

February 2, 2004

WASC Commission  
James R. Appleton, Chair  
985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100  
Alameda, CA 94501

Dear Chair Appleton and Members:

We are grateful to the WASC visiting team for their thoughtful analysis of the Preparatory Report, their diligent and exhaustive site visit, and the many valuable recommendations they have provided to California State University, Fresno. We anticipate that some of the team's suggestions will be addressed more thoroughly in the Educational Effectiveness report, and I have provided a brief update on the status of that report at the end of this response.

The visiting team commented about an occasional lack of evidence in the preparatory report. Upon reflection, we suspect a difference in interpretation of the distinction between the preparatory and educational effectiveness reviews. The campus writing groups spent a great deal of time debating whether to include specific pieces of evidence in the preparatory report or defer them to the educational effectiveness report. We chose to defer some evidence. We are confident that the visiting team will find ample supporting evidence in the Educational Effectiveness Report. More specific items to which we would like to respond follow under bold subheadings.

### **Planning and Budget**

We appreciate the suggestion to achieve greater student and staff representation on strategic planning and budget committees. The staff has, in fact, been very well represented in strategic planning efforts, but in the past it has been difficult to obtain consistent student representation. This is beginning to change as members of the Smittcamp Family Honors College have assumed major leadership positions within the Associated Student cabinet. We will continue our efforts to include student representation on committees and task forces. As the university begins to plan for a significant reduction in the 2004-05 budget, both students and staff will be included in the Budget Summit to be held this February. Deans are also expected to consult with faculty and staff as they prepare budget reduction scenarios for discussion at the budget summit.

We acknowledge the suggested needs to establish implementation priorities for strategic goals and to work towards alignment of the comprehensive campaign with university strategic goals. A subgroup of the Strategic Planning Committee began last fall to examine progress in achieving strategic goals and to consolidate goals under a few priority action areas. The comprehensive campaign is still in its earliest stages - specific areas of emphasis have not been finalized and even the target has not yet been determined. Planning for the comprehensive campaign will remain an open and consultative process, including review of campaign priorities by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee with the intent to achieve alignment with the university's Plan for Excellence II. As the campaign unfolds, we will focus on managing expectations while maintaining enthusiasm.

### **The Faculty**

Several of the visiting team's comments dealt with faculty roles, rewards, and workload issues. In the 1998 Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey, responses of California State University, Fresno faculty were similar to those of other CSU campuses and other four-year institutions in sources and levels of stress, with time pressures (85%) and "institutional procedures and red tape" (81%) indicated as the most common stressors. Workload and use of time were similar to those of comparison campuses. Along with other CSU faculty, more of our faculty (compared to faculty from four-year institutions) indicated that faculty roles and rewards had changed in the last decade (61% vs. 42%).

We suspect that the issues around personnel practices and workload relate more to perceived fairness than to clarity of expectations. The campus is committed to a retention and tenure process in which probationary plans provide clear expectations of each faculty member, with the faculty member supported to achieve those expectations. We intend to address the perception that junior faculty members face greater demands than their senior colleagues as we explore the impact of creative and scholarly activities on teaching and learning, one of the research questions identified for the Educational Effectiveness report.

Although the university's 1991 strategic plan included as a goal increasing the diversity of the faculty to more closely approach that of our student body, Proposition 209 has prohibited the use targeted programs to achieve this goal. Programs such as the California State University Forgivable Loan program and the McNair program are helping us "grow our own" faculty, and we aggressively recruit faculty members who reflect all sectors of our student body and our society at large.

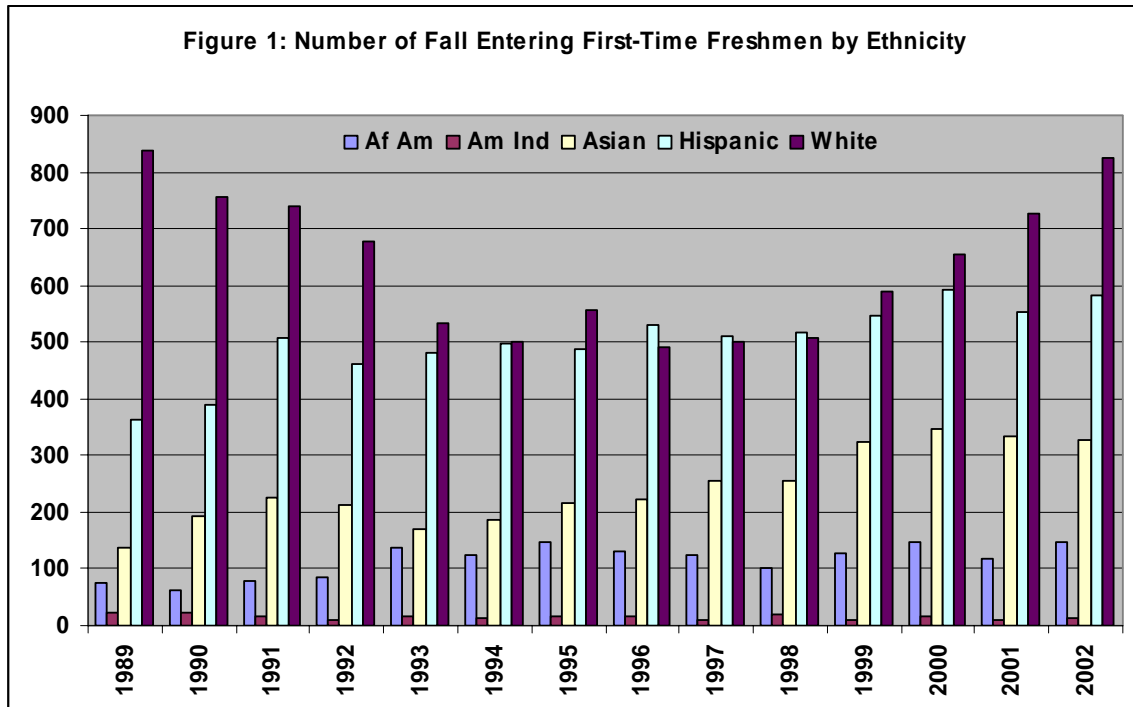
The current Collective Bargaining Agreement includes an agreement between the California State University and the California Faculty Association to rebuild the permanent faculty through designated numbers of tenure-track faculty hires. Like other campuses, we have seen many retirements. Last year began with 78 tenure-track searches, and although many were canceled due to the declining budget, we still hired 44 new tenure track faculty members. Over the near future, the budget crisis will decrease the percentage of temporary faculty. While this situation is undesirable, the university budget committee is being consulted with regard to a long term recovery plan which will focus on the recruitment of more tenure track faculty as major component.

### **Diversity of the Student Body**

While commending the university for its commitment to access and retention, the visiting team wondered why the percentage of entering Latino students has declined and the percentage of entering African American students has remained essentially constant between 1998 and 2002. The two figures below, which provide a longer term context for the questions, help in understanding those phenomena.

Beginning some time before the budget crisis of 1991-92, the population of entering Caucasian students began a precipitous decline, dropping from 838 in 1989 to 500 in 1994 - a drop of 40% (Figure 1). Why that decline occurred is not known but "white flight" seems, at least in part, a

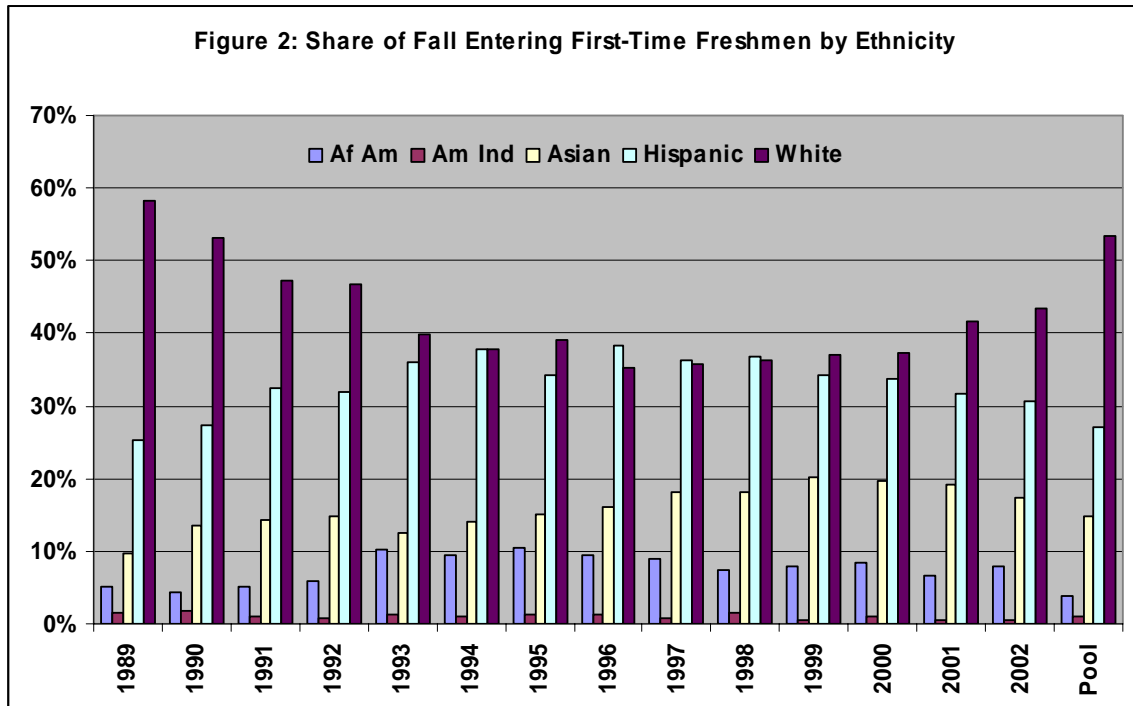
reasonable guess. During that period our minority student population grew from 38% to 52% of the total student body and from 38% to 58% of our entering freshmen group. It stands now at 60% of the student body and 50% of entering freshmen.



The increase in Caucasian students in the entering class in recent years is largely responsible for the relative decline of the Latino, Asian, and African American population. That rise can reasonably be attributed to two related changes: the advent of the Smittcamp Family Honors Program in 1998 and the general strengthening of the reputation of the university over the past decade which has attracted an increasing number of high ability Caucasian students.

Figure 2 shows the relative shares of the five ethnic groups (defined as a percent of those students for whom ethnicity is known) over this same period as well as the 2002 five county (Fresno, Tulare, Merced, Kings, and Madera) pool of high school graduates with the high school courses required for admission to the UC and CSU. All minority groups except American Indians made up a higher proportion of our entering class than of the pool of college-eligible high school graduates. The biggest disparity between pool and freshman share holds for African American students where the freshman share in 2002 is a bit more than twice the pool share, reflecting the unusually high percentage of African American students with origins outside the valley.

We expect additional evaluation of our support of the diverse student body to be included in the Educational Effectiveness report.



### Coordination and Assessment of Service-Learning and Community Interactions

This topic will be addressed further in the educational effectiveness review. New faculty members are alerted to the significance of service-learning through its inclusion in position descriptions, and the higher administration has consistently recognized service-learning and related community interactions in personnel decisions. Faculty members on the forefront in service-learning, internships, community service, and similar activities have joined forces to seek the formation of a Center for Community Based Learning as one of the priorities of the comprehensive campaign. The center would be the 'central node' recommended by the WASC review team to coordinate the myriad of service/outreach volunteer activities and to "be the first (and visible) contact of external groups seeking to partner with the campus in community-based learning."

Moreover, this proposed center can best address the review panel's recommendation for "a more systematic assessment of service learning and community interaction activities" - the key word being 'systematic.' Already there have been two studies of service learning, one of which has been accepted for publication in an academic journal. Evaluations of various community-based programs are increasingly focusing on efficacy as well as efficiency, as success in program delivery is assured and knowledge about the presumed impact on students and the community is sought. The center would enable assessment to be more uniform and allow broader conclusions about campus wide performance in this area.

### **Assessment and Program Review**

We thank the visiting team for their comments on outcomes assessment and their encouragement to continue to move forward with the assessment process. We are aware that some faculty members still perceive assessment as another straw on the camel's overburdened back. We tried to address the workload associated with assessment by providing start-up support and managing expectations. During the learning phase and initial development of assessment plans, we provided assigned time as well as a one-time replacement for traditional program review. We intentionally kept the requirement for assessment down to one or two assessment activities each year for a total of eight activities over five years. During the review of assessment plans, many departments were asked to decrease their planned activities to more manageable levels. We believe that assessment is central to educational effectiveness, and hope that departments are beginning to share that belief. We will be working with departments this semester to gather data that will provide a clearer picture of the status of outcomes assessment. Frankly, we are taking advantage of the accreditation process to help reframe and reinvigorate the focus on assessment as a measure of educational effectiveness. We appreciate the visiting team's assistance as we more completely institutionalize outcomes assessment of student learning. This semester, the WASC self-study team will work with the General Education Committee and the recently formed General Education Assessment Committee to address the effectiveness of general education. One emphasis will be working towards strengthening the description of student learning outcomes for general education and moving towards a commonly accepted vision of the qualities of a graduate from California State University, Fresno.

### **Educational Effectiveness Review**

As soon as we had completed the Preparatory Report, small working groups began to address a set of seven research questions on educational effectiveness. To get the process moving, the research teams were encouraged to start gathering information and formulating their responses without worrying too much about the exact wording of the questions. Most of the working groups have completed their first drafts. After review by the WASC Steering Committee, these reports will be shared with the university community, packaged with integrative introductory statements and conclusions, and supported by evidence in the electronic portfolio.

#### **Research Questions informing the Educational Effectiveness Review:**

1. How effective are university processes in supporting and improving student learning?
2. How effective are academic programs, including general education, in preparing undergraduate and graduate students for post-degree educational and employment pursuits?
3. How effective are academic support services in reaching students and meeting their needs?
4. How has the expansion of faculty research and scholarly activity impacted the quality of undergraduate and graduate education?

5. How has the university as a community addressed the use of technology to support student learning?
6. How has the university's community engagement, such as service learning, impacted students?
7. How effectively does the university engage and meet the needs of the community?

Once again, our thanks to Chair Tony Ceddia and the members of the visiting team for their thoughtful analysis and the many valuable recommendations. We also look forward to the Commission's recommendations regarding the Preparatory Review and to working closely with you as we develop our Educational Effectiveness Review.

Sincerely,

John D. Welty  
President

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