

REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

To California State University, Chico

March 4-6, 2009

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Reaffirmation of Accreditation

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The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution under the WASC Commission Standards and Core Commitments and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page numbers
SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT	
A. Description of the Institution and Visit	1
B. The Institution's Educational Effectiveness Review Report:	6
• Alignment with the Proposal	
• Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report	
C. Response to Issues Raised in the Capacity and Preparatory Review	8
SECTION II. EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS UNDER THE STANDARDS	
Theme 1: The Nature of Student Engagement at a Residential Campus	8
Theme 2: A Refinement of Academic Program Review Process	18
Theme 3: The Innovative Use of Technology	26
Theme 4: Towards Increased Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability	31
SECTION III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW	
Major Findings and Recommendations	34

EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW TEAM REPORT, CSU CHICO

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Visit

California State University, Chico, the origins of which date to 1887, is part of the 23-institution California State University System. The University occupies a scenic 119-acre campus that is immediately adjacent to downtown Chico. The close proximity between the campus and the business core of the city provides a wonderful college-town atmosphere, and the close town-gown relationship is an important part of the “Chico Experience.” The University has a Fall 2008 headcount enrollment of 15,692 undergraduates and 1,440 graduate students. The faculty ranks in academic year 2007-08 included 557 tenured or tenure-track faculty FTE, and 514 Lecturer FTE with a student faculty ratio of 21.6:1.

The Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Team Visit was conducted on March 4-6, 2009. The team conducted a comprehensive site visit on March 4th and 5th, and Dr. Donald J. Farish, Team Chair, met for an exit interview with President Paul Zingg on Friday, March 6th. The team wishes to thank President Zingg, Provost Sandra Flake, Vice President Drew Calandrella, the other members of the President’s Cabinet, the Deans, the Executive Committee of the Senate, the Academic Chairs, and the faculty and staff for their commitment to CSU, Chico, and for their time and effort. The university should be very proud of their students, particularly those who took time to meet with the visiting team, providing a vital perspective of the uniqueness of the “Chico Experience.” The team would also like to thank all of the participants in the two Poster Sessions for their enthusiasm in telling us both “The Chico Story” and the work that has been accomplished in assessment and improvement of student learning. Clearly, the faculty, staff and students are justifiably proud of CSU, Chico. Finally, the team

would like specifically to commend Dr. Arno Rethans, WASC Accreditation Liaison Officer, and his staff and steering committee for the quality of the materials presented to the team, both prior to and during the visit, and for the thoughtful and comprehensive itinerary developed for the visit.

Prior to this final phase of the university's accreditation process, CSU, Chico hosted the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) Visit in March of 2007. The visit was organized to permit assessment of the University's capacity in five areas that generally corresponded to the priorities within the CSU, Chico strategic plan as well as to the essays within the Capacity and Preparatory Review report. The CPR team found CSU, Chico to be "a vibrant and healthy institution with many admirable qualities. The University is commended for its strong community, and the remarkable commitment of the faculty, staff, and administration to student success."

The CPR Team noted several other commendable areas, programs and initiatives, including:

- The goals of the strategic plan;
- Progress on the important and challenging issue of diversity, under the strong leadership of President Zingg;
- The strong, collaborative, and experienced staff and students who are proud of their service and their role in turning around the 'image' of student behavior within the community;
- Integration of technology into the academic life; and
- The North State Initiative, the Sustainability Initiative, and the quality of civic engagement, with CAVE (Community Action Volunteers in Education) being particularly notable.

Finally, the CPR Team noted several issues and challenges to be addressed at the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review visit. In particular, CSU, Chico:

- Needs to establish performance indicators related to the six priorities identified in the strategic plan, with an implemented assessment plan;
- Needs to improve the manner by which it attests to its achievements in both the academic and the non-academic arenas;
- Needs to provide evidence of the degree to which program assessment and learning outcomes assessment are taking place, and are being used for programmatic improvement;
- Needs to provide an evidence-based analysis of the effectiveness of the General Education and First Year Experience programs;
- Needs to find ways of identifying and committing resources to the program assessment initiative, and a significant number of academic programs need to have learning assessments, with results demonstrating that educational effectiveness is in place;
- Should make the development of the Enterprise Knowledge Management Initiative one of its highest priorities in order to facilitate the assessment of educational effectiveness;
- Should invest in a unique opportunity to build first year learning community programs by carefully articulating the aspects of the Chico Experience that enhance student affinity for the community, and that support academic success in part by formalizing the relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs;
- Should articulate the need for increased diversity as more than merely equitable access. Despite welcome signs of progress, there are still significant concerns about the climate of the community, and the recruitment and retention of minority students, faculty, and staff;

- Should encourage Student Affairs to engage fully in a comprehensive program review process involving assessment and development of outcomes specific to the strategic plan, and encourage Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to work together to identify ways in which they might form more effective partnerships in support of student success;
- Should continue reformation of the Greek system, and the president's initiative on reducing the prevalence of alcohol, both highly commendable programs;
- Should develop a long-range deferred maintenance plan, and refresh plans for the residence halls;
- Should refine performance measures for information resources and technology;
- Should systematically consider succession planning for long-term staff.

The purpose of the EER team visit was two-fold:

- To review the work that has been accomplished since the CPR in addressing the issues raised during that visit as noted above; and
- To investigate further the themes and goals outlined in the EER Report, "The Heart of the Matter: Student Learning and Student Success."

The following essays document the team's efforts to understand and attest to CSU, Chico's success and challenges in meeting the laudable goals of their accreditation review.

B. The Institution's Educational Effectiveness Review Report: Alignment with the Proposal and Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report

In keeping with the Commission's goal of a focused accreditation process that permits adaptation and responsiveness to institutional context and priorities, California State University, Chico, elected to conduct both its Capacity and Preparatory Review and its Educational Effectiveness Review within the framework of Chico's mission, values, and vision statements

and the priorities of its *Strategic Plan for The Future*. The campus selected the following three themes for special emphasis in its Educational Effectiveness Review:

- The Nature of Student Engagement at a Residential Campus;
- The Refinement of the Academic Program Review; and
- The Innovative Use of Technology.

Based on the recommendation of the CPR visiting team that the campus “needs to improve the manner by which it attests to its achievements in both the academic and the non-academic areas,” the campus incorporated a fourth theme in its Educational Effectiveness Review:

- Towards Increased Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability.

In its concluding integrative essay, “Today Decides Tomorrow,” the university reflects on the findings of institutional engagements recounted in the Educational Effectiveness Review Report, and makes recommendations on how to ensure that the results of the EER become anchored in the evolving campus culture of evidence and accountability.

The EER team found CSU, Chico’s EER Report to be very well aligned with the original proposal and applauds the inclusion of the fourth theme, “Towards Increased Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability,” as it is directly responsive to a major concern raised in the CPR visit. The EER Report details carefully steps taken in the review, particularly in the area of assessment; it is detailed and forthright in its reporting of results and progress.

The report was well organized and provided substantial evidence through links, charts, graphs, and appendices. Documentation was easily accessible and provided evidence to support the themes. Particularly impressive was the amount of data collected and the university’s expressed desire for data-driven decision-making. The team anticipated seeing additional

evidence during the EER visit demonstrating how data are used to advance educational effectiveness, and to “close the loop” on student learning.

It was clear to the team, both in the materials supplied with the report and throughout the team visit, that CSU, Chico has taken seriously the recommendations of the CPR review, and has done significant and meaningful work to advance the overall educational effectiveness of the university. The team found near unanimity among the individuals interviewed attesting to the collective vision for the university, and commitment to the strategic goals and priorities jointly set by the CSU, Chico community.

C. Response to Issues Raised in the Capacity and Preparatory Review

CSU, Chico introduced Theme 4, “Toward Increased Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability,” as a direct response to issues raised in the CPR visit. Additionally, the university provided an appendix (Appendix III, CSU, Chico Response to CPR Recommendations) that enumerates the CPR recommendations, the campus actions taken and/or progress achieved, and links to evidence that supports the progress that has been achieved. The EER Report is responsive, detailed, and thorough in its treatment of the issues and recommendations raised by the team in the CPR visit.

The University clearly has taken seriously the issues and recommendations of the CPR visiting team. During the EER visit, members of the team were impressed with the substantial work that has been conducted during the interim between the two visits in addressing the concerns. Clearly, the University has committed itself to showing its fulfillment of the WASC standards and its commitment to the improvement of educational effectiveness.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS UNDER THE STANDARDS

Theme 1: The Nature of Student Engagement at a Residential Campus

The Chico Experience

In the CPR from 2007, the visiting team noted, “Although the team certainly recognized the significance and reality of the Chico Experience in the character and quality of the University, there did not seem to be a sufficient consensus definition of what the community understood that experience to entail.” The visiting team recommended “that the campus [carefully articulate] the aspects of the Chico Experience that enhance student affinity for the community, and that support academic success.” The centrality of The Chico Experience references CFRs 1.2; 1.3; 1.5; 2.11; 4.1; and 4.6.

It is readily apparent from the Educational Effectiveness Report that CSU, Chico has taken this recommendation to heart. In Theme 1 (The Nature of Student Engagement at a Residential Campus), the longest of the essays that comprise the EER self-study, the campus devotes almost five pages to The Chico Experience and connects it to diversity, the prevention of alcohol abuse, and the first year experience, among other programs at the university.

The energy and effectiveness underlying the manner in which the campus has addressed a more comprehensive understanding and definition of The Chico Experience is highly commendable. Through focus groups and surveys of both current students and alumni, the campus identified 44 distinct features and attributes that collectively circumscribe The Chico Experience, of which 9 are particularly prominent.

Not only has the campus encapsulated the primary elements of The Chico Experience, but it has also elected to derive from its studies a branding identity that is grounded on this concept—and far from being satisfied with a mere description of The Chico Experience, the campus is determined to find ways to enhance this unique feature of a CSU, Chico education.

A series of interviews with interested parties clearly demonstrated that (a) The Chico Experience is a real phenomenon; (b) it is manifested in related, but nevertheless distinct, ways

in individual students; (c) it has continued to evolve over time, such that current students value, to a significantly greater extent than do alumni, the opportunities afforded today's students to become involved in student organizations that are service providers to the North State; and (d) there is broad appreciation among students, faculty, staff, and alumni that The Chico Experience is a hallmark of a CSU, Chico education.

Much of what underlies The Chico Experience stems from the fact that students at CSU, Chico find themselves in a somewhat geographically isolated region, yet share space with the faculty and staff of the university; that they are inherently a traditional-age, residential population (albeit not, for the most part, in university housing); that they are in a quintessential college town, with a largely supportive local population; and that they are encouraged to join one or more of a seemingly endless range of student organizations that are focused on delivering a host of different services to the residents and communities of the North State.

The campus is clearly committed to finding ways of enhancing The Chico Experience, by coupling it with particular goals of increasing the proportion of students residing in campus-owned or campus-supervised housing; by combating the long-standing image of CSU, Chico as "a party school;" by addressing very directly the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption; by looking to be more inclusive, in the sense of finding ways to extend The Chico Experience to racial minorities; and by seeking to incorporate The Freshman Year Experience as a component of The Chico Experience.

In interviews the team found abundant evidence of a commitment to the extension and enhancement of The Chico Experience on the part of campus leaders. It was noted, for example, that students perceive that faculty and staff love the campus at least as much as the students do; that students excel in group activities at CSU, Chico, and gather easily and enjoy each other's company; that there now exists a model MOU between the campus police and the City of Chico

police (that among other things ensures that the town retains jurisdiction over the Greek houses—all of which are off-campus—but that allows the campus police to be first responders to incidents arising on Greek Row); and that the campus is now far more intentional regarding efforts to enhance diversity and educational success on the part of minority students.

The students noted and valued the “authentic relationships” with the faculty and staff at Chico, and spoke with reverence and affection for the campus, and what it has meant to them personally. One staff member noted that she felt “goose bumps” in the new sense of pride CSU, Chico had in itself, and noted, even in very difficult economic times, how empowered and confident the campus felt because of the sense that each person is surrounded by people who take a broad-based team-oriented position.

Recommendation: Even as the visiting team recognizes and applauds CSU, Chico’s embracing of the challenge of defining and refining The Chico Experience, it challenges the campus to find ways of extending the opportunities of a CSU, Chico education to a broader diversity of students; to persist in a branding exercise grounded in a sharper understanding of the uniqueness of a CSU, Chico education even in very trying economic times; to continue to challenge a culture still too grounded in alcohol abuse; and to incorporate ways in which The First-Year Experience connects integrally to The Chico Experience.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership and intentional partnerships are transforming the quality of student life at CSU, Chico. Approximately two years ago, a new Vice President for Student Affairs was empowered by a visionary President with a strong commitment to students. CSU, Chico leadership today is a vibrant partnership of faculty, student affairs staff and students building on the strengths of a mutual deep dedication to their university, and all that it is capable of becoming.

The Student Affairs Division has successfully addressed recommendations from the CPR visit (2007) including:

- Support academic success in part by formalizing the relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs: the Provost and Vice President for Student Affairs engage in active collaboration; Student Affairs partnerships with First-Year Experience through residential learning communities and residence hall-based faculty mentorship programs;
- Program Review: Student Affairs has fully engaged in a comprehensive program review process; and
- Residence Hall Improvement: CSU, Chico is aggressively moving forward to build additional on-campus residence halls, and is implementing a “refresh” program for current residence hall and dining hall space.

The CSU, Chico community celebrated the opening of a new student service building that provides “one-stop” comprehensive services and support for students. The new LEED-certified space is an active hub of activity, including warm niches for student networking. On the horizon is the opening of a 109,000 sq. ft. recreation center that will serve as a state-of-the-art fitness center indicative of a transformative partnership between CSU, Chico students and campus leadership.

The discussion that follows addresses three elements in the theme 1 essay concerning student engagement at a residential campus: diversity scorecard; alcohol and drug education; and first-year experience.

Diversity Scorecard

The CPR report acknowledged “welcome signs of progress” in 2007 but cited significant concern regarding campus climate issues. The CSU, Chico campus community has taken intentional and aggressive steps to address campus climate issues. Leadership representative of

all campus areas, supported by the President, are actively working together on the Diversity Scorecard.

CSU, Chico has embraced the Diversity Scorecard model developed at USC. The diversity committee is seeking to model Chico within the four quadrants of the scorecard framework. The working committee has focused on each area of the quadrant in analysis of data in curricular and co-curricular areas. For example, the committee assessed diversity coursework across campus and found diversity represented in 76% of CSU, Chico courses. The next level of analysis is to assess patterns of course enrollment. The committee has cited examples of diversity programs in nursing, agriculture and engineering.

The CSU, Chico EER report and meetings on campus acknowledged significant progress in addressing campus climate in additional areas. First to be noted is the fall 2007 opening of the Cross Cultural Leadership Center (CCLC). The CCLC is a benchmark of successful campus partnerships. CCLC serves as a “campus living room,” a safe zone, and a student leadership opportunity. Students describe the CCLC leadership opportunities as “...allow[ing] me to lead, to be somebody, to empower community.” Students excitedly and proudly describe their role in creating and implementing multiple diversity retreats within the past year.

The appointment of a new Diversity Director was applauded in multiple meetings during the EER visit. His role bridges both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs concerning campus climate and diversity. Department Chairs and faculty attribute the Director’s outreach and involvement as having a positive impact across campus. He has worked with colleagues to implement new campus rituals and traditions to welcome students to campus.

The Diversity Scorecard committee also cited new initiatives on behalf of students with disabilities. For example, faculty across departments are participating in a new program of

“disability camps” to provide training for faculty. The programs are in a successful second year and have received exceptional feedback.

While progress has been made, the Diversity Scorecard team and students are candid about challenges that remain:

- Students and faculty express concern that CSU, Chico continues to be a ‘hard sell’ for minority students, and a challenge in both the recruitment and retention of minority faculty;
- Where are the role models and mentors? Faculty and staff express concern about a lack of diversity in university leadership positions;
- The “culture shock” of CSU, Chico for students, faculty and staff from urban communities—Chico is an island;
- Numbers of students, faculty and staff from minority groups continue to decline; and
- Low graduation rates for Black and Latino/Latina students.

Next Steps: Campus Climate/Diversity Scorecard

Intentional and strategic management is critical to next steps concerning the Chico Diversity Scorecard and campus climate. The Diversity Scorecard group is planning to develop a comprehensive strategic plan. The strategic plan will identify specific goals, outcomes and accountability concerning the CSU, Chico campus climate (CFRs 4.1, 4.4, 4.6). Elements of the plan will include:

- Student recruitment plan to include funding for travel and campus visit programs;
- Model hiring practices and support systems for faculty and staff;
- Who’s next? Succession planning for current long term ‘voices’ and role models;
- Strategies to improve graduation rates, including commitment to a campus message of “4 years to graduation;”

- Diversity and program review within the curriculum; and
- Continued support for student programming and quality of space for student networking.

Finally, the Diversity Scorecard group emphasized the impact of the President as the “champion” of CSU, Chico’s commitment to diversity.

Alcohol and Drug Education

CSU, Chico is rewriting its history by implementing a comprehensive alcohol and drug education program. Chico is haunted by a history of its rankings on party school lists, events the reputations of which attracted large numbers of “guests” to the CSU, Chico community, and a campus culture that celebrated high risk drinking behavior. When incidents occur, the college town media is immediately on point as was illustrated in the issue of the student newspaper the team saw during the site visit.

The CSU, Chico community, led by university, community and student leaders is rewriting history and rebuilding identity based on the Chico experience of 2009, particularly concerning alcohol. The President is at the forefront of a “zero tolerance” policy, and Chico town/gown leadership is building a model community understanding. The President and the Vice President for Student Affairs are known for “walking the walk” at the start of each semester, and immediately engaging in dialogue with students following an incident. For example, the President quickly met with Greek leadership following a recent alcohol incident. CSU, Chico continues to support its Greek community while challenging them to meet, if not exceed, their organizational standards.

CSU, Chico is to be commended for the memorandum of understanding developed by university and community leaders. Community and university leaders are truly neighbors who do not define the boundaries of their respective neighborhoods by the acreage of the campus or a

walk across the street. There is a commitment to a safe quality of life, and the development of meaningful and respectful citizen leadership.

Aggressive campus programs and policies are elements of CSU, Chico's comprehensive program. The progressive impact is seen through reduction of campus incidents, participation in the Safer California Universities Project, and increased education. Increased alcohol education is primarily documented through AlcoholEdu, a program that received mixed reviews from students during a student meeting. However, the Freshman Safe Start program received positive reviews from students for content and long-term impact.

The Campus Alcohol and Drug Education Center is commended for its programmatic initiatives and peer education programs. Students spoke passionately about their training and experience at peer education facilitating sessions for students charged with alcohol related sanctions. Students proudly spoke about their role in implementing alternative programming, and recruiting the volunteers needed to manage successful and highly attended events.

CSU, Chico students were emphatic about who they are today: students with high academic values; a desire to be measured by their degree; and engaged in transforming their community. As a student peer educator stated: "You can't force someone to drink the water – but there is so much water to drink."

Next Steps: Alcohol and Drug Education

The WASC Team commends the President, the Vice President for Student Affairs, community leaders and students for their commitment to "re-write Chico's history" to reflect the Chico Experience 2009, including:

- Steadfast commitment to building additional housing to provide opportunity for all freshmen to live on campus (CFR 4.6); and

- Continuing University-Community shared commitment to strengthening community standards of citizen leadership (CFRs 4.6, 4.8).

We strongly recommend a continuing commitment to these worthy actions.

First-Year Experience

In 2007, the WASC team recommended that CSU, Chico invest in building first-year learning community programs, and formalize the relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. CSU, Chico has infused new energy into the First-Year Experience program through faculty and staff working directly with course and community development. While the FYE program has been in place since the early 1990s, renewed commitment and successful funding opportunities are revitalizing the program.

Beginning in 2006, the FYE programs began a cycle of classroom ethnographies and have recently chosen to focus on civic engagement. Students utilize campus technologies in coursework and research experience within the courses. Fall 2008 data illustrate a significant increase in information literacy. In addition, comparison of FYE course evaluations includes significant positive student feedback concerning campus resources, life skills, service learning, and personal wellness.

The FYE program is exploring and solidifying course linkages, including a successful town hall program within the English department. The town hall meeting provides students with direct experience in research and defense of their research findings.

FYE and student affairs are partnering to build residential learning communities. Civic engagement has been identified as a theme for the residential learning communities in fall 2009 and will have course linkages in support of the theme. In addition, FYE partners with Student Affairs to identify faculty mentors to mentor residence hall learning communities.

Progress concerning campus First-Year Experience is certainly notable since the 2007 WASC team visit.

Next steps: First-Year Experience

The WASC Team commends CSU, Chico for progress in developing a comprehensive First-Year Experience program and recommends the following for consideration:

- Further development of theFYE program to include course linkage and programmatic component within residential learning communities (CFRs 4.4, 4.5, 4.6,4.7); and
- Strengthen campus partnerships across departments (CFR 4.8).

Veterans' Center

Students raised the issue of support for veterans on campus. There is mixed feedback from students concerning whether to establish a veterans' center. Students were divided as to dedicating space and/or making certain that student veterans are aware of support systems and services in place for CSU, Chico students. The visiting team encourages CSU, Chico to consider engaging in a needs assessment and subsequent communication strategy concerning campus services and support for student veterans.

Theme 2: A Refinement of Academic Program Review Process

CSU, Chico's EER Report indicates that "program review processes could play a key role in demonstrating both educational effectiveness and accountability. Such reviews have the potential to systematize a program's approach to academic quality and educational excellence and provide a framework for managing quality assurance in program offerings and related educational activities. Accordingly, the campus proposed to refine its Five-Year Program Review processes as part of the Educational Effectiveness Review." In particular, the campus chose to:

- Develop an infrastructure for the assessment of student learning;

- Develop a new framework for academic program review; and
- Enhance assessment in general education.

Assessment of Student Learning

CSU, Chico in its EER Report provides evidence of a robust effort at assessment of student learning. The creation of the Academic Assessment Council (AAC), an outgrowth of the All University Responsibility for Assessment (AURA) Committee, is a welcome development. As the EER Report states, the Provost recognized that the lack of resources to engage in meaningful and sustainable assessment—including time to learn about and engage in assessment as well as having the institutional infrastructure to support it—was one of the main barriers to implementing outcomes-based review programs.

Accordingly, she reconstituted AURA into the Academic Assessment Council (AAC) with a membership that is located within college deans' offices, and allocated resources both at the level of the college and that of the department for assessment. Dean Office-level assessment officers serve as coordinators for the assessment facilitators housed in each of the college departments (CFRs 4.4; 2.4). The team found that CSU, Chico's current framework for assessment of student learning is a model that could be adopted at other universities and contains the potential for sustainable efforts in the areas of assessment and program review. Consistently, faculty members spoke strongly in support of this current model, stressing the importance of dedicated resources for assessment and program review efforts. Some faculty and department chairs indicated that without this structure and resource support they doubted whether the assessment efforts would have been so successfully embedded within the culture of the department. There was near unanimity that the university needs to continue its support of this essential effort, particularly with departments and programs where the assessment efforts are still at more fledgling levels of engagement (CFR 4.6).

The poster session on “Assessment of Student Learning” was an impressive demonstration of the dedicated work done by faculty in systematically assessing the student learning outcomes established for each program (CFRs 2.3; 2.4). The team noted the enthusiasm of the faculty members engaged in this effort, and how they concurred on the power of assessment to focus programs on improvement of student learning. Several faculty members remarked on the value of assessment for students, who can clearly gauge their own achievement of the goals and outcomes of their educational program (CFR 2.5). Many programs are successfully implementing the use of embedded assessment and rubrics that allow for useful, manageable, and sustainable assessment efforts (CFR 2.6).

In individual meetings with four departments – Theatre, Physics, Psychology, and Communication Design – team members were afforded the opportunity to discuss more deeply the assessment efforts of the departments and to hear about the successes and struggles directly from department chairs and assessment facilitators. These departments represented varying levels of engagement with learning outcomes assessment – initial, emerging, developed, and highly developed. Through this process, the team was able to think carefully about ways to provide recommendations to the university that will allow all programs to progress to more highly developed stages of assessment and educational effectiveness, and to sustain the considerable work that has already been accomplished (CFR 2.6; 4.4).

During the CPR visit, the team found “that graduate programs had barely begun using data to review their programs,” and looked forward “to hearing about additional progress in graduate level program review and assessment at the time of the EER review.” Clearly, the graduate programs have made substantial progress in this area. Under the leadership of the Graduate Dean and Associate Dean, a series of workshops were developed to help graduate coordinators move through the process of engagement with student learning outcomes and

assessment. Monthly meetings allowed the graduate coordinators to develop mission statements, goals, student learning outcomes, assessment plans, and assessment strategies. While only a handful of graduate programs have engaged in a full program review (with the exception of most of the externally accredited programs), the team feels assured that the university has taken seriously the need to engage in systematic assessment of its graduate programs (CFR 2.3).

However, the graduate coordinators expressed concern regarding the data warehouse and the template for program review. Graduate programs differ significantly from undergraduate programs, and different tools and templates are needed. Additional concerns were expressed about the “invisibility” of graduate programs, and the need for stronger commitment to graduate studies at the higher administrative levels of the university (CFRs 2.1; 4.6). Finally, coordinators lamented the lack of resources available for assessment and program review efforts at the graduate level, as opposed to those outlined above that serve the undergraduate curriculum.

The visiting team wishes to commend the effort and substantial progress in the area of assessment of student learning. CSU, Chico has made tremendous strides in this area. The team recommends that, in order to sustain the momentum of this important work (particularly in light of extremely difficult economic circumstances) the university:

- Continue to provide essential resources to support the significant work undertaken by academic affairs, the colleges, the departments, and faculty;
- Maintain and refine the current structure of assessment efforts through the office of the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the Academic Assessment Council (AAC), the college assessment coordinators, and the department assessment facilitators;
- Where appropriate, encourage the adoption of STEPS portfolio assessment system as a management aid for programmatic assessment; and

- Provide support for the developing effort of assessment of student learning in the university's graduate programs.

Academic Program Review (CFRs 2.7, 4.4, 4.5)

In the EER Report, CSU, Chico describes the effort of developing a new framework of program review “as a multi-phased, multi-year inquiry through which, with thoughtful experimentation and testing, a more effective, outcomes-based academic and co-curricular program review model would emerge. In this way, both process characteristics and review guidelines were systematically tested and continuously improved over a period of five years.”

The visiting team spent considerable time perusing the extensive program review self-studies and discussed at length the process of program review with the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the College Deans, the Department Chairs, and faculty assessment facilitators. The work that has been done to refine the program review process, and to create the data warehouse and data elements necessary for a comprehensive self-study, is impressive. CSU, Chico has developed a comprehensive framework that allows for a full and complete assessment of student learning and provides for a substantive analysis of all aspects of a degree program: its curriculum, its faculty, its pedagogy, and its students' educational attainment.

As delineated in the EER Report, CSU, Chico's program review now focuses on educational effectiveness “by having programs—not the academic units that offer the programs—articulate a collective vision of educational attainment, explain how they organize for learning, and demonstrate their commitment to learning and continuous improvement.” The self-study includes a substantial external review, and culminates with an articulation of a five-year improvement plan. Final review results in committee recommendation to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

In particular, the visiting team viewed the development of a five-year improvement plan as the means by which the program can engage in continuous improvement. It is within the plan that the program is able to outline decisions made, propose action items, stipulate timelines and identify expected results. Department chairs and assessment facilitators indicated that the improvement plans are fundamental to supporting the goals of educational effectiveness. They further expressed that, in most cases, plans to improve, refine, and redesign curriculum are being implemented. Department chairs, however, stated that often those plans that involve investment of additional resources are not being implemented. Considerable concern was expressed that, given current economic conditions, plans requiring additional resource allocation, including new faculty, equipment, laboratories, etc., are likely to be put on hold, making it unlikely that programs can achieve all of the outcomes of their improvement plans.

As noted in the section above on assessment of student learning, graduate programs are still in the initial phases of program review. While several programs with external accreditation have been reviewed, only a handful of non-accredited programs have undergone program review under the new guidelines. Graduate coordinators expressed the need to have a different template and different data information from undergraduate programs, citing the distinct nature of graduate programs.

An additional area of concern noted by the visiting team was the need for program review to do a more systematic and thorough analysis of the contribution of programs to the diversity efforts of the university. In a meeting with department chairs, team members posed a question about diversity and multicultural perspectives in the curriculum. Clearly, some programs and departments have significant curricular offerings that advance multicultural and diverse perspective, particularly those in the humanities, social sciences, and ethnic and gender studies.

However, it should be the role of all program and departments to take collective responsibility for curriculum that encourages global awareness and multicultural perspectives (CFR 1.5).

The WASC visiting team commends CSU, Chico for its comprehensive program review design and for the exceptional work of the departments and faculty in conducting thoughtful and comprehensive self-studies, grounded in appropriate data analysis and assessment of student learning. To further the development and refinement of the program review effort, the team recommends that the university:

- Explore ways to assist programs in achievement of their 5-year improvement plans, including addressing issues of curriculum redesign and program needs identified in the program review process;
- Encourage programs to address seriously in program review and on-going assessment efforts their contribution to diversity and multicultural learning at CSU, Chico, not only in the recruitment and retention of students, staff and faculty, but also in the curriculum; and
- Assist in the development of frameworks for program review and data measures for graduate programs that recognize the inherent differences between graduate and undergraduate education.

General Education Assessment

The campus has made progress in general education assessment. The General Education Advisory Committee's (GEAC) "Meta-Analysis" of past reviews led to process improvements and, it would seem, faculty commitment to the GE assessment process. A revised website will elevate GE's virtual presence (CFR 2.12) and provide more ready information for students.

Mechanisms to gauge Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) have focused initially on Area A, core skills. Rubrics have been developed for oral communication, written communication, and

critical thinking, and preliminary assessments have informed the process of identifying criteria for quantitative reasoning. The oral and written communication rubrics have achieved the widest use in GE courses, particularly in Area C, and in some cases have led to revised pedagogical strategies (CFR 4.7).

The EER identifies a number of remaining questions and issues, including the need to direct general education to a more programmatic (as opposed to course-based) level, and to extend the identifying of SLOs and accompanying metrics to more domains of GE. These are laudable and important goals.

Responsibility has devolved to a new group, the General Education Design Team, for coordinating the campus response to LEAP Goals for Higher Education and the CSU EO 1033. The Design Team will shepherd a revisioning of GE. The team has been meeting with campus constituencies in an inclusive process (CFR 4.6), and is clearly in the early stages of efforts to make GE more coherent in form and substance. The team has set up a helpful website for the campus community.

This history and current status occasion several questions about GE assessment's immediate and longer-term future. While it is likely that a broad-based revisioning of GE will not greatly affect work already accomplished on the core skills, will it temporarily curtail further development in other areas, mentioned by both students and faculty – leadership and collaboration, for example? What will become of assessment within the upper division Thematic Programs? In fact, what will become of the Thematic Program idea in a revisioning? How will budget concerns affect the work of assessment coordinators, or the ability of individual faculty to assess student writing? Will pedagogical and curricular adjustments have to be made to mitigate those effects (e.g., decreasing the amount of writing required in a GE course)? Members of the design team, and the visiting team as well, see opportunity in such challenges to refine GE

processes. Moreover, CSU, Chico's progress thus far, while not spectacular, is deliberate, steady, and enthusiastic enough to occasion optimism for the future of GE assessment. The visiting team understands that the revisioning endeavor is a positive development and that, while it may call into short-term question further progress in developing GE assessment targets and metrics, the campus-wide discussion of GE's mission and objectives has the potential to enhance the level of discussion of GE assessment.

(Note: Theme 3 takes up assessment of large GE courses in its discussion of academic technology.)

Theme 3: The Innovative Use of Technology

A. Academic Technology

Academic Technology on Campus

Instructional technology has a proud tradition at CSU, Chico, and its many strengths were noted in the CPR. Over the last two years, the evidence is strong that, despite staffing issues, the technology operation has kept pace with rapid change in technology tools for classroom and distance learning. Surveys, performance measures, and informal discussions with faculty members and students indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the Technology and Learning Program's (TLP) programs and general support; an increase in sophistication with which faculty take advantage of the more robust features of the learning management system; extensive use of IT in general; and satisfaction with IT support (CFR 3.7).

Support for faculty, staff, and students ranges beyond the confines of courses. Approximately 130 "learning communities" have sprung up using BlackBoard Vista's features to share expertise and other resources, collaborate on committee projects, and perform other tasks involving collaboration and mutual advancement.

The TLP and the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) have worked together to redress the disconnect, noted in the CPR, between faculty development and academic technology training.

End users are unequivocally positive about academic technology at CSU, Chico. The visiting team commends the IT staff for effective efforts in support of teaching and learning. The team has every reason to believe that critical junctures ahead – the evolution of learning management systems, the selection of Web 2 technologies, and the support of course and program assessment – will be handled in the same effective manner.

Academic Technology in Distance and Online Offerings (Including Offerings in Redding)

Colleges and universities are increasingly turning to new distance education modalities for strategic reasons, as well as for sound pedagogical reasons and the extension of access to students who might not otherwise be able to pursue postsecondary studies. CSU, Chico has justifiably been celebrated as a pioneer in this area.

The EER highlights academic technology's role in the School of Nursing's online programs and the Department of Education's course on credentialing standards. The details of assessments and adjustments, and technology's role therein, are impressive and worthy of commendation to the AT team and the two academic departments.

University Center, Redding

The Center for Regional and Continuing Education offers the following programs in Redding:

- Business Administration – Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management;
- Child Development;
- Liberal Studies;
- Nursing (RN to BSN); and

- Master's degree program:
 - Professional Master of Business Administration Program; and
 - Master of Social Work.

In addition, students taking online and distance education courses not offered at Redding may use the Redding facility for advising, two-way video, and other services.

Assessment data suggest that students are generally satisfied with much of their off campus learning (but some of these assessments are intermingled with online/distance results). Exploration of some individual courses that allow comparison between on-campus and off-campus students tends to show that off-campus students earn equivalent or in some cases slightly higher grades – with exceptions. Other learning objective data have not been provided. And, admittedly, intervening demographic variables may explain variations in performance.

The BA in Liberal Studies, which originated in part as a result of a promising market study funded by the McConnell Foundation, incurred a dramatic loss of course enrollments and has had to adjust its course cycle. The disjunction between predicted and actual demand may be an indicator of changed circumstances, including competition.

Online and Distance Education.

Through the years, enrollments in CSU, Chico's non-campus-based courses and programs have remained relatively stable or, across the spectrum, increased moderately. At the same time, the visiting team's explorations of online and distance education's current status, while eliciting admiration for the considerable efforts of faculty and staff, occasion some questions about where online/distance education is heading. Admissions to the MS and BS programs in Computer Science have been suspended for lack of available instructors. Other offerings have experienced a fall-off in enrollments.

Much of what CSU, Chico labels “online” would, in other quarters, receive the adjectives “distant” and/or “synchronous.” This is not simply a semantic issue. It speaks to a vision of distance education and its potential clients. The visiting team states this not to criticize CSU, Chico’s array of offerings, but to raise the possibility that “fully or mostly online” is not widely available in their offerings (although hybrid offerings in Nursing, Child Development, and the upper-division general education Themes appear to make greater use of the asynchronous aspects of the learning management system). This might be an area for further exploration. Web tools have evolved to the point that such asynchronous offerings can provide degrees of engagement that equal or even surpass synchronous offerings. Additionally, even some asynchronous modalities (e.g., video streaming of lectures), while clearly useful, may, if relied upon too heavily, eclipse web technologies’ potential to engage students in active learning. This situation invites a broad assessment of the market for online and distance education, as well as the manner in which the University conducts such education. For example, would more students enroll in CSU, Chico’s distance offerings if they had greater flexibility with respect to time and place – the hallmarks of online offerings that are burgeoning at other institutions across the country?

There are also inconsistencies in the “business model” for online/distance offerings. Some are supported out of the general fund. Others are self-sustaining. There are no doubt good reasons for this differentiation, but it invites scrutiny among departments and programs considering online/distance offerings.

Teaching evaluation practices may limit the attractiveness of online/distance modalities for faculty, given the absence of instruments dedicated to non-face-to-face settings. As was pointed out to the visiting team, an item on faculty office hours has little validity in online/distance settings, but a student filling out the evaluation form may feel obliged to note accurately that the professor did not hold office hours.

CSU, Chico has a strong base from which to refine its online and distance offerings. That base is the technology that infuses face-to-face instruction, and the evident enthusiasm with which students and faculty employ that technology. The training infrastructure is there; some faculty development supports are in place. Assessment practices and performance measures are well along the way. A dedicated faculty, academic technology support group, and a proven Office of Regional and Continuing Education all inspire confidence that online and distance education can in fact expand access to quality higher education at CSU, Chico.

The visiting team believes, then, that there are manifold opportunities for CSU, Chico to extend the Chico Experience to a greater population through its online and distance offerings. The team commends the campus for its efforts to date. At the same time, the team recommends a continuing exploration of ways in which online and distance education can be enhanced strategically and pedagogically: the overall strategy; the business model or models; the targets of opportunity; and capitalization on CSU, Chico's impressive accomplishments with respect to enhancing learning through the use of technology.

Technology in Large General Education Courses

Academic Technology has made important contributions to the development of large GE courses, such as Natural Sciences 101/102, and University 101. In the former case, Vista provided the vehicle for delivering course content electronically, freeing up faculty time for direct mentoring of students. Preliminary indications, while not conclusive, suggest that the curriculum redesign – a metamorphosis of two disconnected courses into one year-long sequence – combined with the technology tools resulted in improved performance for student (average grades slightly higher) and the drop/withdrawal/failure rate (dramatically lower) (CFR 2.7).

University 101 was entering a revision at the time of the CPR. Part of that process entailed an assessment of student perspectives on technology that resulted in ongoing efforts to

incorporate consideration of technology and society in the course. In addition, University 101 now requires Vista, and incorporates an electronic text on resources at CSU, Chico for the course topics of academic inquiry and civic engagement. An assessment of student use of Vista shows moderate gains in student use of these modules. It also provides instructors with the ability to track how students engage the course content. University 101 faculty members are adjusting their approaches accordingly.

More important than the results of such assessments is the nature of exploration the technology encourages. It remains for faculty and staff to continue to make refinements, but the basis for continuous improvement is evident (CFR 4.4, 4.6, 4.7).

Theme 4: Towards Increased Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability

Each of the four major divisions of the University has made a significant effort to develop a strategic plan that aligns the division's goals with the stated goals of the University's strategic plan [CFR 4.2]. In the case of Academic Affairs, this effort extended over almost an entire year, starting with a Spring 2007 retreat and resulting in the roll out of the 2007-2012 Academic Plan in May 2008. Throughout this time, there were continuous presentations at Council of Deans meetings and consultations with numerous campus constituents. Fellow members of Cabinet indicated that they also participated in some of the campus-wide focus groups. The other three divisions of the University have also produced strategic plans during the two years between the CPR visit and the current EER visit. While these plans are not quite as detailed as those of Academic Affairs, the WASC team commends the effort and encourages these units to continue to refine their plans.

The team was impressed with the way that each division developed its plan to align with the University's plan. As one example of this flexible adaptation, the sixth goal in the University plan is to embrace sustainable development. The Business and Finance division aligned with the

university goal by establishing a goal to strive for sustainable use of all campus resources and respect for the environment. Among the objectives to reach these goals are the purchase of recycled products, reduction of energy use, and increased use of alternative transportation. For Academic Affairs, alignment came about by establishing a goal to educate for a sustainable global society, with objectives related to curriculum as well as scholarly and creative activities.

It is clear from interviews with the Cabinet, the Academic Deans and the Department Chairs that the University is committed to the concept that planning must be informed by analyzed data [4.3]. Each of the major divisions of the university has developed a “scorecard” with five years of data for each of the performance indicators identified for each of the goals within the respective strategic plans. The WASC team had some concerns, based on the EER report, that the University believed that the establishment of the scorecard was sufficient for planning purposes. The team pursued this line of discussion in each group meeting and was relieved to hear at both the meeting of the Deans and with the members of Cabinet that everyone understood that the primary purpose of the scorecard in its current format is to serve as a benchmark. One member of the Council of Deans agreed with the team’s assessment stating that there are plenty of data out there and the structure for planning exists, but the University is still not at the point where the big questions are being informed by data. This realization about the importance of taking the process to the next step was echoed at a meeting with the Cabinet. The Provost indicated that it is her intention to spend the next six months working with the Deans to identify the most important performance indicators and establish targeted goals to be reached over the next five years. Other members of the Cabinet voiced similar plans. The team commends the leaders of the University for understanding that the current development of performance indicators is only a step along the way to developing fully functional strategic

plans; and the team recommends with great urgency that the University commit itself to reach this higher level of planning as soon as possible.

The team observed that at many levels of the University it was understood that in order to make rational decisions about resource allocations, it is essential to have appropriate data. For example, several department chairs made the point that with the improved access to data on campus, they felt more comfortable in making their case to deans for increased resources. Further, several chairs agreed that knowing that decision makers are using data to inform their decisions makes it easier to accept a decision that might require a department to lose resources.

The importance of access to quality data was stressed during the previous visit. Among the recommendations made by the CPR team at that time was that the University “should make the development of the Enterprise Knowledge Management Initiative one of its highest priorities in order to facilitate the assessment of educational effectiveness.” In response to this admonition, the University formed the Knowledge Management Infrastructure Team (KMIT). The accomplishments of KMIT in the two years since the CPR visit are truly amazing. The establishment of the Enterprise Data Warehouse has received applause from all areas of the University. The ease of access to important data has improved significantly the entire program review process. Staff members in the colleges and departments testified as to improved efficiency as they can now access data that can be used for financial planning and resource allocation decisions—data that previously could be accessed only by searching numerous data bases administered by different offices, or, in some instances, could not be accessed at all.

In an additional recommendation, the CPR team recommended that the university “should refine performance measures for information resources and technology.” This recommendation has clearly been followed. The IT staff, in conjunction with other campus

constituencies, has developed a rich array of measures that only attest to IT's effectiveness, but also enable rapid response to a problem or crisis – a pure case of assessment leading to action.

SECTION III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

Major Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations for Theme 1: The Nature of Student Engagement at a Residential Campus

“The Chico Experience”:

Even as the visiting team recognizes and applauds CSU, Chico's embracing of the challenge of defining and refining The Chico Experience, it challenges the campus to find ways of extending the opportunities of a CSU, Chico education to a broader diversity of students; to persist in a branding exercise grounded in a sharper understanding of the uniqueness of a CSU, Chico education even in very trying economic times; to continue to challenge a culture still too grounded in alcohol abuse; and to incorporate ways in which The First-Year Experience connects integrally to The Chico Experience.

Diversity Scorecard:

The WASC Committee commends CSU, Chico for their intentional progress on the Diversity Scorecard, successful implementation of the Cross Cultural Leadership Center, and hiring of a Campus Diversity Director. The Committee acknowledges the challenges that remain and encourages consideration of next steps.

Intentional and strategic management is critical to next steps concerning the Chico Diversity Scorecard and campus climate issues. The Diversity Scorecard group is moving

forward to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to identify specific goals, outcomes and accountability concerning the CSU, Chico campus climate. Elements of the plan will include:

- Student recruitment;
- Recommended hiring practices and support systems for faculty and staff;
- Who is next? Succession planning for current long term “voices” and role models;
- Strategies to improve graduation rates, including commitment to campus message of “4 years to graduation;”
- Diversity and program review within the curriculum; and
- Continued support for programming and quality of space for student networking.

Next Steps: Alcohol and Drug Education:

The WASC Team commends the President, the Vice President for Student Affairs, community leaders, and students for their commitment to “re-write Chico’s history” to reflect the Chico Experience of 2009, and urges the university to continue its:

- Steadfast commitment to build additional housing to provide opportunity for all freshman to live on campus; and
- The University-Community shared commitment to strengthening community standards of citizen leadership.

Next steps: First-Year Experience:

The WASC Team commends CSU, Chico for progress in developing a comprehensive first-year experience program and recommends the following for consideration:

- Further development of FYE program to include course linkage and programmatic component in within residential learning communities; and
- Strengthen campus partnerships across departments.

Recommendations for Theme 2: Refinement of Academic Program Review Process

Assessment of Student Learning:

In the context of commendable effort and substantial progress in the area of assessment of student learning, the WASC visiting team recommends that the university:

- Continue to provide essential resources to support the significant work undertaken by academic affairs, the colleges, the departments, and faculty;
- Maintain and refine the current structure of assessment efforts through the office of the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the Academic Assessment Council (AAC), the college assessment coordinators, and the department assessment facilitators;
- Where appropriate, encourage the adoption of STEPS portfolio assessment system as a management aid for programmatic assessment; and
- Provide support for the developing effort of assessment of student learning in the university's graduate programs.

Academic Program Review:

The WASC visiting team commends CSU, Chico for its comprehensive program review design, and for the exceptional work of the departments and faculty in conducting thoughtful and comprehensive program review self-studies, grounded in appropriate data analysis and assessment of student learning. To further the development and refinement of the program review effort, the team recommends that the university:

- Explore ways to assist programs in achievement of their 5-year improvement plans, including addressing issues of curriculum redesign and program needs identified in the program review process;
- Encourage programs to seriously address in program review and on-going assessment efforts their contribution to diversity and multicultural learning at CSU, Chico, not only

in the recruitment and retention of students, staff and faculty, but also in their curriculum;
and

- Assist in the development of frameworks for program review and data measures for graduate programs that recognize the inherent differences between graduate and undergraduate education.

Assessment of General Education:

The WASC visiting team recognizes the progress made in general education, and recommends that the university:

- Enhance and refine its current GE assessment efforts;
- Extend the identification of SLOs and accompanying metrics to more domains of GE;
- Direct general education to a more programmatic (as opposed to course-based) level; and
- Continue its 21st Century GE revisioning endeavor, including the refinement of GE mission and objectives, curriculum structure and pedagogy, GE assessment metrics, and program review and improvement.

Recommendations for Theme 3: The Innovative Use of Technology:

Distance, Online, and Off-Campus Programs:

The campus should revisit distance, online, and off-campus programs. What are the larger purposes to be served? Who are the most appropriate students to be targeted? And what are the best practices for effectively reaching those students?

This recommendation recognizes CSU, Chico's substantial achievements in this realm, and a budding assessment portfolio that indicates success, while acknowledging that changing markets, intensifying competition, continuing innovations in the use of academic technology, and faculty workload issues challenge the current model. So, too, does the complexity of alternate funding bases (e.g., general fund, self support) and delivery modes (synchronous or

asynchronous; web; streaming video; two-way video; and in the case of Redding, face-to-face). These complexities work against the conceptual integrity and operational success of distance, online, and off-campus programs.

Recommendations for Theme 4: Towards Increased Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability:

The WASC team commends the University for its significant progress in developing strategic plans for each of the four divisions. It further commends the University for its efforts in the development of performance indicators that support each of the strategic goals. However, until CSU, Chico identifies levels of key performance indicators as targeted goals and establishes measureable objectives to guide it toward achieving its goals, it will not be taking full advantage of its nascent planning efforts. The WASC team strongly recommends that the University take this next step, and thereby move towards accomplishing its goal of strengthening its institutional effectiveness by “fostering a culture of evidence and accountability through the development of true assessment and performance measurement systems.”