sessions that were constructed to inform the faculty and students. However, implementation, according to most interviewees, was essentially a smooth process that required dedicated communication throughout the university through series of networks that relied on informing and feedback.

For Admissions and Records, however, the process of implementation was different in that it took a lot of planning beforehand. They relied heavily on the Degree Audit Report System (DARS), which is a computerized audit of classes taken by students and requirements for graduation still to be met. Members of Admissions and Records explained that that all the software they had to write was for the new GE plan, which they labeled Plan R, and, at the same time, they had to have dual set ups to be able to deal with the population of students on the old plan. The complex part about implementation was that they had a group of students under an existing plan, labeled C (some student to this day are still under this plan), and, at the same time, had to implement plan R while maintaining plan C. As one of the interviewees related, “It is not easy to change something while it is still working; it’s like changing something on a faucet when the water is still on.”

**Departmental Resources**

Additional resources were devoted to Departments and the Academic Colleges that were affected by the GE Reform initiative, while others were reassured that the new GE plan and its resource affect would not force the closure of their respective Department or Colleges. Among the most affected was the College of Science and Mathematics, primarily because of the new GE program’s addition of another required laboratory course. Because physical laboratory facilities were already impacted on campus and because laboratory courses can only hold a certain maximum number of students, this change presented a major problem for affected Colleges and Departments. However, this problem was anticipated by the Task Force, Administrators, and the affected Colleges. The College of Science and Mathematics, for example, performed an Economic Analysis, which found that the addition of a required laboratory course
would cost a few hundred thousand dollars. From all accounts, the CSUN Administration understood this and assured the College that these resources would be supplied. Other Colleges and Departments also lost resources because of the reduction in GE units. However, as previously mentioned, the Administration reassured that any losses would ultimately be covered. As some interviewees related, initially, many Departments thought the implementation of the new GE program meant, “The end is coming,” at least for their Departments. Ultimately, this did not occur. The new GE plan, instead, produced a situation in which many Departments and Colleges created GE courses that have since become popular and increased enrollment and resources in those Departments and Colleges.

Although some resources were devoted to Departments to implement the most recent GE Reform initiative, supplying counseling and advisement to help inform students of their new General Education options was limited and was, for the most part, left up to the Departments themselves to handle. However, resources of this kind that primarily focus on delivering academic advisement and mentoring had a negligible impact on the Departments and Colleges. Many interviewees commented that advisement was easier on the new GE plan.

Discussion

In looking at how resources were provided for the Task Force and how these resources helped in implementation of the new GE reform, it is obvious that the issue of time reassignments is something that needed to be addressed at the time. Most of the interviewees talked about more reassign time as something that would have greatly aided the GE Reform process. On the other hand, interviewees often returned to the idea that they were not thinking about the money but instead were thinking about educational goals and the students that they were representing. They saw themselves as representing the students and the University as a whole. However, many interviewees raised important questions regarding this subject that remain unanswered:

What would have happened if time reassignments were distributed to everybody? Would meeting attendance have increased? Would there have been less turnover? Would there have been an increase in effort? What kind of message is sent when only some of the Task Force Members are being paid? Does this mean that some people worked harder, better, or more than others did?

One topic of concern, which was widely ignored both during and after the process, is advisement or counseling. The University, as it grows, must consider that the workload of students and the student-to-faculty ratio have both increased. Earlier in this decade, more faculty were hired to maintain a reasonable student-to-faculty ratio. Today, as one interviewee related, “We don’t have any money,” and, when it comes to student support, there is no acknowledgement of the increase of students. There is only the expectation that advisors are going to have to change how they do advisement. Accordingly, advising goes from one student at a time to advising a group of ten students at once. The quality of advising is significant in informing students about their GE choices, about how they may be able to graduate faster, and about what classes to take if others are not available. Because one of the major goals of the GE Reform initiative was to increase graduation rates, some find it surprising that more resources are not devoted to advising. As one interviewee stated, “We usually have other students do the advising in our Department and sometimes a professor but his availability is limited and usually if they need advice they know where to find it; we don’t ask because we assume they know.”

Question C) Did the initiative feature committees or partnerships bridging divisions and units? Were these consciously established or unplanned coincidences?

As previously mentioned in the response to Question A, broad representation and participation and effective communication were cited as the primary factors contributing to the success of the GE Reform initiative. There was wide consensus that earlier attempts failed because each College was mainly
concerned with its Full Time Equivalent Students (FTES) and fought bitterly to preserve the resources they received from General Education courses. Essentially, the negative aspects of these divisions were absent from the GE Reform Task Force. Almost all interviewees agreed that every Department and College was adequately represented on the Task Force and that ample communication was maintained throughout the GE Reform process. The partnerships and committees of the GE Reform Task Force were created by an election process in which the faculty of each College elected a representative to the Task Force. The Task Force itself elected one member to serve as Chair. Additionally, other committees such as the EPC, the Faculty Senate, the Provost Council, Associated Students, and faculty across campus participated in this intense, broad coalition of networking and supplied additional feedback to the Task Force. Ultimately, the goal of creating these partnerships was consciously established very early in the Task Force and earlier in groups who met to discuss the creation of the GE Reform Task Force. One of the most important concerns of those who met to create the Task Force, as one interviewee related, was that it not repeat the mistakes of the past. Broad representation and participation, effective communication, and transparency were all goals that this early group consciously planned to incorporate into the GE Reform Task Force and the GE Reform process.

The GE Reform Task Force

The feeling among interviewees was that everybody on the GE Reform Task Force was quite vested in reforming General Education. Although some Task Force members were almost certainly feeling pressures from their Colleges or Departments, their behavior and attitude were very professional, and the whole experience was very collegial. One interviewee related that, of course, there were members of the Task Force who put their Departmental interests first, and remarked, “You have got to watch out for the curriculum type of mentality.” However, most interviewees related that the Task Force members were very respectful to each other, that everybody listened to everybody else’s viewpoints, and that there was a lot of back-and-forth discussion about General Education. According to some, discussions did become heated at times but these could not be compared to the divisive battles of past GE Reform efforts. Additionally, some interviewees made it a point to state that everyone on the Task Force came in with an “open mind” and with the stated goal of reducing units to increase graduation rates.

Nevertheless, a few interviewees described the discussions as frustrating, contentious, and draining. However, this was not necessarily a negative attribute because, as one interviewee explained, these kinds of discussions “guided [the Task Force] even in these contentious moments and still the general agreement was that [the Task Force] needed to lower GE.” Special emphasis was devoted to acknowledge that they needed to accomplish this in a manner that would be fair to every Department and College, while thinking of the students. As previously mentioned, the strong and effective leadership of Jennifer Matos was repeatedly commented on by interviewees, especially concerning her ability to maintain an atmosphere that allowed heated yet productive discussions and her ability to maintain the partnership that did form across traditional divisions and units.

One such division, as one interviewee related, is the division between what those in what he called “professional” programs and those in subjects that are considered “traditional Liberal Arts.” During the process of GE Reform, he saw his view as opposing others who were more interested in specific “professional programs,” which led to “fighting” between him and others. Although he knew many Task Force members held views similar to his own, he was surprised at “how many professionals actually also value that traditional core value of liberal education.” This agreement across traditional divisions led to a “consensus” being reached among the members of the GE Reform Task Force, even though, as he related, “not everybody was satisfied with everything.”
Discussion

A few interviewees thought that if the Task Force had consisted of fewer members, the process would have been shorter and completed sooner, while others commented that not everyone who should have been represented on the Task Force was represented and that it should have been larger. However, in both cases, these same interviewees often commented that the GE Reform initiative might not have succeeded if the Task Force had been different: if it had been larger, communication and participation would have suffered and fewer partnerships would have formed across divisions, while if it had been smaller, broad representation would have suffered.

While the opportunity for a wide range of individuals to participate in the process existed, there were many occasions when individuals, for a variety of reasons, were not able to participate. This created a situation in which the work continues but only those there contribute. Related to this problem was turnover and replacement of Task Force members. When a Task Force member was replaced, all the discussions, ideas, and all those things already said needed to be repeated. Accordingly, as one interviewee commented, for “people that were already involved in the process, repetition became…a drag.”

A different perspective on involvement and broad participation was given by some interviewees. One Task force member commented that, occasionally, “[Task Force members] were not being asked to give [their] approval; [they] were just being told this is what is going on.” This resulted in a feeling of exclusion at times because the decisions had already been made. Furthermore, some of the faculty thought it would not make sense to speak up if something seemed like a bad idea because of the politics of the situation and the position of the people involved. For instance, as one interviewee made it clear, “You have to remember some professors are vulnerable. I was not going to choose this opportunity to…upset people or offend people. I would not have known whose feet I was stepping on, so I was not going to step.”

While some squabbles and heated debates clearly took place among Task Force members, the Task Force still managed to deal with their problems and deal with the task they hoped to accomplish. As one interviewee related, “There were some people on the Task Force whose primary goal was to make sure that their area of the GE was not diminished.” However, even those who lost certain General Education requirements that they had fought for during the reform process, were ultimately satisfied with the process. As one interviewee who lost a significant GE requirement related, “I think the end result was a very good one, even though I lost out with that one thing.”

Conclusion

This report addresses the relevant thematic questions proposed as part of CSUN’s Capacity and Preparatory Review process for the particular case of the most recent GE Reform initiative. Ultimately, the interviews we conducted provided a wealth of data that was used to accomplish this task. However, an understanding of General Education and the process used to reform General Education arrived at through the analysis of documents was fundamental in achieving a more contextual view of what interviewees related. Furthermore, a comparison of the most recent successful process with failed reform efforts of the past provided conclusions that could not have been arrived at without an understanding of those past reform efforts. The interviews also revealed that a wealth data still remains available, which can be further uncovered through more interviews. Additionally, many questions and themes arose during the interview processes that, although not directly related to the primary thematic questions, are relevant to the theme of Advancing as a Learning-centered University and to the latest GE Reform initiative. To conclude this report, we will discuss some of these themes, discuss further research that needs to be undertaken, and discuss what we have learned, personally, from the experience of conducting the research for this report.
Success and Sustainability

Although interviewees almost unanimously agreed that the most recent GE Reform initiative was a success, many commented on what objective criteria could be used to measure that success and the initiative’s sustainability. Interviewees rarely thought that the GE Reform initiative was unsustainable, but many expressed opinions such as “let’s wait and see.” Most interviewees expressed opinions such as, “I think [GE Reform is] very sustainable; I think we are already seeing that and experiencing it.” Support for their opinion was based mostly on their personal beliefs and experience interacting with students. Many related that they have seen students graduate faster under the reformed GE program and that students find the new GE plan much easier to navigate through, much easier to understand, and find it offers more choice to take courses of interest to them. Others saw an increase in minors as evidence for the initiative’s success. One interviewee asserted that faculty members from all Colleges are seeing an increase in minors throughout campus, although no evidence to support this assertion was presented. One of the interviewees explained that proof of the GE Reform’s success and sustainability could be seen in a recent phenomena: students were asking if they could have their minors put on their diploma. The interviewee believed that the new GE program allows for more minors and is having the desired effect of opening up new opportunities for students.

The “wait and see” approach concerning both the initiative’s success and its sustainability was also commonly expressed by interviewees. Because recertification of specific sections of the new GE plan occurs yearly, it is difficult to determine the sustainability of the GE Reform initiative until at least one recertification cycle is complete. While this may be a hindrance to determining the sustainability of the initiative, the constant reexamination of GE was seen by many as one aspect that would make it more sustainable and successful. As one professor related,

[The GE Reform initiative] is sustainable. I know every year the EPC is recertifying the GE courses in a section. That process is going to help as to make sure that people are really doing what they say they are doing in the GE courses and everybody is being evaluated fairly, so let’s just wait and see for now.

A few interviewees questioned both the success of the GE Reform initiative and its sustainability, although they were not necessarily claiming that the new GE program was unsustainable. Instead, some questioned the goals of GE in relation to its sustainability, while others questioned if sustainability should really be a goal, remarking that flexibility and change are more important than sustainability. Interviewees generally agreed that the goal of the GE Reform initiative was to reduce GE units in order to increase graduation rates. However, a few interviewees believed that this was a narrowly constructed goal. According to these few interviewees, the success and sustainability of the GE Reform initiative should not be related to an increase in graduation rates but related to the amount and quality of General Education students are receiving. As one interviewee related,

Can you imagine what students are losing? Changing GE is also a question of epistemology that was not even seriously considered. Yes, [students] are graduating faster, but what kind of knowledge are they getting kicked out the door with? Better they take more courses, take more time in school, and have a complete coherent educational experience.

However, this was clearly a minority opinion. Most interviewees related sentiments such as, “if [students] take between four and five classes a semester [they] are going to be out in four years, and believe that students were unable to graduate in a timely manner before GE was reformed.

Future Research

Many questions were raised and many themes were revealed during the course of our research that deserve further exploration. These questions and themes can primarily be addressed be through
interviews with people we did not have a chance to talk to and with people or groups of people who were recommended to us by those we interviewed. It would be especially useful to interview individuals from Student Advisement Services and to interview faculty members who were farther away from the GE Reform process. One group that was greatly affected by GE Reform and could clearly provide a wealth of data regarding it is students. Although interviews and document analysis have proven highly effective in achieving our results and should be continued, other methods might also prove useful. Surveys sent through e-mail could reach a wide number of people and would be effective to gauge the opinions concerning GE Reform across large groups such as faculty and students. Focus groups consisting of faculty or students might also provide a more detailed view of thoughts and experiences than a survey could achieve. It would also prove useful to examine the constantly mentioned measures of success of the GE Reform such as graduation rates to determine if they have actually increased. Although this report successfully addresses many of the proposed thematic questions, more readily available data exist that would further enrich these results.

A Learning Experience

Serving as members of a Task Force, consisting primarily of administrators and faculty members, that was working towards an important institutional goal was a unique and, ultimately, rewarding learning experience. Our research gave us a view of the University that students seldom get to see, and we interacted with administrators and faculty members in ways that students seldom do. Besides the direct learning we received, such as in interview techniques and document analysis, which will be extremely useful to our careers as graduate students, we also came to understand more clearly how the University operates as an institution, how Departments and Colleges relate to each other, and became much more comfortable working with and approaching individuals who traditionally seem unapproachable to the student.

Through the course of our research into the GE Reform process and through talking to the GE Reform Task Force members, we intimately learned the details of how things change at a large University such as CSUN. One of the most impressive aspects of this process was the magnitude of dialogue and communication, and how this continuous dialogue is critical to making decisions at such a large institution. Furthermore, the sense of accomplishment among the GE Task Force members revealed that faculty members and administrators do have real concern for the students and are extremely proud when they accomplish something that benefits the students. The experience of serving as members of the Theme 3 Task Force also revealed how individuals in a University come together to accomplish things. For students, the processes that produce changes in the University and, ultimately, in students’ education seem to take place behind closed doors. Having the opportunity to not only see but to participate in these processes was an invaluable experience that has enriched our CSUN experience.

One of the most interesting and useful things we learned is related to the power differential between students, on one hand, and faculty and administrators, on the other. While a professor or a faculty advisor is often seen as easily approachable to students, as an individual’s power and authority increases within the University, they are perceived of as much less approachable. Accordingly, students may have trouble interacting with the head of their Department, the Dean of their College, and other faculty members or administrators. Initially, the prospect of interviewing top-level administrators, faculty members, and Deans, which we were told that we would do as part of our research for this report, was intimidating. We could not imagine why any of these powerful individuals would allow a graduate student to interview them and believed that any interview we did attempt to conduct would be terrible and nerve-racking. However, this was not the case; interviewees were friendly, helpful, and extremely interested in what we were doing, why were doing it, and were often regretful that they could not assist us more. More importantly, they were interested in us as students and frequently asked about our majors, asked what we thought about CSUN, and truly wanted the interviews to be productive. Of course, understanding that
individuals in position of power within the University are approachable and interested in students can only enhance our experience as students at California State University—Northridge.
Study Initiative Statement and Background

California State University, Northridge is preparing for its ten year WASC re-accreditation review in 2011. It will demonstrate to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges its capacity for learning as an institution. In support of this effort, the campus has assigned three case studies of campus wide initiatives in the past ten years, which include: General Education Reform, Graduation Rates Task Force, and the Campus Master Plan. For the purposes of this case study we will be concerned with the Campus Master Plan Initiatives. The objective of this case study is to answer research questions such as, “What can we learn from past initiatives to move ongoing projects forward?”, “How can we continue to build on our successes or improve in the implementation of the planning initiatives?”, and “In what ways has the University succeeded or struggled in demonstrating the capacity to practice continual learning in the implementation of the physical Master Plan since 2006?”. The result of this study will be an analysis of the processes used to develop the 2006 Master Plan and an assessment of the plans impact and effectiveness.

Master Plan Process and Recommendations (2005)

The process involved collaboration with campus and neighboring communities, and comprised of four phases: data collection, planning and analysis, development of Master Plan alternatives, and development of the draft plan and final documentation. Each phase of the process included public outreach in the form of forums and news announcements such as in the local newspaper so that input from campus and community members could be incorporated into the final Master Plan. Planning criteria for the Master Plan was aligned under six principles: campus functional organization, making use of under utilized and vacant land(s), appropriate building placement, enhancement of campus landscape, design of campus vehicle circulation and parking systems, and maintaining a positive relationship with neighboring residential and commercial communities. The plan was developed to address the enrollment requirements over the next 30 years based on California State University projections.

Context of My Involvement

David Saldana Jr., sociology graduate student, California State University, Northridge with a B.A. in Sociology with an option in Criminology and Criminal justice. Responsible for data acquisition, analysis, and drafting of case study.
A Case Study Method Approach

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.

Data Collection and Methods

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

Protecting the Respondents from Harm

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.

Findings and Issues Discovered

- **Elements and Themes that advanced the outcome for the Master Plan Initiative**

1) **Organization: Key linking of groups and committees**

“California State University, Northridge did well to organize and communicate logistics when implementing committees to address each specific need of its campus.”- Consultant

“…excellent at communication and working with concerns of the surrounding community and also serving the individual and group interests.”- Northridge Community Member

“This institution (CSUN) should be a blue-print for all other campuses to follow.”- Consultant

“Groupings and committees were formed and overseen to assure organization and communication across the board.”- CSUN rep1

“The committee worked very well. And, the structure of the committee and coordinating what we were doing with Admin and Finance. Communication is key, because we didn’t want any particular group to be off on its own.”-CSUN rep1

“I knew somewhat about the plan of the campus to expand but when I looked deeper, it seemed organized with chairs of groups, which was nice because my classes (getting into) were unorganized”- CSUN student83
Analysis

California State University, Northridge through themed analysis of “organization” has exhibited its ability to efficiently organize its resources. Multiple respondents many times indicated that CSUN, based on its organization and oversight of its committees, maximized the resources available. Respondents during the interviews were visually sincere through observation of facial expressions and tone of voice when explaining their reasoning for stating that CSUN is an organized institution. It is valid to state, based on the number of respondents who cited positive organizational learning, that CSUN excelled at this phase of advancement of the Master Plan.

2) Communication: Information disseminated appropriately

“We felt that CSUN really gave us the opportunity to voice our opinion and listen to our concerns regarding the formation of the campus expansion planning (Master Plan)”. –City Member1

“I liked how they would post things or put notice when forums or meetings were held, it was advanced notice and properly communicated ...” – Community Member3

“We had a list of numbers and extensions for us to call at any time and if no one was available we could always leave a message and get a call back usually the same day.”- CSUN rep2

“Everyone was on the same page and if something was questioned it was resolved fairly quickly and efficiently.”- CSUN rep4

“Oh it was easy with Colin (Donahue), he did such a great job of keeping us informed and vice-versa, it was easy to talk (to each-other).”- Consultant

“The meetings were great. They told us the plan and even though some people in my community didn’t agree with them, CSUN was still willing to listen and compromise when it could.”-Community member 2

Analysis

California State University, Northridge has exhibited, through respondent themed analysis, that it was able to communicate to multiple groups of concerned parties and stakeholders regarding the planning and implementation of the Master Plan. Communication was cited as a strength for the advancement of the Master Plan, though some ideas were not wholly agreed upon by some parties, it was the act of “speaking and listening” which moved the processes forward.

3.) Consistency: Accountability and Professionalism

“I unfortunately grew up in a stage of life when it was common to see things unfinished or not built. It got to be such a nuance that I expected every college to be like that, to say they would build this or that to attract prospective students and they didn’t do[anything]. Luckily when my daughter attended CSUN they did follow through, more parking and other things. They kept their word and have been consistent in many things”- Community member1

“When they said they would have those Master Plan meetings, they did. It felt good to be heard every time. They didn’t just send peons or underlings from the campus, they sent people who could actually change things, every time, every meeting. I loved that!”- CSUN student2

“Every time we communicated with CSUN it was always a good consistent answer, never a different answer from a different person but the same answer from each one. That’s how I knew they were on the same page.”- Consultant
“We had meetings at least once a month to discuss progress in the (master) planning, to make sure that if any issues arose that they were taken care of quickly and efficiently.”- CSUN Rep1

“I felt like they kept their word on a lot of things, they said they would have meetings regardless of two or thirty people showing up.”- Community Member2

Analysis

*California State University, Northridge has displayed, through thematic analysis, its ability to remain professional, accountable, and consistent in its actions. Many respondents felt that CSUN kept its word regarding meetings and updates. They also felt they were truly listened to, from students to community members to consultants and to faculty. All felt equally respected in their interaction with CSUN. Based on these findings and facts, it is accurate to state CSUN remains consistent and professional in its interaction with many groups and individuals which help to further the advancement of the Master Plan.*

4.) Resources: Documents, information, space

“If anything was not available to us, such as an EIR (Environmental Impact Report), CSUN would assure we would have it in hours but usually we got it in minutes.”-Consultant

“I don’t recall having to ask for and not get anything. From contacts to plans, it was readily available. The committee assured access to everything and really followed through.”- CSUN rep2

“Document access was key in a lot of areas; sometimes it was actually vital for continuation of a project. Prior certification or licensure was at times needed and, yes, it was quickly available.”- CSUN rep1

“Whenever we wanted access to information or documentation, it was available with a simple phone call usually. Colin was very good about returning phone calls.”-CSUN rep1

Analysis

*California State University, Northridge has exhibited its ability to quickly and easily make use of resources and data acquisition. Respondents felt that the funneling of information was made exceptionally easy and efficient. Based on these findings, CSUN does well to maximize use of its resources and make readily available anything not within immediate reach. CSUN, through its ease of use and access of resources, has in itself assured advancement with this element of advancing the Master Plan initiative.*

- *Elements and Themes that Hindered the outcome for the Master Plan Initiative*

1.) Student Concern(s): Students voicing displeasure and concern

“I hate how I have to pay extra, like almost every year, for something I won’t even be able to use after I graduate. It’s ridiculous to see an increase in fees every single semester.”-CSUN student84

“It’s a bad inconvenience when you get to school on time but are late for class because they always outsell the parking passes beyond what the student lots and other parking can hold.”- CSUN student1

“When I have to walk around certain areas because of annoying construction, when will they stop building?”-CSUN student2

“They need to replace some buildings here. I feel ghetto sometimes when I walk into Sierra Hall as it is. How about more landscaping and less game room?”- CSUN student84

“These classrooms are cramped sometimes. They need to be bigger and safer. How come they only have like one golf hole for 25 golf students? That’s ridiculous.”
Analysis

California State Northridge, Students voiced many concerns but none really more apparent than issues with parking and having to pay for services they may never use. Their complaints and concerns were noticeably scattered and not very thematic in nature. Student respondents had multiple concerns but again nothing definitive to validly state a single entity may be hindering campus advancement. Student contentment is a vital entity of campus life and their concerns should none-the less be considered for future initiatives.

2.) Community Concerns: Community Member issues

“The campus should make it mandatory for all students to park on CSUN property and not on private streets. The traffic is such a hassle. They take up valuable parking. Sometimes I will see a student who moves a vehicle then moves it right back to avoid getting a ticket.”- Comm. Member2

“All student housing needs to be on campus, so many parties and nuisances occur that disrupt the quality of life here. If they (students) were on campus this wouldn’t be an issue.”- Comm. Member1

“They are building that huge new performing arts center on Nordhoff but its not near any of the main businesses on Reseda. There needs to be a bridge for that to happen.”- Northridge Community Member1

“Students leave a mess everywhere they go, They should have other police or patrol watching that. Every time there is a show or a concert that brings hooligans here, there is a huge mess left behind in the streets, from Skittles wrappers to condom wrappers. I’m getting tired of it.”- Northridge Community Member2

“I don’t feel like they have a bridge to communicate with us like they did before Judy (Nutter) retired. They have a new gal but she doesn’t really talk to us or keep us informed like Judy did.”- Northridge Council Member 1

“I wish they would have someone like Judy Nutter who kept us very well informed on campus planning or initiatives. After she retired it hasn’t been the same.”- Comm. Member1

“Why did they build the Performing Arts Center away from the main businesses on Reseda? People won’t walk over there and see what we have to offer; they will just get in their car(s) and leave.” –Northridge Council Member1

Analysis

Community Respondents, based on the data, feel that a “bridge” to communication is needed but still not active. Respondents also stated that student life seemingly negatively impacts the quality of theirs, citing loud concerts, trash, and other nuisances. Community members also stated they would like to see the Campus Master Plan more readily intertwine with local businesses, such as those on Reseda Blvd. It is as though the community respondents would like CSUN to actively pursue monetary interest in the city. The community concerns as stated seem to indicate a need for periodic communication and further collaboration regarding their issues.

3.) Professional or Faculty Concern(s).

At the time of this research there were no clearly indicative concerns or issues by either faculty or professional entities involved in this study. Hindrance or any issues that could impede the advancement of this research are not wholly noted at this time.

4.) Collaborations which contributed to the Campus Master Plan Initiatives.
“It was clear that with the committees they had formed it was effective in implementing the Master Plan.” - Consultant

“Oh yes, having the community involved with feedback and such really was vital in knowing the needs of the area.” - CSUN rep4

“It was nice to see a smooth operation, of sorts, with a lot of people working together. Not everyone agreed on certain topics but at least the need for attention was known.” - CSUN rep2

Analysis

Much collaboration occurred during the course of the Campus Master Plan Initiatives. These collaborations occurred between many entities such as: task forces, committees, community members, campus and consulting agencies. The multiple collaborations were inherently planned and necessary in order to ensure the Master Plan’s effectiveness and institution. The past chair of the WASC committee at CSUN explained, in detail, how many faculty units and members collaborated on specific teams to ensure each component was properly addressed and in sync with each other. Community members also gave valuable input and feedback, which furthered CSUNs’ mission of working in collaboration with neighboring areas. The agencies, another resulting collaboration, were a necessity resulting from the need for architecture, traffic and safety research, and environmental condition changes. All collaborations as noted were planned and equally contributed to one another in the advancement of the Campus Plan.

Closing Findings and Case Study Assessment

Procedures: Scheduling many respondents was at times difficult due to the nature of their fields of profession. A few major respondents have yet to be interviewed but have stated they would like to be. Tape recording via digital means is not reliable and other methods should be considered. I was forced to use tapes when my device failed and erased some data. Short hand 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 (again citing organization and communication).

Conclusion of Study Findings: Indicated by the research thus far, California State University, Northridge seems to be geared towards communicating and learning for the purpose of its initiatives. Many times it was cited during this research that CSUN was willing to listen to input from multiple sources, good or bad, and use this information to move forward in implementing a learning environment. One of the facets of being a learning institution includes a willingness to seek out objective feedback from any source with a stake in the community and campus. CSUN did this repeatedly with open forums for ANYONE to attend, and website updates readily available again to anyone. All sources of communication asked for any ideas, comments, or concerns which can be used to help improve or maybe hinder the Campus Master Plan. The Master Plan (Envision 2035) itself and this conclusion align with the campus mission to collaborate with community, faculty, student body, and agencies to ensure a fair say in the planning and expansion of California State University, Northridge.