

2017

# **Institutional Report**

WASC Senior College & University Commission





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## 1

# Introduction: Institutional Context

## Response to Previous Commission Actions

As one of the 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) system, Sonoma State University (SSU) is committed to serving the diverse population of the State of California through high quality higher education. Sonoma State serves its students through forward-thinking degrees in the liberal arts and sciences and professional programs, as well as through community engagement, sustainability efforts, and diversity initiatives. SSU aims to reduce students' time to graduation and improve graduation rates while supporting its dynamic faculty in the pursuit of excellence through teaching, research, and service.



*Environmental Technology Center*

## HISTORY & INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

(CFRs 1.1, 1.5, 3.6, 3.9)

Sonoma State College was established by the California State Legislature in 1960 and opened in temporary quarters in Rohnert Park, California under the leadership of its first president, Ambrose Nichols (1960–70). In the following year, Sonoma State opened its doors to 265 upper-division students, with most of the faculty and administrators having been drawn from San Francisco State College. The college moved to its present 269-acre site in 1966, upon completion of Stevenson and Darwin Halls. In 1978, when university status was granted, the name was changed to Sonoma State University. SSU is governed by the CSU Board of Trustees,

which adopts rules, regulations, and policies for the entire 23-campus CSU system. The board delegates authority to the presidents of the campuses to develop their own rules, regulations, and policies in accord with the CSU and the State of California.

Six presidents have served at Sonoma State, most recently Ruben Armijañana, who served for 24 years in the position (1992–2016). Dr. Judy Sakaki became the new President in July 2016, ushering in a new period of revitalization for the campus, with plans for re-organization and innovation that will connect SSU more closely to the communities it serves.

Sonoma State is the only university in California that is a member of the **Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC)** a prestigious group of 30 universities and colleges across the nation committed to high-quality, public liberal arts education in a student-centered, residential environment. SSU is proud of its liberal arts and sciences tradition but recognizes the importance of professional and career-focused degree programs in all its academic schools, since they offer much-needed training for jobs in the North Bay region. Over the last ten years, Sonoma State has come to celebrate the innovation and collaboration that come with integrating the liberal arts and sciences and professional programs. That identity is a theme throughout the Institutional Report and particularly in **chapter 8**.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, ONLINE OFFERINGS, AND OFF-SITE LOCATIONS

The university is comprised of six academic schools: Arts and Humanities, Business and Economics, Education, Extended and International Education, Social Sciences, and Science and Technology. Through the schools, SSU offers 46 baccalaureate majors, 47 minors, 15 master's degrees, nine credential programs, and nine certificate programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (see **Academics** under degrees and majors on the SSU website). The most heavily enrolled undergraduate majors include business, psychology, sociology, biology, and kinesiology,

demonstrating the mix of traditional liberal arts and professional majors that is characteristic of the campus' identity.

An increasing number of courses are offered online or blended, responding to a student need validated by the popularity among SSU students of the CSU's cross-campus online initiative, **CourseMatch** (CSU Fully Online). A new initiative launched in fall 2016 by the SSU Faculty Center offers faculty an opportunity to convert face-to-face courses to **online or blended formats**. The Faculty Center anticipates 12 online and blended courses will be piloted in summer and fall 2016. The Department of Nursing offers a bachelor's degree in which most of the upper-division coursework is already offered online.

SSU serves the North Bay region through three off-site locations. A degree-completion program in Liberal Studies is offered at the bachelor's level at **Napa Valley College** in Napa, **Solano Community College** in Vallejo, and at Mendocino Community College in **Ukiah**. The Ukiah program is offered state-side, while the other two programs are run through the School of Extended and International Education (SEIE). In addition, the **Collaborative Nursing Education Continuum Model** (CNECM) allows nursing students to pursue clinical work at a number of locations across the service region. New off-site locations for other degree programs are under development.

## ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING

(CFRs 3.5, 3.6, 3.7)

In fall 2016, the university took initial steps to restructure its divisions to better serve institutional goals and to support student success (see the fall 2016 organizational chart prior to restructuring in **appendix 1.1**). Now SSU operates in a more consolidated divisional structure: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Administration and Finance, and University Advancement. One of the most important early steps taken by the new administration was to revitalize a student-focused Division of Student Affairs, moving Housing, Admissions, Records and Registration, Residential Life, Student Academic Services, and Student Life from other areas of the university (see the new organizational charts for Student Affairs and Academic Affairs in **appendix 1.2 and 1.3**). The principal focus of

this restructuring has been to provide enhanced services to students and to better position our campus to fulfill the goals of the CSU Graduation Initiative (see **chapter 5** for more information).

Additional restructuring activities include unifying pre- and post-award activities within Academic Affairs to serve the growing research activity among faculty and students. In an effort to place technology services closer to the academic mission of the university, Academic and Information Technology has joined Academic Affairs. To improve efficiency and enhanced development efforts, University Affairs and the Development Office merged into University Advancement. Finally, the new Executive Director of the Green Music Center will report directly to the university president and will be a member of the Cabinet, aligning the center more closely with the university's academic mission.

These adjustments in reporting structures occurred swiftly during fall 2016 after substantial consultation with the units involved. The next steps in the process will involve recruiting senior administrative leaders, such as a permanent Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, a Vice President for Student Affairs, a Vice President for Administration and Finance, a Vice President for Advancement, and an Executive Director of the Green Music Center, to oversee various aspects of the institution and make sure the new organizational changes have the desired outcomes for students, faculty, and staff.

## FACILITIES IMPROVEMENTS

(CFR 3.5)

Since the last accreditation review process, SSU completed its 130,000 square foot Student Center, which houses student activities and study spaces, dining for students and the public, a copy center, a post office, the University Bookstore, the Associated Students office, the diversity-oriented HUB (Honoring, Uniting, Building), and conference facilities, including meeting areas and a ballroom. The newly enhanced Student Affairs Division has recently moved its administrative offices to the Student Center.

Among the most notable developments in facilities at



SSU in recent years was the opening, in the 2011-12 academic year, of the **Green Music Center**, which contains the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Concert Hall, the Schroeder Recital Hall, an education wing, and conference facilities. The 1,400-seat Weill Hall is said to be one of the preeminent concert halls in the United States and is renowned for its acoustics. The back door of the hall opens to accommodate up to 5,000 additional patrons in lawn seating for commencements, events, and concerts. The 240-seat Schroeder Recital Hall is frequently used for instruction, as well as to feature faculty and student performances by the SSU Department of Music, which is housed in the same complex. See **chapter 8** for more on the impact of the GMC.

## SONOMA STATE STUDENTS

### (CFR 1.4)

The institution currently serves 9,323 undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate credential students. Since the last accreditation review, Sonoma State has seen significant growth at the undergraduate level, increasing 6% in the last 5 years.

SSU has also become a more diverse campus, with a somewhat different mix of students than in 2008. The institution now has larger numbers of transfer students and graduate students than ever before (see **appendix 1.4**). SSU has also benefited from a 50% increase in the percentage of Latino students enrolled in the last five years, reflecting the changing demographics of the region and state.

That considerable increase has led to Sonoma State's efforts to meet federal guidelines under Title V of the Higher Education Act as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). This strategy is in keeping with SSU's aim to diversify its student body and meets the needs of the increasingly diverse population in SSU's service region. SSU meets the requirement for a full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student population that is at least 25% Hispanic. In December 2016, the institution applied for eligibility status through a waiver application (see the application in **appendix 1.5**), and the Department of Education approved it on February 8, 2017 (see the letter in **appendix 1.6**). Administration, faculty, and student leadership are strongly committed to achieving HSI status, and SSU will now pursue the formal application. As that process continues, SSU serves college-going



*The Student Center.*



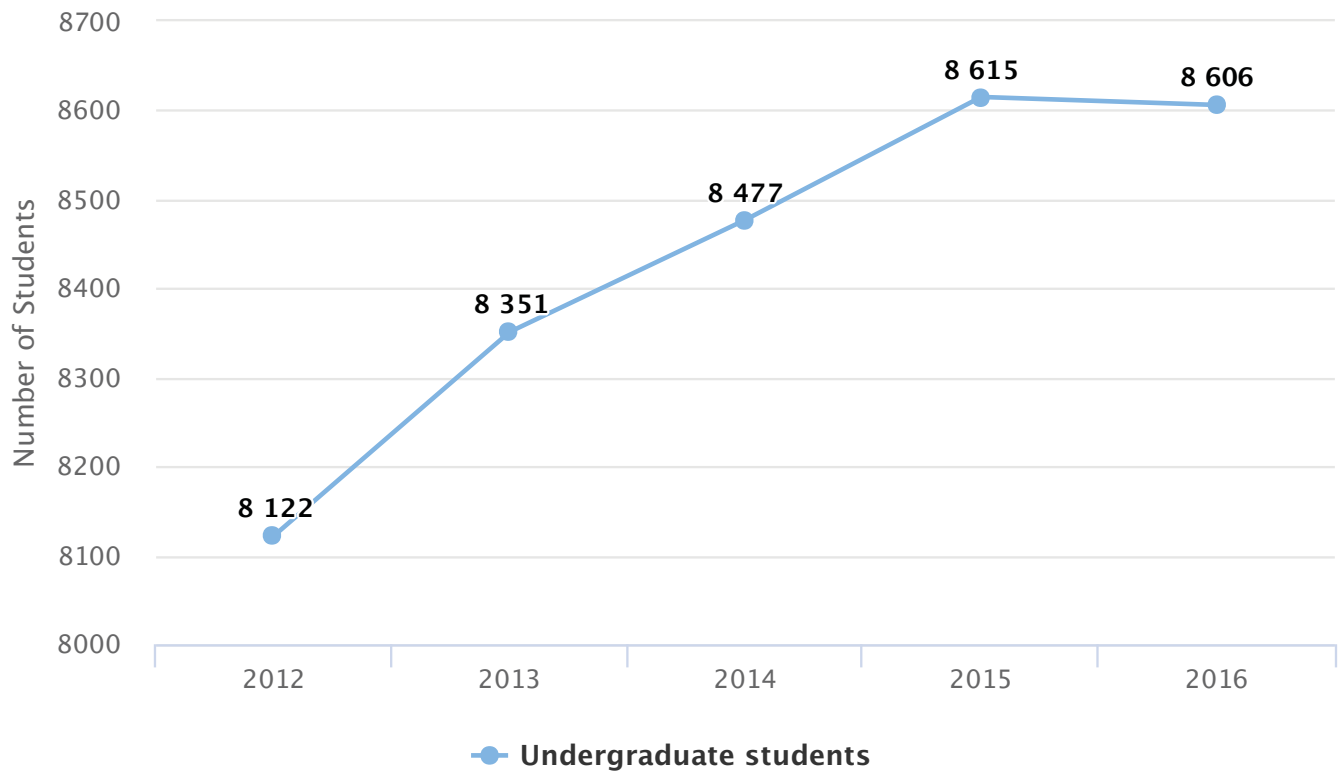
*Rockwall, Recreation Center.*



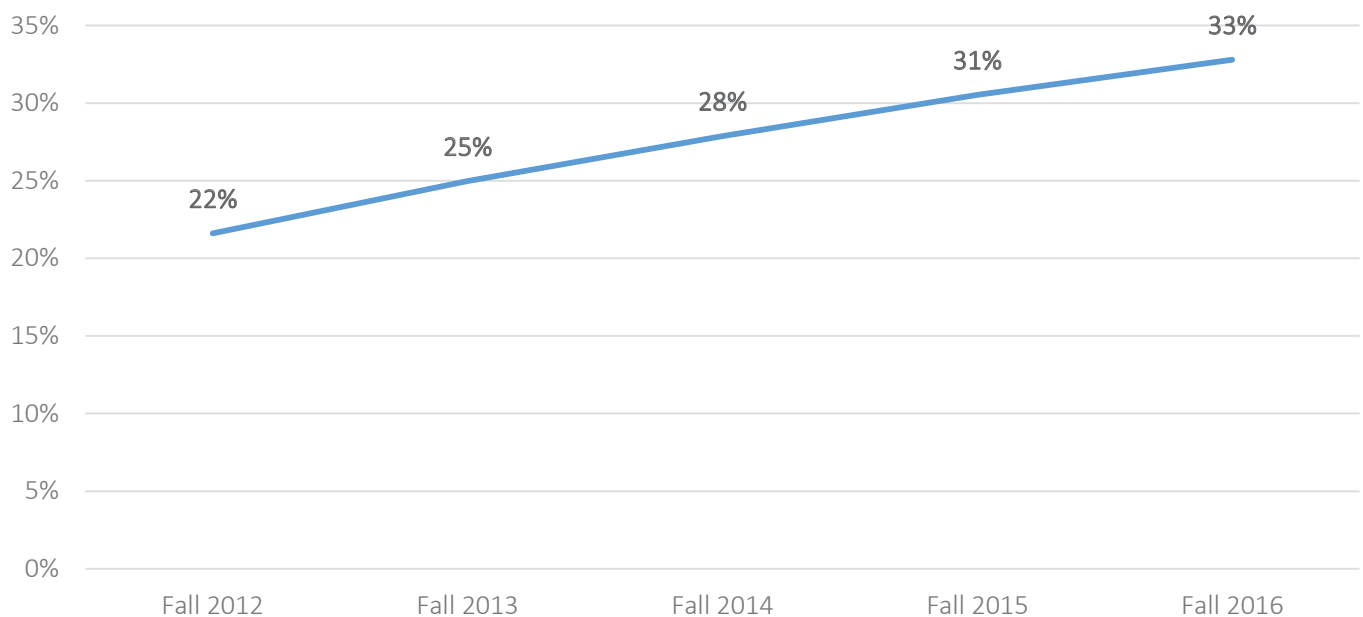
*Green Music Center interior.*

under-represented minorities through collaborations with area high schools, including Roseland University Preparatory School and **Elsie Allen High School** and through TRIO programs like **United for Success**, as well as through college-level programs like the **Educational Opportunity Program** (EOP), **Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement** (MESA), and the **Multilingual Achievers Program** (MAP).

**Figure 1.1**  
Total Undergraduate Fall Enrollment



**Figure 1.2**  
Hispanic/Latino UGRD as a % of Total UGRD





Sonoma State continues to be a campus in demand, receiving 16,271 freshman and transfer applications for admission in each of the past two years—a record for the campus; however, SSU’s popularity puts a strain on campus resources. SSU is able to accommodate 1,800-1,900 freshmen and 700-800 transfer students each year, but it is unable to ensure that all undergraduate applicants can matriculate in their desired majors. As the popularity of the campus continues to increase, so do the number of impacted programs. In addition, ever-increasing supplemental admissions criteria for these majors further restricts their access.

Many undergraduates admitted to Sonoma State seek to declare one of the impacted majors, but when they do not meet more rigorous admissions requirements, they may be forced to choose a second or third choice major or remain undeclared for several semesters. Students who eventually meet the more rigorous admissions requirements of impacted majors can be delayed in the completion of their majors because of impacted courses. As a result, SSU faculty and administrators are developing a number of strategies to alleviate the effects of impactation on the student body. Such strategies include better messaging to students at the point of application and matriculation, better advising strategies, strategic faculty hires, and perhaps even the addition of a limited set of academic majors.

## RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

(CFRs 1.8, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3)

Since the last accreditation review by The Western Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). in 2008-10, Sonoma State has made considerable progress on a number of fronts, and the changes in administration beginning in summer 2016 will generate more improvements in the immediate future. In March 2010, the Commission renewed institutional accreditation and requested an Interim Report in November 2012 focused on three areas: 1) undergraduate retention and graduation; 2) progress toward completing the “accountability loop” in the university’s assessment of student learning and program review process; and 3) progress in rejuvenating and assessing general education. The institution submitted the 44-page **report** on October 5, 2012 that details progress on a number of retention and graduation initiatives, including Early Start, Freshman Learning Communities, degree audits (Academic Requirement Reports), Advising Summits, Sophomore-Year Experiences, and Improved Scheduling. SSU exceeded six-year graduation rates targeted by the CSU in its first Graduation Initiative and has continued since 2012 to increase six-year graduation rates and to close the gaps for under-represented minority students (see chapter 5 for further analysis).

**Table 1.1**  
Percentage of FTF Admits from Applications for Impacted Majors

PROGRAM	F 2016	F 2015	F 2014	F 2013	F 2012	F 2011
Biology	73.4%	89.0%	91.4%	91.0%	90.2%	91.5%
Business Administration	74.5%	90.6%	92.5%	80.7%	82.9%	85.1%
Criminology & Criminal Justice	51.9%	74.1%	76.2%	65.5%	71.1%	75.9%
Communications	68.0%	86.1%	90.9%	91.8%	83.4%	85.5%
Early Childhood Studies	78.2%	72.9%	82.0%	77.2%	N/A	N/A
Environmental Studies	79.1%	83.0%	86.3%	87.6%	87.4%	89.6%
Human Development	Does not accept majors at the Freshman level					
Hutchins School of Liberal Studies	78.2%	72.9%	82.0%	77.2%	N/A	N/A
Kinesiology	44.8%	72.4%	78.5%	71.5%	71.7%	75.5%
Nursing	Does not accept majors at the Freshman level					
Psychology	76.0%	76.3%	75.5%	77.2%	78.5%	82.6%
Sociology	66.5%	73.8%	75.8%	79.4%	83.2%	86.0%

The 2012 report also documents efforts to close the accountability loop for assessment of student learning outcomes and program review. The institution's Educational Policy Committee (EPC) was tasked with making recommendations for changes to the program review process that are detailed in **chapter 6** of the report.

As noted in the report, in 2010, the institution was implementing area-level General Education (GE) learning outcomes. As a result of the WASC process, the institution initiated a reform of GE Areas A and C and developed a five-year plan for assessment; many elements of the reform were implemented since 2012. Assessment processes need further development, so the GE Subcommittee, as it does a program review for general education, is focused on determining how to initiate a new, more sustainable, assessment plan for the GE curriculum (see further discussion in **chapter 3**).

## MISSION, STRATEGIC PLANNING, AND INSTITUTIONAL DISTINCTIVENESS

(CFRs 1.1, 1.4, 4.6)

Since its last reaccreditation, Sonoma State engaged in a strategic planning process, resulting in a five-year **strategic plan** for 2008-13. The Strategic Plan addressed SSU's role as a four-year comprehensive, regional university with a focus on the liberal arts and focused new attention on Sonoma State's **mission**.

The mission of Sonoma State University is to prepare students to be learned persons who:

- Have a foundation for lifelong learning;
- Have a broad cultural perspective;
- Have a keen appreciation of intellectual and aesthetic achievements;
- Will be leaders and active citizens;
- Are capable of pursuing fulfilling careers in a changing world; and
- Are concerned with contributing to the health and well-being of the world at large.



*Welcome to campus banners for President Sakaki.*

In 2014, a **revised strategic plan** was approved. The revision builds on SSU's key areas of distinctiveness, broadens goals beyond the residential undergraduate experience, and identifies three comprehensive and strategic areas of focus:

- **Key Programmatic Areas**, including student experience, academic programs, and faculty and staff development
- **Overarching Values/Principles/Aspirations**, including intellectual curiosity, diversity and inclusiveness, community involvement and civic engagement, sustainability, and globalization
- **Means, Methods, and Strategies**, including enrollment management, external support, and internal resource management

Under the leadership of President Sakaki, a revitalized SSU is emerging. It is an SSU that is looking forward to expanded community-university partnerships that emphasize diversity, sustainability, and community engagement within a global framework. In addition, once a permanent cabinet has been established in summer 2017, the campus community will engage in a process to review and update the Strategic Plan.

# 2

## Compliance with Standards

### Review under the WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements; Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators

Since the last accreditation review by the WSCUC, Sonoma State has deepened its commitment to functioning as an intentional, reflective, and evidence-based learning institution. The university made significant progress in addressing the recommendations of the prior Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) by

- Producing an updated Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 which builds upon the 2009 Review to meet the challenges and needs of the students and community.
- Organizing School Assessment Coordinators to create more uniform methods of assessment and share best practices across programs.
- Revising the Program Review Policy with an emphasis on closing the loop.
- Implementing a new Senate committee on Academic Planning, Assessment, and Resources (APARC)
- Addressing diversity at all levels with the President's Diversity Council, a faculty Director of Diversity, and a Senate Diversity Subcommittee.

Chapter 2 analyzes two required documents that accompany the Institutional Report: the completed **Review under the WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements** (see **appendix 2.1**) and the completed **Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (IEEI)** (see **appendix 2.2**).

## WORKSHEET FOR SELF-REVIEW COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

The SSU Accreditation Steering Committee has provided key oversight for the activities of the current reaccreditation process, and relevant divisions of the campus provided input on specific standards. After review and discussion of the input received, the Committee decided on more focused assignments of specific criteria to key departments, staff, or offices with greater detailed knowledge. Compiled input from all areas of the campus is available in the institution's worksheet (**appendix 2.1**). The comments are a synthesis of the feedback, and the numerical and alphabetical ratings are the modes across all responses.

## AREAS OF STRENGTH

(CFRs 1.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.7, 2.8, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.14, 4.1, 4.2, 4.7)

Over the past several years, SSU has made significant improvement in collaborative efforts across programs, schools, divisions, and community partners to provide High-Impact Practices (HIPs) that strengthen student learning and retention. Beginning over 10 years ago, the **Freshman Year Experience** (FYE) has served as a model for other freshman programs on campus, which now include Freshman Learning Communities (FLCs), and growth in on-campus, living-learning communities in student residences. With external funding, the university now also offers **Sophomore Year Experiences** (SYE). See **chapters 3, 5, and 8** for further discussion of these HIPs.

Information gathering and data quality are increasingly highly developed as a result of a robust—if still improving—program review process and increased staffing and initiatives in the **Office of Reporting & Analytics**. Information from program reviews has steadily led to program revisions and improving curricula based upon the findings from the program self-study and external review processes. New guidelines should help academic departments find increased utility from the program review process (see analysis in **chapter 5**). Information from the Office of Reporting and Analytics directs discussions and decision-making, especially with respect to student enrollment, retention, and graduation.

The institution finds additional strength in making information available to students regarding admissions, registration, degree requirements, and financial aid. Electronic advising tools are available or coming on-line to provide students with information on progress towards degree and pathways towards 4-year graduation (see **chapter 6**). Programs will be able to use the data collected to review and plan scheduling, as well as to assess programmatic effectiveness.





*Faculty Retreat 2017.*

## AREAS OF CHALLENGE

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.9, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 4.1)

Although the institution has strength in its data gathering, it would benefit from greater reliance on information and communication in decision-making. Consistent leadership and setting of priorities, including better communication among the divisions regarding shared pathways and vision, would unify information use and governance. A related concern is finding a better way to close the loop from assessment and review at all levels and directing priorities and resources to identified needs. This cycle of continuous improvement would aid efforts towards increasing the diversity of students, faculty and staff and towards student retention and graduation.

A number of programs have very robust assessment efforts, often related to standards developed by external accreditation bodies. Accredited programs include:

- BA and BFA, Art and BA, Art History (National Association for Schools of Art and Design)
- BA and BM, Music (National Association of Schools of Music)
- MA, Counseling (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs and National Council for Accreditation of Teaching Education)
- BA, MBA, and EMBA, Business Administration (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business)

- BS, MS, and FNP Certificate, Nursing (Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing and California Board of Registered Nursing)
- Credentials, Certificates, and Added Authorizations, Education (Commission on Teaching Credentialing)

Greater uniformity and consistency of assessment, however, including further development of measurable learning outcomes and the setting of uniform standards of performance, should be in place for all programs and the institution. These would better inform the institution on where to focus efforts and resources for student success. Development of Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) is planned and should proceed rapidly during spring 2017 and fall 2017. A **faculty survey** administered in fall 2016 about SSU's distinctiveness and possible ILOs indicates that there is substantial agreement about four areas: social responsibility, diversity, multi- and interdisciplinary preparation for the workplace, and sustainability. These areas accord well with the institutional priorities identified in the strategic planning processes of the last eight years.

## ANALYSIS OF THE INVENTORY OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS

IEEI data were gathered from the chairs of all degree-granting programs and the General Education Subcommittee. As indicated in the self-studies conducted by academic departments, all programs have Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and those outcomes are made available in a variety of locations (e.g., university catalog, department websites, course syllabi, student handbooks). However, greater consistency in displaying PLOs is needed across the institution. Outcomes should be both displayed in the **university catalog** and available on department websites. A number of PLOs would also benefit from being recast in language that is specific and measurable.

Standards of performance vary across programs and are assessed in a number of ways. In many instances, multiple measures are often used in a single degree program. The choice of method is often matched by the program content and faculty interest and expertise.

#### Examples include

- Course embedded assessments
- Final/qualifying exams
- Signature assignments in capstone courses
- Research projects
- Creative experiences
- Work samples
- Portfolio review
- Juried performances/recitals
- Exit/alumni surveys
- In-class/field evaluation

Programs review their assessment information to make decisions on modifying courses and curricula, to inform program review self-study, or to submit to external accrediting bodies. These activities are conducted by individual faculty, faculty committees, or full department reviews.

The IEEI indicates that all degree programs at SSU undertake assessment of their curriculum and students to varying degrees, and they utilize the gathered information to make improvements. Although the freedom for each program to choose the methodology it finds most suitable is often highly prized, it leads to inconsistency in aggregating assessment results across programs and in understanding student performance at the institutional level. Frequent feedback in the departmental self-studies reveals a desire for greater consistency in assessment across programs (at the school level) and wider use of the information to drive decisions. This indicates a need to support all programs to work toward developing direct measures of assessment, and for the institution to develop an on-going and sustainable assessment process for core competencies.

***"The Challenge: To Develop Direct Measures of Assessment and On-Going Process for Assessing Core Competencies."***

## ADDRESSING AREAS OF CHALLENGE

Consensus from the institution's accreditation process provided pathways the institution is now undertaking to address a number of current challenges and to provide opportunities for further growth.

### A. Leadership and Setting of Priorities (CFRs 3.1, 3.3, 3.7, 3.8, 4.7)

President Sakaki brings strategic vision and a breadth of experience in managing institutions and divisions to her leadership of SSU. She has brought on board several interim vice presidents to examine the structure of the university with an eye towards the reorganization of administrative units (see chapter 1 for a review of organizational changes). The intent is to open more lines of communication with faculty and staff and refocus the institution on the academic mission of the university and student success. SSU's new direction invigorates all stakeholders and opens opportunities to address concerns raised in this institutional report.

### B. Strengthening Assessment and Prioritizing Resources (CFRs 1.2, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 4.1, 4.3)

A number of developments show promise in addressing efforts to strengthen assessment and use evidence-based decision-making. For example, the institution's new web interface will aid in future assessment efforts by adding standardized department and program templates that include a section for each program to explicitly list learning outcomes.

More substantive changes include new resources for programs to strengthen their learning outcomes and assessment methods, such as the recent addition of School Assessment Coordinators, who will serve as leaders in addressing assessment need and developing institutional learning outcomes. The School Assessment Coordinators will work with the Director of the Faculty Center to provide guidance, workshops, and forums on best practices for undertaking assessment and use of the information for making informed pedagogical or curricular reforms. APARC acts in harmony with these enhanced school assessment efforts because it houses UPRS and has direct knowledge of program assessment efforts and resulting academic needs (see chapter 6 for further discussion of assessment efforts related to program review). APARC is uniquely positioned to make informed recommendations for the allocation of resources to have the highest impact on improving the educational experience for all students. The Academic Senate plans to work with School Assessment Coordinators during spring 2017 on the development of ILOs. (See chapter 4 for more on the Academic Senate and the role of shared governance).

## MISSION, STRATEGIC, PLANNING, AND DEGREES

(CFRs 1.1, 1.6, 1.8, 2.2a & b, 2.5, 3.7, 3.10, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6)

SSU has been engaged in discussions about the meaning, integrity, and quality of its degree programs since 2005 (see [Section 4](#) of the Educational Effectiveness Review from 2009). Faculty and administrators have taken seriously the challenge posed by the increasing focus of higher education and the public on quality and accountability, engaging in campus-level dialogues about the “meaning of a liberal arts and sciences education” at the undergraduate level. High-quality academic programs are central to the institutional identity and vision.

## MQID PROCESS

(CFRs 1.2, 2.1, 2.2a & b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

In fall 2016, Sonoma State engaged in a process of collecting and evaluating information related to the meaning, quality, and integrity of its degrees (MQID). After attending WSCUC workshops in fall 2015, the Steering Committee elected to use the **MQID grid** created by Cal Poly Pomona (see [appendix 3.1](#)) and discussed the plan with governance committees and administration in spring 2016. All academic programs were asked to complete their grids, and the Office of Academic Programs offered two workshops in October 2016 to assist faculty. EPC agreed to review and analyze the grids, which were then summarized by school. Separate analyses of graduate programs and the general education program were performed in conjunction with Graduate Studies and the General Education Subcommittee. The MQID grids have been integrated with IEEI data and program review information to create the analysis below. [Appendix 3.2](#) provides the school, GE, and graduate program MQID summaries, and individual program MQID grids are available on the [SSU Accreditation Website](#).

## MEANING AND DISTINCTIVENESS IN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

Faculty designing undergraduate degrees at Sonoma State have matched curricula to SSU’s institutional mission and produced innovative educational experiences that help students succeed. By focusing on disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge-making, the undergraduate degrees build **intellectual curiosity** and the capacity for **life-long learning** and capture the breadth of learning that is a hallmark of undergraduate education in the CSU. Most majors have developed courses that address **diversity, inclusiveness, sustainability, and global awareness** in their content and learning outcomes.

One of the most widespread patterns in the MQID process and program review materials is the degree of faculty commitment to a set of HIPs that sequentially develop skills and provide engaged learning experiences for students. Nearly all undergraduate degree programs at Sonoma State are making use of multiple HIPs.

### High-Impact Practices at SSU

- First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service-Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects

The MQID grids and program reviews reveal that when students enter upper-division course work in the major, they benefit from an integrative curricular approach that mixes theoretical content with research, community, or career-based experiences, providing students with the



skills to pursue careers or graduate school. The Department of Physics and Astronomy, for example, assesses students through a set of capstone projects that are largely research-based and demonstrate application of physics principles, experimental design, and research methods. Students use their acquired skills to follow career paths in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) fields and, to a lesser degree, to attend graduate school. Analysis of assessment data have led to changes in the capstone pedagogy to add more group work and to the addition of poster presentations as a signature assignment (see the department's 2015-16 [Program Review](#), section G.



*Physics Research class with Professor Jeremy Qualls.*

Faculty also engage stakeholders in assessing the success and impact of internships. Many programs employ satisfaction surveys with students and the organizations who host internship placements. For example, the Department of Engineering surveys employers to determine whether applied learning produces graduates who succeed in careers after college.

## QUALITY AND INTEGRITY IN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.7, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6)

At Sonoma State, faculty have responded to the challenge to create and maintain degrees with quality and integrity by creating PLOs. Central to the assessment process for degree programs are curricular elements such as **core courses** and **capstone courses**. Focusing on **life-long**

**learning skills** and **core competencies** such as written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, critical thinking, information literacy, cultural literacy, scientific methods, and the application of knowledge to real-world problems, faculty have made considerable progress in developing assessment of student learning. To see two case studies of undergraduate assessment from Early Childhood Studies and Women and Gender Studies, see [appendix 3.3](#). As indicated in chapter 2, a number of undergraduate programs have external validation of quality through disciplinary accreditation, and the B.S. in Engineering is in the early stages of preparing to seek accreditation through **ABET**.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data also provides information regarding student perceptions of the academic quality. In the spring 2016 administration of NSSE, 43% of first-year students reported that their courses “highly” challenged them to do their best work. 26% of seniors reported working on a research project with a faculty member, 48% of seniors had done (or were doing) a culminating senior experience, and 47% of seniors had participated in an internship, field experience, or clinical placement. Service-learning is particularly prevalent: 66% of freshmen and 61% of seniors said “at least some” of their courses included a community-based service-learning project. In addition, 63% of seniors report participating in two or more HIPs (down slightly from 67% in 2014). See [appendix 3.4](#) for the NSSE16 Pocket Guide Report for SSU. While there is room for improvement, these data generally suggest that student perception matches MQID and program review data regarding the importance of HIPs to the undergraduate curriculum.

## MEANING AND DISTINCTIVENESS IN GRADUATE DEGREES

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

As indicated above, graduate programs went through a separate analysis process during the MQID project. At Sonoma State, graduate programs are characterized and made distinctive by their **multiple pathways to the degree** in the form of concentrations, themes, tracks, options, or pathways, many of which are multi- or interdisciplinary,

as in the case of the MA in Organization Development or the MS in Computer and Engineering Sciences. Graduate programs are also characterized by intimate learning environments and provide beneficial **mentoring relationships** between students and faculty. Master's students benefit from **community connections** between their degree program and industry, non-profits, and professionals in the field. They also benefit from a focus on **career preparation**, which may involve a focus on transformational leadership as in the Executive MBA or the MA in Education or personal development as in the MA in Organization Development. In keeping with the mission, many graduate programs encourage **social responsibility** through cultural literacy, global learning, rural health care, social justice frameworks, or engaged citizenship. **Applied learning** at the graduate level takes myriad forms, including action research, immersion experiences, laboratory and field research, internships or field experiences with non-profits, clinical experiences, creative publication, and teaching assistantships.

## QUALITY AND INTEGRITY IN GRADUATE DEGREES

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.7, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6)

Graduate programs have made considerable progress in measuring the quality of student learning. For some programs, such as counseling or nursing, measuring student learning is required for accreditation from external organizations, but all programs assess student learning using qualitative or quantitative measures. The MQID and IEEI data supplied by graduate programs reveals that faculty in graduate programs think seriously about **professional skill development** and promoting engagement with scholarship in the field of inquiry. Programs emphasize methodology, advanced analytical skills, and the ability to formulate research problems and design projects independently. Many programs focus assessment efforts on **culminating projects**, such as exams, theses, projects, and publications. A number of programs require a **public presentation** or public defense of a thesis or project. Education students, for example, have used skills developed in the MA to pursue doctoral degrees at University of California, Davis in the **CANDEL** program, in which SSU collaborated until recently.

Graduate programs engage in multiple measures of assessment at various points in the degree. In the English MA, for example, students sit for reading exams at the end of the first year. In biology, graduate students must take oral qualifying exams prior to commencing the culminating project. The MQID data indicate that graduate programs are aggregating assessment data, but could be more consistent in their documentation of this process of closing the feedback loop. To see a case study of a graduate-level assessment process in the Department of Nursing, see **appendix 3.5**.

SSU graduate programs also receive external validation of their quality, including the disciplinary accreditation for programs like counseling, the nursing graduate degrees, and the business graduate degrees. The counseling program was ranked **number one** on the list of top value counseling master's degrees in California by TopCounselingSchools.org.



*Poster Presentations at the Research Symposium 2015.*

## MEANING AND DISTINCTIVENESS IN GENERAL EDUCATION

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

The **General Education (GE) program** at Sonoma State builds on the state-mandated breadth requirements. As noted in the 2009 external review, the SSU GE program includes four distinct characteristics. First, the **Hutchins School** offers four lower division seminars that satisfy all GE requirements but quantitative reasoning. Seminar instructors develop students' skills in reflection, complex reasoning and interdisciplinary perspectives

that are documented in students' portfolios. Second, most **first-year students** take a year-long blended course that covers oral communication and critical thinking requirements. For assessment data related to these freshman learning communities, see below. Third, SSU requires an **Ethnic Studies course** that is designed to enable students to hear, read about, and experience voices from under-represented groups in the United States, in keeping with our mission and strategic plan (GE External Review, 2009). Fourth, students take an **additional science course** beyond the state requirements, and many of the GE Science courses integrate laboratory experiences designed to increase active, experiential learning (GE External Review, 2009). Transfer and upper division students must complete an additional nine units of upper division coursework.

#### Distinctiveness in GE at Sonoma State

- Hutchins School interdisciplinary seminars cover all GE except quantitative reasoning
- FYE, FLCs, and RLCs cover oral communication and critical thinking
- Ethnic Studies requirement emphasizes diversity and inclusiveness
- Additional science requirement emphasizes active, experiential learning

Despite these elements of distinctiveness, recent discussions surrounding the curriculum in GE Subcommittee, in faculty retreats, and in the Graduation Initiative Group (GIG) indicate that the GE pattern, created in 1990, is not fully serving students' needs. The categories and subcategories in the pattern and the way courses fit in the pattern can be confusing to students and advisors. Anecdotal reports indicate that many students advise themselves and therefore may not follow the most efficient pathways through GE. The Graduation Initiative 2025 has revealed bottlenecks in GE: long waitlists each semester in Ethnic Studies courses, for example, suggest the institution needs to plan for and fund adequate sections or change the requirement. SSU distributes oral communication skill-building among other areas in the GE pattern, but in doing so, fails to meet the required pattern. While recognizing that GE reform is complicated, there is support for a substantive discussion to address these challenges in GE.

## QUALITY AND INTEGRITY IN GENERAL EDUCATION

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.7, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6)

Faculty members have articulated **goals and objectives** for the entire GE program, as well as for each **breadth area** and **sub-area**. Faculty who propose courses for GE certification must complete and present a **course proposal** to the GE subcommittee that requires faculty to explain how the course meets sub-area learning outcomes.

As noted in SSU's 2012 *Interim Report* to WSCUC, the institution developed a 5-year cycle for GE assessment, starting with a pilot project related to GE Subarea B1 (physical sciences). Faculty workshops led to the development of a rubric and data collection process. The GE Subcommittee developed summary statistics, which faculty teaching physical sciences courses reviewed and discussed to develop a plan for course changes to improve student learning.

After the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation was released, the GE Subcommittee began a substantial effort to assess GE Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) built around the **Essential Learning Outcomes** developed by AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. The first areas addressed by the faculty were Information Literacy and Oral Communication.

### Assessment of Information Literacy

Assessment data on information literacy done in 2011-12 by library faculty and faculty in the first- and second-year courses revealed that students were not fully engaging with the sources they were using in their research papers (see Progress Report on Assessment of Information Literacy in **appendix 3.6**). A new curriculum was developed and implemented for first-year students to enhance students' abilities to evaluate rather than simply "find" information sources. The research assignment in these courses was revised as well. This process, in turn, led to further assessment of information literacy in freshman composition courses. Data were collected and analyzed, and challenges with processes, instruction, and student learning were identified. Training of composition instructors led to a common assignment



and discussion ensued about a more “strategic alignment of information literacy within the GE pattern” (2012 Interim Report to WSCUC).

### Assessment of Oral Communication

FYE faculty developed a plan for assessment of oral communication in all sections of UNIV 150 B, using two common assignments. Discussion maps were used to track student participation in class discussion. Faculty developed rubrics for seminar discussions and assessment of the oral presentation in spring 2013. Assessment data were aggregated and are represented in **figure 3.1** below as related to discussion skills. While the results do suggest some patterns in student oral communication, the faculty determined that the data were not sufficient to drive curricular decision-making, so assessment was shifted to the section level for course assessment. Additional data on assessment in freshmen courses is discussed in **chapter 6**.

### Ongoing Review of GE through Program Review

As part of the program review policy, individual departments review their GE courses, and the few individual course assessments of direct student learning included in program reviews suggest that students do learn what the faculty intend. A few programs on campus also include GE reflection as part of students’ senior portfolios, and these GE reflections suggest that some GE courses and faculty impact students’ engagement, growth, and learning.

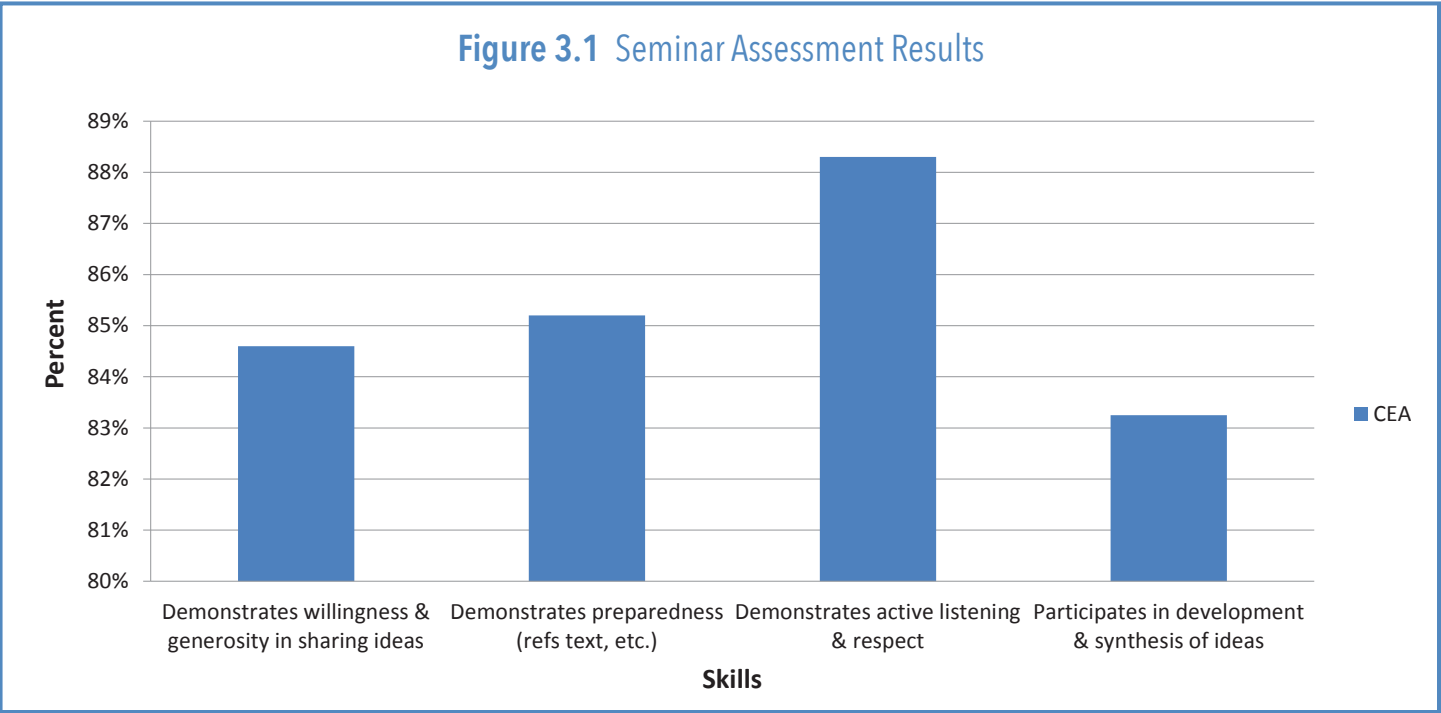
## CHALLENGES WITH MEASURING QUALITY AND INTEGRITY

(CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.7, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6)

SSU has made progress on program and GE assessment since the 2008-10 accreditation review, primarily through increased vigilance in the program review process. The MQID analysis recently undertaken at SSU reveals continued inconsistencies in assessment processes, which include the following:

- While programs have goals and objectives and many have SLOs, not all programs have measurable learning outcomes.
- Some programs have relied heavily on indirect assessment of student learning in the form of exit surveys or student satisfaction surveys, rather than using course-embedded assessment processes.
- Some programs have not yet developed systematic processes for the gathering, review, and use of assessment data to drive curricular change. These programs, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, are reviewing individual student progress but are not yet aggregating data across student populations.
- GE assessment in science and information literacy produced some real, tangible, and usable data that has driven curricular change, but the process has not been sustained and must be renewed.

Figure 3.1 Seminar Assessment Results



To address the challenges in program and GE assessment processes, the institution has taken a number of steps (see **chapter 2**) In addition, the GE program review will analyze assessment and their use in curriculum revision, and will produce a new effort to sustainably assess GE learning outcomes. The Chair of the GE Subcommittee and the AVP of Academic Programs will attend the AAC&U's Network for Academic Renewal on general education assessment in February 2017 to gather best practices and brainstorm a new assessment plan. SSU can also take advantage of CSU resources, such as recent efforts to scale up, track, and measure the effectiveness of **HIPs**.

# 4

## Educational Quality

### Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation

At the heart of Sonoma State's mission are educational quality and academic excellence, which involve sustaining and developing challenging, innovative, relevant, and intellectually rigorous academic programs that engage students and faculty in life-long learning, inquiry, creativity, and reflection.



*Environmental Science 326 with Professor Karen Tillinghast.*

The MQID process, the IEEI, the Review under WSCUC Standards, the assessment of core competencies, and the program review process all reveal a story of educational quality, which begins in the first year of college and builds sequentially to baccalaureate completion, and then on through the master's programs. To ensure that students have a rigorous and meaningful educational experience at the undergraduate level, SSU integrates PLOs with GE program outcomes and the five WASC core competencies. The GE learning outcomes primarily articulate levels of learning students should achieve in the first two years of the undergraduate experience, while core competency assessment and assessment of PLOs articulate the levels of learning students should achieve at or near the time of graduation. At the graduate level, MQID and IEEI data suggest that faculty in all graduate programs are measuring student learning at the time of exit, as well as other points of the degree, particularly at entry and mid-career (see discussion in **chapter 3**).

## CORE COMPETENCIES AND GENERAL EDUCATION

(CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

Core competency assessment integrates well with assessment of general education at SSU. The mission, goals, and learning objectives of the GE curriculum were developed and approved in 2003 and are posted on the Academic Programs' **General Education webpage**. The mission of the curriculum is as follows:

*GE at SSU investigates the complexity of human experience in a diverse natural and social world, and promotes informed and ethical participation as citizens of the world.*

The institution also approved five "fundamental goals" for all GE approved classes:

- I. Teach students to think independently, ethically, critically, and creatively.
- II. Teach students to communicate clearly to many audiences.
- III. Teach students to gain an understanding of connections between the past and the present, and to look to the future.
- IV. Teach students to appreciate intellectual, scientific, and artistic accomplishment.
- V. Teach and/or build upon reading, writing, research, and critical thinking skills.

Four objectives, each with multiple student competencies or learning outcomes, provide a path for assessment of student learning at different levels (**table 4.1**):

1. Acquire a foundation of intellectual skills and capacities.
2. Develop social and global knowledge.
3. Understand and use multiple methods of inquiry and approaches to knowledge.
4. Develop capacities for integration and lifelong learning.



**Table 4.1**  
Mapping Core Competencies to SSU  
GE Objectives and Learning Outcomes

CORE COMPETENCY	SSU GE OBJECTIVE	SSU GE OUTCOME
Written Communication	Acquire a foundation of intellectual skills and capacities	Write and speak effectively to various audiences
		Translate problems into common language
Oral Communication	Acquire a foundation of intellectual skills and capacities	Write and speak effectively to various audiences
		Translate problems into common language
Information Literacy	Acquire a foundation of intellectual skills and capacities	Develop intellectual curiosity
		Develop research skills
		Develop skill in the use of information technology
		Imagine, design, and execute scholarly and creative projects
Critical Thinking	Acquire a foundation of intellectual skills and capacities	Evaluate everyday experiences critically
	Understand and use multiple methods of inquiry and approaches to knowledge	Understand and appreciate mathematics and science
		Understand and appreciate fine and performing arts
		Understand and appreciate historical and social phenomena
		Recognize and use perspectives of diverse disciplines
Quantitative Reasoning	Acquire a foundation of intellectual skills and capacities	Develop capacity to reason quantitatively
	Understand and use multiple methods of inquiry and approaches to knowledge	Understand and appreciate mathematics and science

and quantitative reasoning. For students prepared for college-level english, SSU provides a unique combination of year-long, entry-level GE courses that combine oral communication, critical thinking, and comparative perspectives or a foreign language. These courses include college transition skills provided by student peer mentors (FLC), thus deepening the learning environment while building basic core skills (See **chapters 3, 6, and 8** for further information). Students who need further development in written communication have the option of a year-long stretch English course which incorporates oral communication. DSP allows students to opt for an accelerated one-semester introductory English course, again combining written and oral communication. Several science programs have recently developed courses that meet both major content requirement and foundation-level critical thinking. For an example of an NSF-funded course with assessment data that demonstrates increased retention and student success in STEM, see **appendix 4.1**). Additionally, all first-year students get at least one introductory library instruction session on information literacy and evaluating sources.

Foundational courses in the GE program for first-time freshmen initiate the learning of core competencies. Beginning at the time of students' admission, the university has entry-level assessment data on students' writing and math skills from the CSU proficiency standards, the English Placement Test (EPT) and the Entry Level Mathematics (ELM) test. SSU also engages in Directed Self Placement (DSP) for placement into English composition courses (discussed in **chapter 6**), which provides data on student perceptions of their writing ability. Early Start, a CSU program to better prepare students in mathematics and English composition, also provides data about student competency in those areas at the time of matriculation.

Based on these assessments, students are guided into appropriate foundation-level GE courses to continue to build written and oral communication skills, critical thinking,

At the lower-division level, SSU built an assessment plan to take into account the WASC core competencies. The GE Subcommittee has conducted assessment of Oral Communication and Information Literacy, as detailed in **chapter 3**. SSU thus has the structures in place to evaluate student learning in the core competencies at the entry level, in the lower-division, and in senior-level major courses, but the institution has not yet engaged in a project to measure the "value-added" between these levels of student competency.

## CORE COMPETENCIES: ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND RESULTS

(CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

In summer 2016, the institution conducted core competency assessments for written communication, critical thinking,

and information literacy. During fall 2016 and spring 2017, the institution is undertaking assessment of quantitative reasoning and oral communication.

For the summer project, 133 senior-level projects, including term and final papers, case studies, posters, essays and analyses, were collected from departments in all schools. Two teams of four faculty assessors were assembled to draft scoring rubrics and conduct the assessments. Rubrics were drafted for simplicity and generality, tested on sample projects, and final rubrics developed by each team to produce a common understanding of outcome levels, applicability to diverse projects, and normed responses. The teams were divided into six blind pairs, and each pair was assigned seventeen projects to score. Projects were sampled evenly, and each team assessed 102 of the 133 available projects.

For the fall 2016 and winter 2017 project on quantitative reasoning, nearly 200 exams, essays, posters, and analyses were collected from departments in three schools. A team of 4 faculty assessors have drafted a rubric using the same principles of simplicity and applicability as described above. The teams are divided into blind pairs, and scoring is underway.

The development of an assessment process for oral communication will commence in spring 2017 and will be carried out as indicated above for other core competencies. The assessment process will account for the different types of oral communication that occur in different disciplines.

## Written Communication

In the development of the written communication assessment rubric, the faculty team focused on the expected outcomes for SSU graduates. The team evaluated how a written project addresses an audience and what strategies the writer employs (awareness of writing situation, appropriate style, evidence, analysis, and development of ideas). The team also evaluated the mechanics of a presentation (organization, sentence fluency, syntax, and writing mechanics). See [appendix 4.2](#) for the Writing Literacy Rubric.

The results from the assessment process demonstrate that, of the projects assessed, the “Developed” stage is the

median value across all outcomes. Additionally, more than 70% of the projects were either at the “Highly Developed” or “Developed” Stage, with *Appropriate Style of Writing* as the highest trait (90%). *Sentence Fluency and Control of Syntax* was the lowest rated trait (68%). See [appendix 4.3](#) for Written Communication Assessment Results. Program data were disaggregated and returned to home departments, along with the institution results and scoring rubric. Each program will decide how to use its individual results to make changes to curriculum or pedagogy.

The institution’s results from the written communication assessment are aligned with those of the Written English Proficiency Test (WEPT) which graduating seniors must pass to fulfill the CSU Graduate Written Assessment Requirement (GWAR). The WEPT requires students write a persuasive essay on a topic of general interest in a two-hour time period. The essay is scored by pairs of faculty on the basis of seven criteria examining audience voice, focus, use of examples, sentence and word variety, and mechanics of grammar. Further information about the [WEPT essay and assessment](#) process is available on the Writing Center website. The average pass rate for the WEPT is between 68-72%, consistent with the results from the Core competency Writing Assessment.

In the last year, the campus has begun a writing intensive course (WIC) initiative that provides students the option of passing, with a grade of C or better, an upper-division course which has a strong emphasis on writing in lieu of taking the WEPT to meet the GWAR requirement. Starting with a pilot of five courses in the fall 2016, the Writing Center staff reports that 100% of the students passed with a grade of C or better. The program has expanded in spring 2017 to include 17 [courses](#) in three schools. Faculty offering these courses must obtain training in preparation for offering a writing intensive course. In addition, the WIC courses address one of the barriers to graduation identified during the fall 2016 Graduation Initiative 2025 advising initiative. The WEPT will remain available for students for the foreseeable future, but the expansion of the WIC program shows great promise for alleviating one barrier to graduation, since courses that count towards the GWAR requirement also meet GE upper-division requirements and/or major elective requirements.

## Critical Thinking and Information Literacy

The faculty team decided to take an integrative approach in preparing learning outcomes and rubrics for what they considered to be paired core competencies. For critical thinking, the guiding principle was formulating and defending an original thesis in light of compelling evidence that takes multiple points of view into account. Since a thesis relies on the submitted evidence, there must be effective awareness of the use of sources, i.e., information literacy. Thus, critical thinking represents the relevant use of evidence and its organization within the context of presenting and developing a thesis. Information literacy focuses on how evidence is appropriately sourced, used to support claims, and ethically presented and evaluated. See [appendix 4.4](#) for the Critical Thinking and Information Literacy Rubrics.

Faculty used the same population of projects collected for the Summer 2016 writing assessment. The faculty team was again divided into 6 blind pairs and assigned 17 projects per pair (102 projects total). The faculty team rated outcomes on the basis of achievement levels, with a 0 as not meeting the outcome and a 3 as advanced. Three traits were assessed for critical thinking, with their median values at achievement level 2 (intermediate). At least 84% of all projects were assessed at achievement level 2 or 3 for all traits. See [appendix 4.5](#) for Critical Thinking Assessment Results.

The assessment for information literacy produced somewhat lower results. 68% of the projects demonstrated combined achievement levels of 2 or 3 for Use of Sources. 71% of the projects demonstrated combined achievement levels of 2 or 3 for Use of Information to Accomplish a Specific Purpose. Ethical Use of Sources was the most problematic area: only 56% of the projects demonstrated an achievement level of 2 or 3. See [appendix 4.6](#) for more information on Literacy Assessment Results). These results point to a need to help students understand how to be cognizant of citing sources, especially in the digital age where hyperlinks are as necessary a citation as are references to printed materials. The institutional results were again disaggregated by program and sent to departments (along with the assessment rubrics) for reflection and consideration on potential changes to courses or pedagogy.

Institutional data from the information literacy core competency assessment process suggests the need to support enhanced programming by the University Library scaffolded across both the four-year baccalaureate and the graduate experience. The library has contributed significantly to the process of getting students started on research as first-year students and has also piloted information literacy instruction in SYE courses in Arts and Humanities and in Science and Technology. With additional information literacy workshops and training for students, staff, and faculty, as well as collaborative efforts between faculty in the majors and library faculty, the institution could promote sequenced information literacy skills throughout the baccalaureate experience.

## Quantitative Reasoning

SSU is conducting a similar course-embedded institutional assessment process for quantitative reasoning and oral communication during spring 2017. A team of faculty have developed the rubric for quantitative reasoning (see [appendix 4.7](#) for the Quantitative Reasoning Rubric), and the Office of Academic Programs has collected samples of student work, including exams, projects, and posters from undergraduate research presentations.

In addition to this institutional assessment project, quantitative reasoning is included in many PLOs across the academic schools. In programs like the BS in Kinesiology, the BA in Geography, the BS in Electrical Engineering, the BS and BA in Physics, the BS in Business Administration, the BA in Women and Gender Studies, as well as in the humanities-based BA in American Multicultural Studies, faculty have built in learning outcomes that encourage students to use quantitative reasoning and quantitative literacy as a means of problem-solving. In assessment practices, programs measure quantitative skills through tests, problem-based learning, poster sessions, and essays. Some programs map quantitative reasoning outcomes through the curriculum (see [Physics and Astronomy Learning Objectives](#)). The program review process helps ensure that programs are gathering and evaluating program assessment data to drive curricular change.



## Oral Communication

This spring, a team of faculty will begin work on oral communication rubrics. That team will build on the work done in 2012-13 to assess oral communication at the freshman level (see discussion in **chapter 3**). As WSCUC workshops have demonstrated, for oral communication it will be important to develop mechanisms for different types of course-embedded student work. Disciplines have a variety of ways of measuring verbal skills, including in-class discussion, clinical situations, formal presentations, informal presentations, poster sessions for undergraduate research, and more. By re-assessing oral communication in the FYE and FLCs, using a new set of rubrics that address the problems associated with the earlier GE assessment process and by comparing those data to assessment in senior-level courses, the institution can investigate whether student oral competency increases between the first year and the senior year.

In addition to this institutional assessment process, oral competency is measured in many PLOs across the academic schools. In programs like the BM and BA in Music, the BSN (Nursing), the BA in Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies, the BA in History, the BA in Political Science, and the BA in Psychology, faculty have built in learning outcomes that encourage students to develop oral communication skills in a disciplinary context. In assessment practices, programs measure oral competency through a variety of in-class situations, research presentations and poster sessions, and clinical situations. The program review process helps ensure that programs are gathering and evaluating program assessment data to drive curricular change.

## FACULTY AT SSU: THE CORNERSTONE OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

(CFRs 1.3, 2.8, 2.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.10)

At Sonoma State, instructional faculty include tenure system faculty, lecturers (both full- and part-time), and those taking advantage of the Faculty Early Retirement Program (FERP). The professional qualifications of all faculty are determined by the tenure/tenure-track members of the department based on industry and academic standards.

The California Faculty Association **Collective Bargaining Agreement** and the CSU Chancellor's Office have published documents that delineate recruitment, hiring, orientation, workload, incentives, and evaluation practices for all CSU Unit 3 employees. In addition, SSU employs a broad policy for evaluation of teaching effectiveness that includes course review, peer observations, Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETEs) tools, candidate self-assessment, and committee review. Faculty are informed of evaluation processes, such as timelines, required document submission, and committee review, each academic year. The **Office of Faculty Affairs** works with the **Faculty Center** to provide faculty development workshops and materials to inform faculty about evaluation processes.

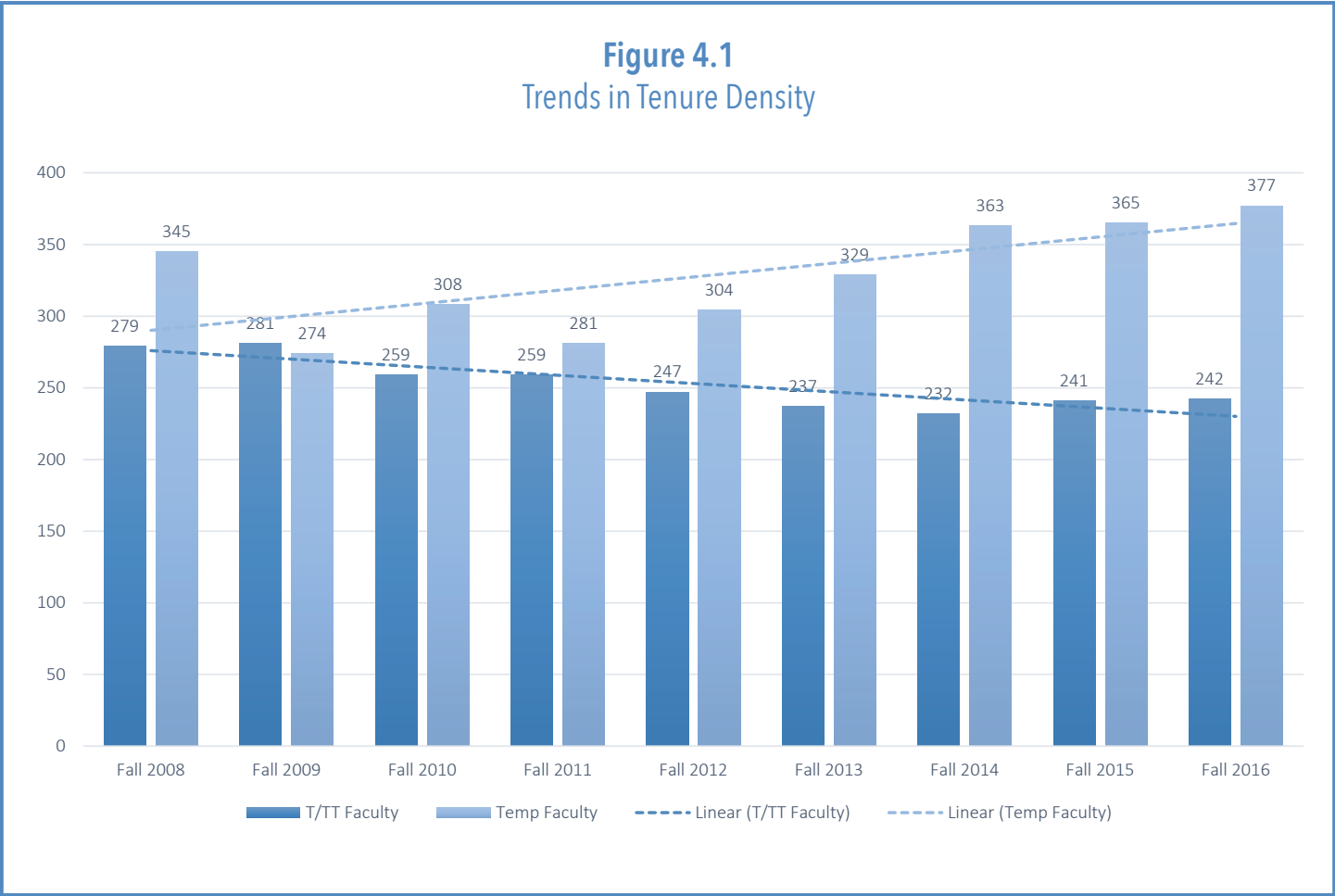
Sonoma State University has developed a clear and concise **Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion Policy** (RTP) that delineates three pillars of academic success 1) teaching, 2) research, scholarly and creative activities, and 3) service, listed in weighted order. Each department may further delineate department-specific RTP criteria for candidates. These criteria are vetted through faculty governance and thoroughly explained to faculty on the tenure track. Faculty accomplishments, including scholarly and creative work, grants, and break-through work in curriculum and pedagogy are often shared on the SSU website and are honored through awards such as the **Excellence in Teaching Award**.

In fall 2016, SSU had 242 tenure-track faculty members and 377 lecturers. Tenure density has been a well-explored issue not only on the SSU campus, but also at the level of the CSU Chancellor's Office. As is evident from **figure 4.1** below, SSU has experienced a decline in tenure/tenure-track faculty since 2009. In the last three years, the institution has hired over 50 new tenure-track faculty and is currently hiring 25 for the 2017-18 academic year. SSU is also making a concerted effort to build diversity in its faculty ranks, since only 20% of SSU's faculty report being American Indian/Pacific Islander, Asian, Black, Latino, or Multiracial. SSU staff are more representative, with 46% reporting as non-white.

Faculty at Sonoma State are characterized by their engagement in governance processes. **Academic Senate** is the

governing body of the faculty. Its committees oversee the curriculum, academic policies, and policies and processes surrounding RTP. It is the official faculty body providing opinion on matters affecting the university, largely through the work of its **committee structure**. In addition, there are many other **administrative committees** that include faculty representatives, with opportunities to participate in myriad areas of decision-making.

Sonoma State University enumerates rights and responsibilities that are essential for the protection of **academic freedom** through The Statement of Professional Responsibility (SPR) and the Faculty Bill of Rights (FBR). These documents empower the Academic Freedom Subcommittee (AFS) of the Faculty Standards and Affairs Committee (FSAC) to ensure compliance and an avenue for reporting violations to academic freedom. AFS meets regularly to ensure faculty have unrestricted search for knowledge and truth and free exposition in the scholarly community and have avenue for assuring these rights as outlined.



Sonoma State's mission statement, with its focus on life-long learning, cultural perspectives, intellectual and aesthetic appreciation, active citizenship, career preparation, and social responsibility, is the foundation of the institution's definition of student success.

## GRADUATION RATES FOR UNDERGRADUATES

(CFRs 1.2, 2.10, 4.2)

The CSU **definition** of student success reflects the importance of retention and graduation rates.

- Student success means improving graduation rates and ensuring more students get a degree sooner.
- Student success means reducing the number of students who drop out of college before graduating.
- Student success means making college more affordable to more Californians.
- Student success means helping more prospective students understand what it takes to earn their degree.

Sonoma State's **Office of Reporting and Analytics** reports retention and graduation information on its website. Fall-to-fall **retention rates** for first-time, full-time students have been trending upward, increasing approximately 7% for the ten-year period ending spring 2016. Even with these successes, 19% - 20% of incoming freshman are typically lost between the first and second year. This represents the most significant area where Sonoma State loses students and is an area where additional work needs to be done. Recent discussions this spring about changes to advising and the institution's academic disqualification policy may help improve persistence.

In 2009, the CSU launched its first **Graduation Initiative**. By 2015, SSU's six-year graduation rates had increased to 59%, which exceeded the target set in the first Graduation Initiative (57%). While the achievement gap for URM students decreased over the 6-year period, the institution did not meet its goal of a 50% reduction in the gap.



SSU's target was 1%, but in 2015, the achievement gap was still 8%. For the most recent cohort of students entering as freshmen (2010), SSU's 6-year graduation rate was 61% and the achievement gap was 7%. The achievement gaps for four-year graduation rates are larger, at 10% for the 2012 cohort (see **appendix 5.1**). Nevertheless, for the 2010 cohort, Sonoma State has the fourth highest four-year graduation rate among the CSUs.

For transfer students, the achievement gaps are much lower. For the 2012 cohort, there is no achievement gap in four-year graduation rates. Both the general population and URM students are graduating at 79%. There is still a small achievement gap for the 2-year graduation rates for transfer students: URM students are graduating at 51%, while the general population of transfer students is graduating at 54% (see **appendix 5.2**).

In fall 2016, the CSU launched **Graduation Initiative 2025**, for which Sonoma State received one million dollars in one time funds. This second phase established a new set of ambitious goals, including raising the system-wide 6-year graduation rate to 70% and eliminating the achievement gap. In this iteration of the Graduation Initiative, the CSU Chancellor's Office has emphasized four-year graduation rates for students entering as freshmen and two-year rates for transfer students. Sonoma State has been charged with increasing its four-year graduation rate to 54% (from 29%) and its two-year rate to 64% (from 52%). See **appendix 5.3** for the Graduation Initiative 2025 Goals for Sonoma State.



At Sonoma State, efforts to meet the objectives of the graduation initiative are being spearheaded by the GIG. In fall 2016, GIG used the campus’ **Student Success Plan** to develop two initiatives: an advising-focused graduation outreach and the expansion of a pilot project to develop writing intensive courses to replace or at least provide an alternative to the WEPT. The graduation outreach involved advisors, both faculty and professional, making contact with over 800 students with 103 or more units towards graduation to reduce to graduation in fall 2016 or spring 2017. As part of this project, deans and department chairs identified bottleneck courses and added 21 additional sections for spring 2017.

The second project GIG spearheaded involved expanding the delivery of **WICs**, which focus on disciplinary modes of writing in upper-division courses. A pilot project to develop WICs commenced in fall 2016 prior to the graduation initiative, organized by the Writing Center and the school of Arts and Humanities (for a complete review of the pilot project with assessment data, see **appendix 5.4**). Benefits include enhanced development of academic writing skills, removal of impediments to graduation, and deeper engagement with disciplinary content. As discussed in chapter 4, the pass rates for WIC pilot courses were impressive (100%), so for the spring semester, faculty converted 12 additional upper-division courses to WICs, for a total of 17.

The graduation initiative will fund 15 more WIC courses in fall 2017 to continue reducing reliance on the WEPT. The Writing Center also offered an additional administration of the WEPT during winter 2017 to help students graduate in fall 2016 and spring 2017.

In addition, the School of Extended and International Education (SEIE) offered scholarships to students nearing graduation to defray the cost of taking winter intersession courses. Data is still being analyzed to determine the impact of these initiatives on graduation rates, but anecdotally faculty are reporting increased numbers of graduation applications.

In spring 2017, Sonoma State will establish target goals for each school as part of the graduation initiative. In addition, GIG has already turned its attention to transfer students and URM students and will develop strategies specifically designed to insure smoother transitions for transfer students into the university and to decrease the achievement gap for our students from under-represented groups.

## RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

(CFRs 1.2, 2.10)

Retention and graduation rates have also improved for graduate students on campus over the period since the last accreditation review. The decrease in the three-year retention rate is generally attributed to the fact that most graduate programs are structured on a two-year completion model. Lower retention in the third year means that more students are completing their work in two years.

Table 5.1 Graduation Rates for Graduate Students		
	FALL 2010 GRADUATE COHORT	FALL 2012 GRADUATE COHORT
Two-year retention rate	37.7 %	47.1 %
Three-year retention rate	7.5 %	6.9 %
Graduation in 2 years	28.6 %	32.6 %
Graduation in 4 years	65.2 %	73.91 %

## REMEDIATION AND EARLY START

(CFRs 2.10, 2.12, 2.13)

Closely tied to retention and graduation rates is the academic preparedness of students who matriculate at Sonoma State. CSU **Executive Order 665** (1997) requires that campuses develop a procedure to ensure incoming students satisfy the ELM and EPT requirements or qualify for an exemption. Students who fail to meet these placement benchmarks must complete their remedial requirements in one year or be placed on a leave of absence until they do so. The fall 2015 freshman cohort consisted of 1,893 students, and 727 students (38%) required remediation in English, math, or both subjects. An academic advisor serves

as the remediation compliance officer for the campus and works with students and records and registration to ensure students meet the requirements. For the fall 2015 cohort, 81% (588) of students needing remediation were able to clear their remediation requirement successfully. During the 2016-17 academic year, staff and administrators are developing strategies to improve the remediation rate with better communication about the need to complete ELM and EPT testing prior to orientation.

In addition, and in parallel to the English department’s “stretch” composition sequence (see **chapter 6** for details), the math department is currently developing proposals to launch a series of stretch courses. The department has already piloted Math 165X (Elementary Applied Statistics), which is a 6-unit version of the 4-unit Math 165 (Elementary Statistics) open to first-time freshman who place into intermediate algebra. The six-unit version allows students to satisfy their remediation and their GE B4 requirement simultaneously. In fall 2017, four experimental stretch courses are being proposed. Each will be a two-semester sequence covering the material of the associated one-semester GE B4 course, and each will be open to first-time freshmen who have placed into beginning or intermediate algebra. The stretch math program can shorten the time to graduation, reduce the stigma of being placed in a remedial mathematics course and help phase out the remedial classes permanently, and improve essential learning outcomes.

Also available to students for completion of remedial course work is SSU’s **Early Start Program**, a CSU initiative that encourages students to begin remediation during the summer before matriculation. Early Start provides a man-

datory workshop during orientation for students who have remedial math needs and courses are offered in an online mode during the summer. Alternatively, students can take an Early Start course at another CSU.

## SUPPORTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

(CFRs 1.4, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14)

During fall 2016, the campus began operating in a more student-focused and student-centered manner by consolidating all of the primary Academic Support and Student Life/Campus Life services and programs into the Division of Student Affairs, as mentioned in chapter 1. By revitalizing and rebuilding Student Affairs, the expectation is that this change will place SSU students and their academic and co-curricular needs at the forefront of the institution’s efforts. While equipping the organization with the capacity and consolidated resources to successfully engage and address the challenges. The Writing Center, SOURCE, Study Abroad, and the Center for Community Engagement continue to report to Academic Affairs. Many of the units discussed below have been tracking metrics of student participation and student satisfaction, as reported.

### Advising

The Advising Center and the Orientation Office, along with EOP, the Office of Career Services, and the Office of Records and Registration, recently moved from the Division of Academic Affairs to Student Affairs as part of the reorganization discussed in chapter 1. The Advising Center is primarily set up to serve undeclared students, and four advisors serve 1,388 undeclared students (as of fall

**Table 5.2**  
First Time Freshmen Remediation

	ENGLISH REMEDICATION	MATH REMEDICATION	MATH & ENGLISH REMEDICATION
Fall 2015 First Time freshmen on entry need remediation	11% (213 students)	14% (262 students)	13% (252 students)
Fall 2015 First Time freshmen on completion of first year completed remediation successfully	80% (171 students)	71% (187 students)	91% (230 students)

2016). Two of the advisors, however, have 50% appointments in the School of Science and Technology and in the School of Social Sciences, serving as GE advisors to students with declared majors. One of the advisors serves as the remediation compliance officer and another supervises a small group of peer advisors. The advisors also support faculty and students in the majors with GE advising. The high number of undeclared students is related to the impaction issues discussed in chapter 1. With the new administration's arrival are questions about whether the advising structure is working properly, and discussions have commenced about whether special populations, including freshmen, sophomores, transfer students, athletes, and URM students are receiving sufficient advising support. The professional advisors in the Advising Center were central to the 2016-17 graduation outreach described earlier in this chapter, contacting and working with about 400 students over a two-month period.

Advising in the majors is still primarily handled by faculty, although most of the schools have one full- or part-time professional advisor. In the graduation outreach described above, faculty in almost every department also made contact with a total of 400 students. The graduation initiative has raised questions about the advising model at SSU and about the effectiveness of advising services. More discussions will ensue in spring 2017 with the goal of gathering data about advising and developing objectives for improvement.

## Serving Diverse Populations

Sonoma State has developed a well-functioning set of academic support services that helps students succeed, and a number of those services have a direct benefit for under-represented students. Central to campus efforts to reduce the gap in retention and graduation rates for first-generation and URM students is the **EOP**. EOP helps ease the transition to SSU of low-income students and provides services in the following areas to help them succeed: admissions, financial assistance, orientation, academic support, as well as academic and personal advising. EOP is currently serving 140 students, and outcomes data suggest the program is succeeding. Fall-to-fall retention rates for EOP students are higher than the general population of freshmen (85% compared to 81%) and transfer retention



*EOP students at Sonoma State University.*

rates are also higher (about 5 percentage points higher than the general population). In addition, graduation rates for EOP students have been steadily climbing, and for the 2010 cohort of freshmen, six-year graduation rates are almost on par with the general population (58% vs. 61%), demonstrating that the achievement gap is closing. For transfer students, the four-year graduation rates are actually higher among EOP students than in the general population (88% vs. 83%). The challenge lies in closing the achievement gap for four-year and two-year graduation rates.

Closely linked with EOP, the **Seawolf Scholars** Foster Youth Program increases the academic and personal success of motivated foster youth enrolled at Sonoma State University. This program for both freshmen and transfer students was initiated three years ago via grant-funding by an SSU student, who herself had been raised in foster care. Data from 2015-16 indicates the program has some effect on student success. Although foster youth are more likely than other freshmen to need remediation, Seawolf Scholars are more likely to persist for at least three consecutive semesters after the freshman year than the general population. They also are more likely to achieve a 3.0 GPA or higher in the first year of college than the freshman population in general. See **appendix 5.5** for the full data set.

Several programs assist students who are bilingual or English language learners. Two long-standing TRIO programs, **United for Success** and the **Multilingual Achievers Program** (MAP), assist 500 first-generation, low-income students each year. More than 40% of United for Success students and 75% of MAP students are Latino.



In the current academic year, MAP is serving 538 students, 436 of whom are Hispanic. MAP has a persistence rate of 91% and a good academic standing rate of 90%. Another long-standing program aimed at increasing college attendance for middle and high school migrant students is the **Migrant Education Advisor Program** (MEAP). MEAP is a federal program associated with the counseling degree at SSU, and it engages the institution and its students in collaborations with county and regional organizations. Bilingual SSU students work in local public schools, either as tutors considering careers as bilingual teacher via the Mini-Corps Program or as academic advisors and mentors via MEAP. Many of these SSU undergraduates go on to pursue teaching credentials and/or MA degrees in school counseling.

### Tutoring and the Writing Center

The Tutorial Center provides services in two different formats: individualized tutoring and supplemental instruction (SI), in which tutors are assigned to specific courses in the sciences, modern languages, and business. Over the past 3 years, the tutorial center has tripled the number of courses using SI tutors each semester—from 10 to 30 courses. Each semester, 25-35 tutors provide individual tutoring sessions for students in more than 50 courses. See data on the use of the tutorial center in **appendix 5.6**.

SSU's Writing Center assists students, faculty, and staff members, as well as community members. Staff and peer tutors work both one-on-one and in small groups to develop clients' writing skills. Center staff also work with faculty to improve writing instruction and with students who need support to pass the WEPT. In 2015-16, approximately 1,080 students used tutoring services in 3,255 appointments.

### Disability Services for Students (DSS)

DSS is responsible for receiving, reviewing, and verifying disability documentation for students, authorizing and providing specialized support services, and assisting faculty, staff, and managers in providing equal access with reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities in a reasonable and timely manner. In 2015-16, 689 students (7.4% of the total population) identified themselves as a student with a disability, up from 432 students

in 2010-11 (the report on **DSS for 2015-16** contains more information). Students who use DSS report high levels of satisfaction: 90% of students responding felt welcome, believed office staff were knowledgeable, helpful, and courteous, and would recommend DSS to other students.

## STUDENT SERVICES

(CFRs 2.11, 2.13)

### Residential Life

Residential life recently moved from the Division of Administration and Finance to Student Affairs and is an integral partner in the university's effort to provide a positive educational experience that fosters retention and graduation. More than 3,000 students are served by residential life each year, many in residential academic communities such as ACE (academic and career exploration), first-gen, and FYE. These communities help students create a strong link between their lives in the residence hall and learning experiences in the classroom. Students in each living-learning program are housed together in designated villages and take classes together that count toward graduation and GE requirements. Each year, Housing and Residential Life participate in a national intercollegiate campus resident satisfaction survey. This benchmarking survey compares



*Associated Students, JUMP tabling on campus.*

SSU residents' reported satisfaction ratings on 20 different factors to those from other universities. The response rate has increased considerably, from 28% in 2012-13 to 55.7% in 2015-16. Residents ranked their overall satisfaction with living on campus at 76.3%, up from 71% in 2012-13.

## Associated Students (AS)

Associated Students (AS) is a student-directed, auxiliary corporation of SSU. The mission of AS is to enrich the lives of SSU students. AS accomplishes this mission by providing a variety of programs and services including AS productions, the Children's School, Join Us Making Progress (JUMP; a student community service organization), and student government. As participation increases and more students take AS or JUMP leadership positions or participate in JUMP programs, students report that they find value in and learn from the programs. AS students serve on multiple governance and administrative committees. For the Spring 2016 AS student affairs assessment report, see [appendix 5.7](#).

## Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS serves the mental health needs of the student community by offering confidential counseling to students experiencing personal problems that interfere with their academic progress, career, or well-being. In addition to offering individual and group counseling, CAPS serves the mental health needs of students through offering consultation, training and outreach. CAPS also offers a Mental Health Ambassador internship for students interested in reducing stigma associated with accessing mental health care. Demand for CAPS services is high and increasing. In 2012-2013 they served 957 students, and in 2015-2016 they served 1,075. A full review of [CAPS](#) contains more information.

## COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (CFRs 2.5, 2.11, 2.13)

Community engagement is one of the strategic initiatives most closely related to SSU's mission. The [Center for Community Engagement](#) (CCE), housed in Academic Programs, advances community-based and service-learning programs on the SSU campus.

*Service-learning is a pedagogy that utilizes community service projects within the context of an academic course. Academic service-learning distinguishes itself from internships and other credit-bearing community experiences in several ways. First, the community experience is a component of an academic course. Second, service-learning projects are designed in partnership with community to meet an expressed community need. Third, structured reflection is utilized to help students understand how their community experiences link with the academic and civic learning objectives of the course.*

The CCE supports faculty in developing community-based teaching that integrates academic theory with community service and scholarship that is inclusive of community partners and students to address local problems. By incorporating these projects into the curriculum, the CCE teaches students to be active citizens and that the theories taught in the classroom do apply to real world issues. Use of service-learning pedagogy at SSU continues to increase. In 2012-13, 2,702 students were enrolled in a total of 88 courses. In 2015-16, 2,857 students participated in 82 courses. Most exciting, of SSU's 2,140 2015-2016 graduates, more than 50% (1,141) took at least one service-learning course while at SSU.

## INTERNSHIPS AND OTHER CAREER-RELATED FIELD WORK (CFRs 2.5, 2.13)

In recognition of the importance of internships, the SSU Academic Senate is currently working on defining various types of engaged learning (e.g., internship, service-learning, and clinical) and creating an internship policy. A number of majors require students to participate in engaged learning. For example, the Department of Sociology requires that their majors complete a sociological experience requirement that students can meet through an internship, a service-learning course, or a careers in sociology course. Discipline-based internships and fieldwork are assessed in departmental assessment processes as reflected in the MQID and IEEI data (see [chapter 3](#)).



*Anna Cheban studying abroad in Australia.*

## STUDY ABROAD

(CFRs 2.1, 2.13)

The Center for International Education (CIE) at SSU is the hub for all students, faculty, staff, and community members interested in international education. This office houses the American language institute, CSU international programs (IP; study abroad), international student advising, the national student exchange (NSE), the CIE student ambassador program, and WIVA (work, intern, volunteer abroad). CIE is committed to supporting a global community of international friendship and scholarship on campus. Involvement is steady: in 2013-14, 62 students studied abroad via IP and nine via NSE. Study abroad is positively correlated with high graduation rates at SSU: 65 of the 71 students who went abroad in 2013-14 graduated within 6 years of their admission. In the same year, 14 students studied domestically and of those 8 graduated within 6 years of their admission. In 2015-16, 67 students studied abroad via IP and 16 via NSE, and 20 students studied domestically. While participants in study abroad are not diverse enough, programs like the Gilman Scholarship encourage participation in study abroad by URM students.

## UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE RESEARCH

(CFRs 2.8, 2.9)

Sonoma State University is proud to provide students with many opportunities to engage in research and present their research in professional forums. Undergraduates collaborate with faculty in the studio, laboratory, and field, often on externally funded projects sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, NASA, the Departments of Defense and Education, and others. Undergraduate and graduate students have access to advanced research facilities, including a scanning electron microscope and DNA analysis equipment, which are highly distinctive experiences for a public, primarily undergraduate, university.

Both undergraduate and graduate students are invited to share their research at the annual research symposium. Students are prepared for these events with the help of faculty mentors, and staff in the SSU Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Experiences ([SOURCE](#)). Students funded by programs such as the McNair Scholarship and the Koret Foundation are required to present their research at the symposium. Many graduate programs across campus also require students to present their research as part of their core curriculum. Both poster and oral presentation opportunities are available and are judged by a panel of faculty.

## TOOLS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS: ARR AND DEGREE PLANNER

(CFRs 1.6, 2.2, 2.10, 2.12, 3.5)

Since 2013, a number of new online planning tools have been implemented. The most recent eAdvising tool being implemented is the Degree Planner, a course planning tool designed to assist students with developing long-term semester-by-semester plans for graduation using a dynamic course planner that interacts with the Academic Requirements Report (ARR). The tool identifies course requirements in need of completion and displays the courses in the order specified by the academic department to ensure course pre-requisites are taken early to facilitate a timely graduation. As more and more students use this new tool,



the Degree Planner will provide data to address course demand in a way that is not currently possible.

*Online advising tools provide students the ability to control and manage more aspects of their academic planning, exemplifying SSU's actions to increase students' active participation in their academic success.*

## SUPPORT FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The majority of our master's programs include internships, field experiences, and practicums that provide students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in real world situations. In the biology master's program, for example, each student is assigned to a particular lab under the direction of a faculty mentor whose research interests most closely align with their own areas of interest. Several programs (e.g., biology, English, public administration) employ students as teaching associates or graduate assistants to teach introductory undergraduate classes or supervise lab sections. In addition to their salaries, these students are also eligible to receive tuition waivers. Other forms of financial assistance for qualified graduate students include scholarships, the State University Grant, the Graduate Equity Fellowship, the California Pre-Doctoral program, and the Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive program. The School of Education offers support for post-baccalaureate certification students through the **TEACH** program. In 2016, the School of Business and Economics was provided \$50,000 in funding from the CSU Chancellor's Office, with a 25% match from the SEIE, to pursue a fully online, Executive MBA focused on the global wine industry.

## GRANTS AND CSU-FUNDED STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES

In 2016, President Sakaki signed an agreement to make SSU a partner college with TheDREAM.US, the nation's largest college access program offering privately funded scholarships to undocumented students. SSU was the only institution in California added this past year. These new scholarships for incoming freshmen and transfer students are renewable each year, and can cover a maximum of \$25,000 towards a bachelor's degree.

Also in 2016, the School of Science and Technology received a \$48,365 grant from The Regents of the University of California/National Science Foundation to partner with the University of California, Berkeley, Lawrence Hall of Science, in the Transforming College Teaching project. This effort seeks to improve university faculty instructional practices and boost students' learning through a blended professional learning program. The program engages faculty in interactive and reflective activities to discuss current research in learning, reflect on their actions, and share their practice. The program was piloted with STEM undergraduate faculty and is broadening to include cross-disciplinary peers from across the SSU campus, as well as community college faculty from the northern California region.

In 2013, SSU received Academic and Student Success Programs (ASSP) funds from the Chancellor's Office in support of **Infrastructure Enhancement for Student Success, Peer Mentor Leadership, and Sophomore Year Experience**. This funding has since been made permanent base funding. For a description of these programs, see **appendix 5.8**.

In 2015, SSU received Student Completion Initiative funds from the Chancellor's Office in support of **Tenure-Track Faculty Hiring, Enhanced Advising, Augment Bottleneck Solutions, Student Preparation, HIPs, and Data Driven Decisions**. For details regarding these programs, see **appendix 5.9**.



# 6

## Quality Assurance and Improvement

Sonoma State has developed a robust program review and assessment process that is participatory, attentive to student learning outcomes, and focused on quality and improvement of instruction.

### PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS

(CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6)

Sonoma State has developed a comprehensive **Program Review Policy** detailing the purpose and contents of the self-study, as well as the evaluation process. Every 5 years, departments and programs are asked to address the key elements of program effectiveness. The process culminates in an action plan that ultimately leads to program revision. Departments implement changes based on program review and assessment, including external reviewer recommendations. The process is designed to effect a continuous cycle of improvement for every academic program.

### RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS WSCUC CONCERNS

(CFRs 1.8, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6)

SSU's program review process has been a subject of scrutiny in previous WSCUC evaluations. In March 2010, the commission noted that assessment needed to be strengthened in the program review process. The institution was asked to complete the "accountability loop" and seek "greater consistency in defining and assessing learning and utilize direct assessment of student learning more effectively," (**Commission Action Letter**). Over the past seven years, SSU has worked to improve both the program review process and assessment of student learning.

SSU's **2012 Interim Report to WSCUC** details the challenges the institution continued to face regarding program review and the initial steps the institution took to address those challenges. The EPC was tasked with reviewing the program review process and making recommendations for improvement. The chief recommendation was the creation of UPRS. The EPC also developed a process

consisting of two cycles, each of which had a clearly delineated purpose. They also decided to provide the university with a summary each year of the patterns in program reviews. The faculty developed additional guidelines for cycle two, and the Office of Academic Programs worked with deans to develop a new schedule for program review. The AVP for Academic Programs also began meeting with faculty from each program to provide training on the new procedures. The intent was that the program review process be collaborative, involving all faculty and staff in the program. The changes to the process also included establishing compensation structures for the program review coordinators and the external reviewers. SSU's 2012 Interim Report offers examples of how programs used the new process to close the loop and drive change. Biology used external reviewers' comments as impetus for considerable curricular changes, removing two concentrations and creating a new research experience course. Global studies revised its learning outcomes and strengthened its assessment plan. Recent steps taken by SSU to strengthen the program review process are detailed in the next section.

### RECENT ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM REVIEW AND FUTURE PLANS

(CFRs 2.7, 3.3, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6)

In the last year, the institution has again addressed the issue of creating a process of continuous improvement, as evidenced by the spring 2016 faculty retreat, which focused on the theme of "Closing the Loop on Program Review." At that retreat, faculty analyzed the program review process, its strengths and limitations, with particular attention paid to what happens after the program review process is complete. The group work at the retreat led to recommendations to increase transparency, simplify and standardize the process, invest the provost and the deans more heavily in the outcomes of program review, and create a new program review template. The retreat revealed that the program review process continues to be somewhat inconsistent in terms of using assessment data to close the loop. Faculty reported that they want more from the process. They

want to see tangible results—not just in terms of resource allocation, but in terms of the value of program review.

In fall 2016, UPRS took on the task of revising the program review guidelines, separating the process of program review from the template for the self-study. Those guidelines are now under discussion by the EPC and by the parent committee for UPRS, the newly developed APARC (APARC’s role is discussed in chapters 2 and 3). As a result of the retreat discussion and further conversations in UPRS, GIG, and other committees, suggested changes include the following:

- More formal training for the departments beginning cycle one of the program review process; the AVP for Academic Programs will work with the Faculty Center to design a workshop that outlines policies and procedures.
- On-going support from the Office of Academic Programs and School Assessment Coordinators for the departments and the program review coordinators as they prepare the self-study. The support will ensure timely completion of the self-study and should include discussions of assessment and curriculum revision, as well as other aspects of the program review template.
- Clarification of the external review process that creates opportunities for the provost and the AVP for Academic Programs to discuss the external reviewer’s findings with the department chair and dean, thus ensuring that administrators are invested in the process and working with the department on how to use the external review findings.
- Clarification of the role of the school curriculum committees and the deans in the program review process with clear guidelines for the feedback needed at those levels.
- Development of a rubric for UPRS to use when providing feedback to departments; the rubric will also enable UPRS to assess the quality and integrity of the program review process.
- Clarification of the Memorandum of Understand (MOU) template and the contents of the MOU, which should spell out departmental responsibilities and timelines for action items as well as the support and resources needed from the institution for the department to make progress.

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**  
(CFRs 2.10, 4.1)

The program review process, as well as the IEEI and MQID grids, reveal that faculty use a variety of methods to assess student learning (see analysis of the IEEI and MQID grids in chapters 2 and 3). Those include, but are not limited to,

evaluating core competencies of writing, critical thinking, oral communication, quantitative literacy, and research skills across disciplines, student surveys, focus groups, persistence rates, and signature assignments in senior seminars and capstone courses at the undergraduate level or culminating projects at the graduate level. In the lower division, processes and courses such as DSP, FYE, and English 100 A/B First Year Composition serve both as instruments of assessment and as retention strategies at the undergraduate level.

**Freshman Programs**

In fall 2014, an SSU faculty member surveyed 619 students in their third and fourth years about their experiences in freshman programs (a 22% response rate). **Table 6.1** represents the number of survey respondents who reported taking each of the listed first-year courses.

**Table 6.1**  
Number of Participants in Various FYE Programs

FIRST YEAR PROGRAM	FREQUENCY
First Year Experience	135
Freshman Interest Group	87
Educational Opportunities Program	26
Making Our Space an Inclusive Community	16
A&H Freshman Learning Community	65
Stretch Learning Community	41
Biology Learning Community	11
Chemistry Learning Community	8
Stem Watershed Learning Community	13

As shown in the data tables in **appendix 6.1** and **6.2**, there is some evidence that participants in the FYE and FLC programs are more likely to interact with faculty, serve as teaching and research assistants, and declare a major. Students who did not participate in a first year program anticipated lower grades. The appendices also reveal additional information relevant to assessment of the quality and meaning of the degree, including pride in the institution and accessibility of classes and advising.

## A. The Freshman Year Experience Program (FYE)

The FYE is a distinctive program at SSU. Prior to the 2012-2013 school year, SSU offered FLCs to only about half of its first-year students. At that point, the institution extended its FLC offerings to include new courses in the Schools of Arts and Humanities and Science and Technology. Beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year, there were enough seats in FLCs to accommodate almost all of the institution's 1800 first-time freshmen.

Students earn 10 units of credit over the course of a full year in the program, working in small classes and listening to plenary lectures. FYE faculty are recruited from multiple disciplines and collaborate to develop and impart the curriculum. The faculty meet for workshops and then, during the terms, every week in support of these efforts. FYE thus constitutes a “teaching lab” within SSU, one which entails constant professional development and constant qualitative and regular quantitative assessment leading to strategic revision. **Appendix 6.3** reports on two areas of recent assessment effort by FYE faculty. These assessment efforts build on work done in 2010-13 discussed in **chapter 3**.

## B. English 100 A/B First Year Composition (Stretch English)

**English 100A/B** extends the English 101 learning objectives across an entire year, giving students more scaffolded, supported instruction and the benefit of working with the same instructor for the academic year.

SSU's English 100 A/B sequence focuses on the acquisition of college-level critical reading and expository writing skills. The English department's assessment of the program is that it re-envisioned an older “remediation” model into a dynamic, sustained, and supportive long-term engagement between first year students and composition faculty. The design, implementation, and guidance of English 100 A/B has involved work with campus committees, creation of curriculum, and professional development, and assessment results indicate that the program is effective. Six years ago, at the end of English 100 A/B's first year, English composition faculty and instructional librarian Felicia Palsson did a holistic assessment comparing a selection of about 70 English 101 students' research essays with about 70 English

100 B students' research essays. Results of that assessment indicated that English 100 B was successfully enabling students to produce work equivalent to that of students in English 101.

## C. Directed Placement Program (DSP)

In summer 2015, SSU implemented a **directed self-placement program** (DSP). DSP comprises a set of literacy tasks that students complete in an approximately 2-hour working session online in Moodle (SSU's learning management system). In the DSP process, students

- Engage in a series of college-level reading and writing tasks.
- Reflect on their literacy skills preparation.
- Learn about first year composition/reading courses at SSU.

DSP encourages and empowers students to use their own discretion in choosing their first-year composition/reading course and to register for that course during Freshmen Summer Orientation. In the first year of DSP implementation, only first-time entering freshmen with EPT scores of 146 and below were required to do the DSP activity. Over 500 students completed DSP in the first year. Forty-four percent (n=227) chose English 101 (these are students who would have been automatically placed in English 100 A/B on the basis of their EPT), and 56% (n=284) chose English 100/B.

Of the group of 227 students who chose English 101, only one student who did DSP failed in fall 2015 (by comparison, there were a total of 31 fails in English 101 in fall 2015). For spring 2016, there were 6 DSP students who failed English 101 (by comparison, there were 19 fails total in that course). For 2015-16, out of 227 students who chose to place themselves in the more accelerated course, only seven students who participated in DSP failed.

Given the success of the program, in summer 2016, all first-time freshmen were required to do the DSP activity. However, if students did not complete DSP, they would be placed in their first-year comp course on the basis of their EPT scores. In summer 2016, 1,053 students completed DSP. Of this group, 55% chose English 101 (n=576 students) and 45% chose English 100 A/B (n=477). DSP continues

to grow in popularity with students and the composition faculty further evidencing its continued potential for student satisfaction and successful student learning outcomes.

## DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

(CFRs 4.2 - 4.7)

SSU's **Office of Reporting and Analytics** is the primary source of statistical information for Sonoma State University. Reporting and Analytics plays a crucial role in supporting campus progress and success by providing statistics, analyses, assessment information, and institutional research to advance strategic university planning and decision-making. Reporting and Analytics provides data to university administrators, deans, department chairs, faculty, and staff with the end goal of aiding in the process of informed decision-making. The reports may be standardized and regularly scheduled or may be ad hoc reports for specific purposes like grant applications or departmental initiatives. The office also manages institutional compliance and reporting obligations to federal and state agencies and the CSU Chancellor's Office and supplies information in keeping with university policy and privacy standards to external publications such as the *Princeton Review* or *U.S. News and World Report*.

Reporting and Analytics houses a number of key data sources on its web site. The *Common Data Set*, developed by the College Board, provides information about SSU to college guides and other surveys, serving as a factbook for finding out basic information about the campus. Federal reports include the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), a survey conducted each year by the National Center for Education Statistics, housed under the U.S. Department of Education. Also accessible on the Reporting and Analytics website are links to the CSU Student Success Dashboard, the College Portrait, the Student Achievement Measure (SAM), and BlackBoard Analytics. The CSU Dashboard is an interactive data presentation tool that allows users to explore key student progress indicators across the CSU. Key to the Graduation Initiative 2025, the dashboard helps faculty and administrators understand the patterns of student progress and the barriers to graduation, such as bottleneck courses. Data in the dashboard can be disaggregated in a variety of ways to allow for data-driven decision-making about closing the achievement

gap for URM students. For example, the dashboard tells us that in the past five years, the number of URM freshmen has increased by 38% at Sonoma State, the fourth largest increase in the CSU system, a factor that impacted the decision to apply for HSI status (see **chapter 1**). The dashboard also speaks to the success of some programs: freshmen who participate in Summer Bridge are considerably more likely to persist than freshmen who do not.

An important example of how the Office of Reporting and Analytics supports institutional decision-making and student success comes from the fall 2016 graduation initiative. Using data derived from the degree audit in PeopleSoft, the unit was able to produce a list of over 800 students with 103+ units disaggregated by school and department. That report, along with a list of students who needed to take the WEPT, became the data source for graduation outreach, the intensive advising initiative discussed in chapter 5. The Director of Reporting and Analytics sits on GIG, the campus group driving the graduation initiative, and regularly shares data about paths to improve student persistence and graduation rates.

Reporting and Analytics supports departments as they write program review self-studies by supplying a suite of data that correlates with the current program review template. Staff will also meet specialized data requests for departments as those are needed for the program review process. For examples of the kinds of reports supplied for program review self-studies, see **appendices 6.4** and **6.5** from the MA in Organization Development.

Finally, Reporting and Analytics has taken a lead role in the development of Degree Planner (discussed in chapter 5). The director has been responsible for helping to design the pilot project with five departments in fall 2016 and the full roll-out has occurred in spring 2017. The director regularly communicates in public forums like Academic Senate or its committees and subcommittees, sits on the provost's team, and manages data requests for accreditation reports at the institutional, school, and department levels. Reporting and Analytics is a strong unit at Sonoma State that has developed collaborative campus partnerships to drive decision-making, develop quality assurance, and promote student success.



# 7

## Sustainability: Financial Viability

### Preparing for the Changing Higher Education Environment

### FINANCIAL VIABILITY

(CFRs 1.7, 3.4, 3.7, 4.7)

SSU has remained financially stable since the last accreditation review, despite considerable fluctuations in the California economy and in the state contribution to the CSU system. The institution has not had an operational deficit during this period.

#### State Appropriations

**Figure 7.1** shows the contribution of state appropriations to the university's general fund, in both millions of dollars (not adjusted for inflation) and as a percentage of the general fund. During the economic downturn of 2008-12, the state contribution in dollars decreased, and student fees rose to offset the decreases. More recently, due partly to ballot initiatives approved by California voters in 2015 and 2016, the state appropriation in dollars has largely recovered from the economic downturn. Student fees have remained at their increased levels, with the result that the percentage contribution of the state to the general fund has consistently decreased over time.

After several years of stagnation, the CSU system recently funded gradual enrollment growth at SSU. Between 2007-08 and 2013-14, our CSU-prescribed enrollment target for Full Time Equivalent Student (FTES) was largely stable. The following two years, 2014-15 and 2015-16, saw increases of 3.7% and 3.1%, respectively (**figure 7.2**). Enrollment growth is financially beneficial to SSU because the CSU's marginal contribution for each new student exceeds the base funding per current student. (see **appendix 7.1** for information on growth funds going toward instruction).

#### Student Fees

Data from the **CSU Budget Office** demonstrates that increases to student fees offset the decline in state appropriations during the economic downturn. Since the 2011-12 academic year, CSU statewide student fees have not

increased, as shown in **figure 7.3**, although in fall 2016, the CSU announced a possible increase of up to \$270 per resident undergraduate student annually that was discussed at the board meeting on January 31, 2017.

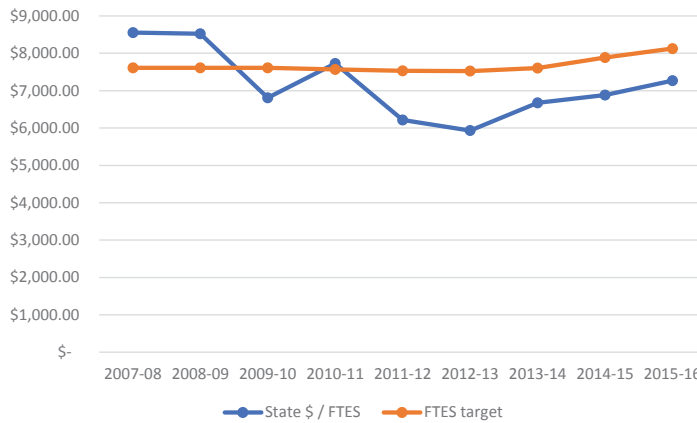
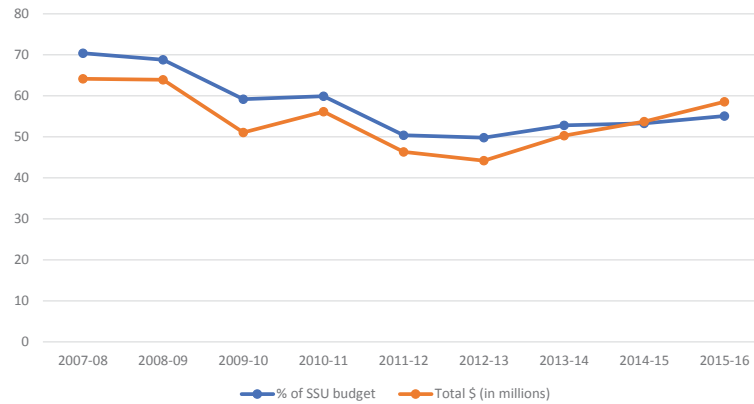
SSU's campus-based fees are the third highest in the CSU, behind Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and San Jose State University. This high fee rate is due mostly to the **Instructionally Related Activities fee**, which provides funding for programming in areas such as Athletics, the Center for Performing Arts, the University Library, the Children's School, and the **Student Union fee**, which supports the recently constructed Student Center. While students voted by referendum to fund campus fees for these additional services, this fee structure poses a challenge for recruiting and retaining lower-income students. Working through this challenge may take some time to address, given the financial commitments of the university.

#### Development

**Figure 7.4** shows the university's gift receipts from 2008-09 to 2015-16; this figure does not count gift commitments or endowment distributions. Other than two outliers—2009-10 and 2011-12—contributions have remained within the range of 7 to 9 million dollars per year.

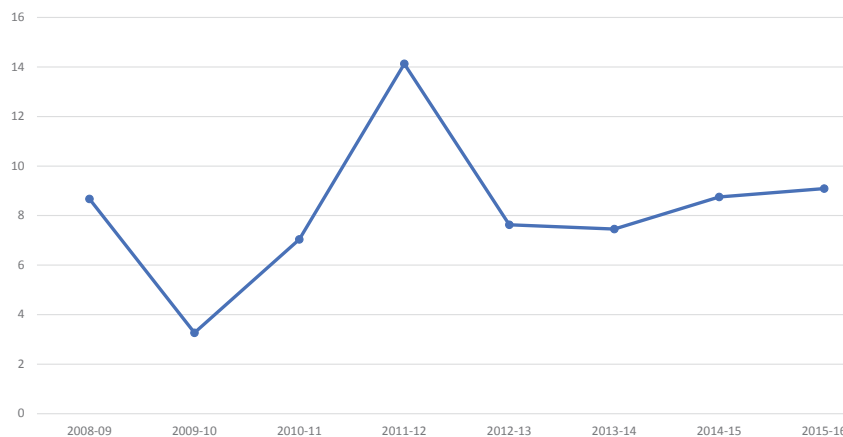
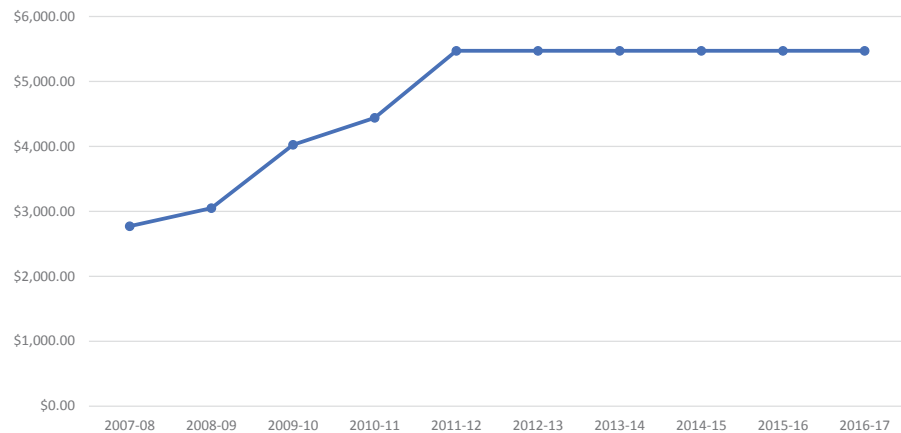
During this period, development efforts focused largely on the construction of the GMC. Now that construction is complete, fundraising efforts have appropriately turned toward the broader campus. To serve new and better advancement efforts, The Office of Advancement became a single organizational unit in fall 2016, after having been split for some time between University Affairs and Development (see **chapter 1** for organizational changes). In addition, all fundraisers on campus—some of which are tied to specific areas of the university and not under development reporting structures—now meet on a weekly basis to discuss priorities. The reorganization of the Office of University Development to align with best practices, along with a shift from the GMC to new and broader goals, is expected to invigorate fundraising.

**Figure 7.1**  
Revenue from  
Appropriations



**Figure 7.2**  
State General Fund  
Appropriations  
and Target FTES

**Figure 7.3**  
CSU systemwide  
annual undergraduate  
resident student fees



**Figure 7.4**  
Gift Receipts  
(in million \$)

Grants and Contracts

SSU’s grant volume has generally remained stable since 2008-09: between 8.4 and 9.3 million each year (table 7.1). The notable decline in 2010 was due to the end of a five million-dollar National Head Start Family Literacy program. Our current grant portfolio is split almost evenly between research and public service.

Table 7.1

Office of Faculty Research & Sponsored Programs  
(Volume 2008/09 - 2015/16)

YEAR	REVENUE	ANNUAL CHANGE
2008 - 2009	13,618,200	
2009 - 2010	12,257,443	- 9.99 %
2010 - 2011	9,305,013	- 24.09 %
2011 - 2012	8,458,000	- 9.10 %
2012 - 2013	9,102,000	- 7.61 %
2013 - 2014	9,007,000	- 1.04 %
2014 - 2015	8,444,000	- 6.25 %
2015 - 2016	8,715,708	3.22 %

In fall 2016, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs was consolidated under Academic Affairs. That change has allowed for the implementation of growth initiatives in spring 2017, which are supported by funds from a CSU-wide initiative to grow research and sponsored programs. The CSU initiative prioritizes research, but the campus anticipates public service will remain equally important given our identity as a primarily undergraduate-serving institution.

Extended Education

In the division of Academic Affairs, the financial model can be divided into stateside (public) and self-support (not-for-profit, educational, auxiliary) categories. Financially, SEIE is governed by multiple executive orders (see EO 1000, 1099, and 804) from the CSU Chancellor’s Office as to how it interacts with the rest of the university as a self-support unit.

SEIE does not receive any public funding for its operations, but provides complementary course offerings during the summer and winter breaks between semesters. SEIE also offers degree and professional programs that have direct

and indirect connections with the academic schools on the public side of SSU’s financial model. The connections are in the form of annual payments from SEIE to each academic school, based on the schools providing curricula, faculty, and guidance for all programs and courses taught in SEIE as a way to bridge and partner. A portion of excess revenues (what would be invoiced from each school as their negotiated share of revenues in excess of expenses by program) is distributed to each school. Executive Orders dictate that those funds be spent by each school for programs in SEIE, so there are still restrictions post-funding.

Debt

As of June 30, 2016, SSU had \$187.4 million dollars in outstanding debt, costing \$14.2 million annually in debt service. The majority of the debt (56%) is for student residences, followed by the Student Center (25.7%), the GMC (8.6%), and the Recreation Center (6.2%). Revenues to offset debt primarily come from student fees or leasing of space to the University or other on-campus entities. The debt is held by the CSU system as a whole.

A CSU executive order mandates that each campus’s Net Revenue Debt Service Coverage Ratio (DSCR) should be 1.35 at minimum. A DSCR consists of annual gross revenue, less annual operating expenses, divided by annual debt service. SSU’s DSCR has ranged from 1.40 to 1.65 over the accreditation period, and was 1.49 in 2015-16, thus putting the institution in compliance with system regulations.

ALIGNMENT OF RESOURCES WITH STRATEGIC GOALS (CFRs 3.6, 4.7)

President Sakaki has set in motion a set of processes to be implemented over the next couple of years to review the alignment of resources with strategic goals. One of the most important of the alignment processes, as discussed in chapter 8, concerns the GMC. Since its groundbreaking in 2000, the GMC has been a high campus priority. Its opening in 2010 and completion in 2012-14, along with the recovery of CSU funding, have allowed for a reexamination of strategic priorities and realignment of resources. The recent reorganization of the university is another example of this realignment, with resources moving from Administration and Finance to Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

As mentioned above, the campus is also refocusing its development efforts on broader campus goals and a comprehensive fundraising campaign.

Academic Affairs is also rebuilding capacity. After years of very limited tenure-track hiring, increased hiring in the last three years has stopped a precipitous slide in the number of tenure/tenure-track faculty (see **chapter 4** for more details). Academic Affairs has also been able to invest in faculty professional development, as described in the next section.

In addition, the Provost's Office is working to set aside permanent base funds for assessment, program review, and accreditation activities, since stable funding would help ensure steady progress on these accountability measures. These projects are currently funded with one-time funds and supplemental support from general funds. In 2015-16 and 2016-17, general funds have provided \$150,000 each year to cover expenses related to the institutional accreditation process. In 2015-16 and 2016-17, the Provost's Office used general funds to provide each school with release funds or faculty stipend payments for School Assessment Coordinators. The Provost's Office uses unspent funds from the prior year in support of annual program review activities, which includes payments of \$1,500 to each external reviewer. In some cases, individual deans offer release time or stipends to faculty preparing program review documents.

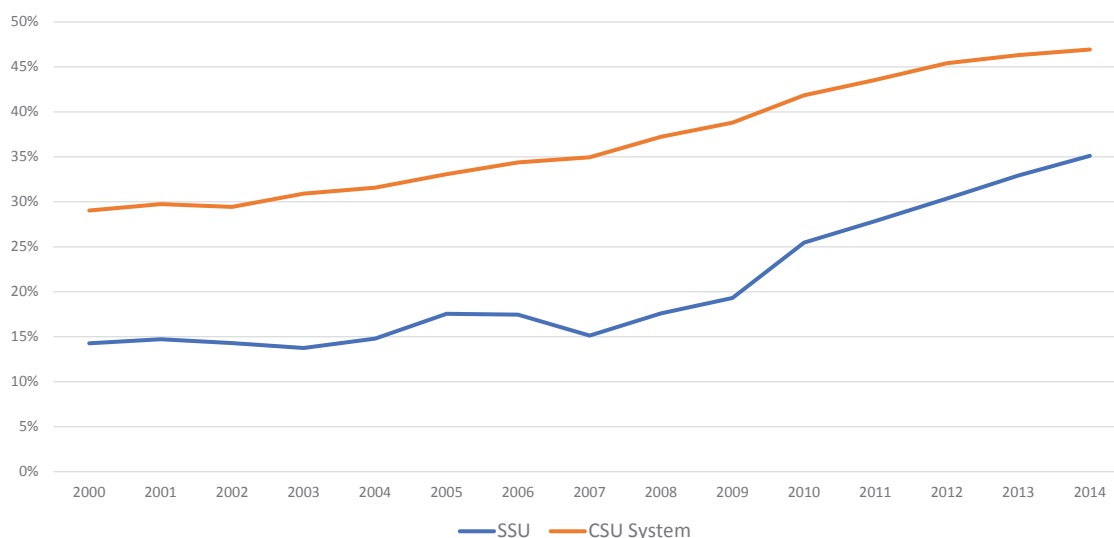
Until fall 2016, budget consultation was split across a number of campus committees, notably the Campus Re-engineering Committee (CRC), the President's Budget Advisory Council (PBAC), and, on the faculty side, the Senate Budgetary Subcommittee (SBS). The recent goal has been to streamline this process and allow for more collaborative early-stage planning. As of fall 2016, the CRC has been dissolved. On the faculty governance side, the defunct Senate Academic Planning Committee (APC) has been reconstituted as APARC (see **chapter 2** and **chapter 4** for more on APARC). APARC has been charged with being the vehicle for faculty budget consultation, from early statements of priorities to later consultation on specific initiatives, using analysis of assessment and program review data to drive decision-making and serve academic planning.

## ADAPTING TO CHANGES & CHALLENGES

(CFRs 1.4, 4.7)

As our local community and our student population change, SSU is poised to evolve with them. The SSU Strategic Plan notes that "the university's service area is transitioning from a largely rural economy and community to one that is increasingly more socially and culturally diverse, economically innovative, and globally connected."

**Figure 7.5**  
URM Population SSU & CSU 2000-2014





Matching that diversity has historically been a challenge for SSU. Throughout the accreditation review period, SSU has had the third-lowest percentage of students of color across the CSU system, behind only Cal Poly-SLO and California State University Maritime. However, SSU's underrepresented minority population has increased over the accreditation period, aligning in a more positive way with system-wide representation. Another challenge is to increase the diversity of SSU faculty and staff (see **chapter 4** for further information).

In order to provide services for under-represented minority students, SSU applied in January 2017 for eligibility to become a federally designated HSI (see chapter 1 for more details). Now that eligibility status has been granted by the Department of Education, SSU has committed resources in the President's Office, the Office of Reporting and Analytics, and the Office of Student Affairs to pursue this designation and the Title III and Title V grant opportunities it opens. As SSU strengthens its partnerships with low-income K-12 schools and expands recruiting in more diverse areas, it will be crucial to provide more student support. The funds from HSI grants would provide student support that would benefit the entire campus. Support services are even more crucial as SSU pursues the aggressive campus- and school-level targets for 4-year, 6-year, and transfer graduation rates set by the CSU as part of Graduation Initiative 2025, as well as efforts to close the gap in graduation rates between underrepresented minorities and other students (see **chapter 5** for further discussion).

SSU has also created structures to allow adoption of new instructional technologies and teaching modalities. As a residential, liberal arts-oriented institution, SSU has historically been slow to embrace online course delivery. Recently, however, SSU has invested in both faculty professional development and information technology.

The Faculty Center centralizes faculty professional development programs. As of spring 2017, 125 faculty are involved in stipend-paying curricular development projects through the Faculty Center. Particularly noteworthy is the 22 member online and blended learning cohort, who are receiving extensive training about online teaching. The Faculty Center director sits on the Academic Senate's

Professional Development Subcommittee (PDS) to make sure Faculty Center initiatives are aligned with institutional curricular and student success priorities.

Collaboration and innovation have advanced the distinctive attributes of SSU. Recognizing those themes in the university's institutional history foregrounds its approach to planning for the future. University initiatives demonstrate a commonality; collaborating and innovating together ground efforts to identify outcomes, improve results, and establish new goals. These themes also provide a framework for melding what, from a cursory look, may appear as disparate and even conflicting academic missions: SSU's identification as the liberal arts campus in the CSU and its strong, dynamic professional programs.

SSU has recently undergone significant organizational changes (see **chapter 1** for details). The effects of these transformations can be perceived across the campus and in the surrounding community; these extraordinary changes have energized Sonoma State on all levels and instigated fresh, reflective conversations about institutional distinctiveness, which are linked to the reaffirmation of core values and to an emerging sense of the University's collective aspirations.

President Sakaki has emphasized her commitment to principle objectives articulated in the **Strategic Plan Revised 2014-2019**: Diversity, Community Involvement, Sustainability, and Globalization. Underscoring the overarching objectives of the Strategic Plan is a stated commitment to creativity, critical thinking, community engagement, collaboration, and communication. While none of the objectives or underlying commitments are unique to this university, the ways in which SSU has coalesced them in its programs and institutional identity has distinguished the campus in marked ways. Pertinent are the emergent themes of collaboration and innovation that have shaped the university and will continue to inform SSU in its transformed future.

SSU has been a member of **COPLAC** since 1999. Identification as a COPLAC institution grounds the way in which SSU promotes itself in the community and distinguishes itself among other CSU campuses. SSU's COPLAC

standing also focuses discussions about bonding the intrinsically liberal arts and science character of the institution with its robust professional programs. In addition, a long-standing commitment to social justice at the university continues to shape initiatives across arts, humanities, natural and social sciences, and professional programs. SSU's collaborative effort to share and integrate best practices has helped forge a unique institutional identity that reflects the multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approaches characteristic of a liberal arts education.

### Academic areas at SSU that are associated with the liberal arts and sciences include:

- Arts (fine arts, music, performing arts)
- Languages and Literature
- Mathematics
- Natural science (biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy, and geology)
- Philosophy
- Ethnic Studies
- Women and Gender Studies
- Social Sciences (anthropology, geography, political science, environmental studies, psychology, sociology, and history)

## A COMMITMENT TO CURRICULAR INNOVATION AND HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES

Across the university, there is an emphasis on curriculum, co-curriculum, and teaching that is student-centered—a hallmark of liberal arts colleges. There is a mix of class sizes in programs, but more classes across the university are discussion-based and thus “smaller,” fostering the perception that SSU students and faculty are connected in meaningful mentoring relationships. For example, the **Hutchins School of Liberal Studies** has codified seminar-based pedagogy in its curriculum, training its students from the first year through graduation to learn from and teach each other in small, interactive classrooms that also function as faculty offices.

The university has added new academic and co-curricular programs that focus on supporting students across their entire college career, enriching their educational experience, and providing them with meaningful, relevant engagement with their communities and the world. These programs, modeled on [AAC&U High-Impact Practices](#), include the Freshman Year Experience and other school-based First Year Learning Communities, school-based sophomore year programs, and a vigorous Student Leadership program. Through the SEIE, more students are traveling abroad in International Programs and more international students are being recruited to SSU than ever before. On campus, programs are also distinguished by their attention to developing close intellectual relationships and direct communication between faculty and students valued as part of the SSU culture.

In a recent survey of the campus community, the two top-ranked ideas for what would distinguish the university are:

1. The Liberal Arts and Science character of the university, and
2. Close human and intellectual relationships among students and faculty.

Piloted in 2006-7, University 150: the [Freshmen Year Experience](#) (FYE) began a cycle of curricular innovation; the course blends general education, transitional skill-building, and co-curriculum in an interdisciplinary, integrated learning community, combining seminars with weekly lectures on questions of global and individual identity. In 2012-13, the School of Arts and Humanities mounted a set of year-long [Freshmen Learning Communities](#) (FLC), each delivered collaboratively by faculty in multiple departments, with inventive titles and themes such as “The Heart of Wisdom: Compassion and the Good Life” and “Science Fiction, Fantasy and Identity.” With seed funding from the National Science Foundation, faculty in the School of Science and Technology in 2013 designed Science 120 “A Watershed Year,” a year-long, inquiry-based learning community in which students are immersed into the multi-disciplinary concerns surrounding water and sustainability. Assessment data for this course indicate it increases retention in STEM majors (see [appendix 4.1](#) for details).

The growth of First Year Learning Programs helped instigate analogous curricular innovation for sophomore students. SSU received Chancellor’s Office funds beginning in 2013-14 to provide academic, social, and institutional support for our second-year. SSU implemented a new [SYE](#) in the School of Social Sciences, designed to provide the kind of institutional support that our sophomores need. The SYE in Social Sciences includes a core course in GE Area E, now serving over 100 students per year; a Social Sciences Undergraduate Research Program, which supports student research with faculty; and is affiliated with a campus-wide SYE office that develops advising and career development workshops, cohort activities, a summer advising letter, and support for sophomores to experience a variety of High-Impact Practices. Since 2013, SYE has expanded as the School of Arts & Humanities and the School of Science & Technology. In each case, faculty from multiple departments in each school participated in a collaboration to develop the core course. In addition, the Library faculty have embedded instruction at a very high level in this course, illustrating another example of collaborative engagement across campus.

*SSU has the highest percentage of its students living on campus of any of the [CSU campuses](#).*

Faculty, staff, and administrators have worked collaboratively to develop programs that join academic life with co-curricular student experiences, which build on distinct resources already in place at SSU. The university has been recognized nationally for the quality of its residential housing. Sonoma State’s residential environment also affirms its COPLAC identity. Most first-year students live in the community-oriented “villages,” and many share a common academic experience, linking their lives in the residential community with their experience in the classroom. [Residential Learning Communities](#) include Academic Career Exploration (ACE), FYE, and First-Gen, and students can also participate in social and academic experiences by joining thematic communities such as Adventure Living, Expressive Arts, Gender Inclusive, Global Engagement, Leadership and Service, and Wellness. Two of these living and learning communities employ Faculty in Residence, who work with peer mentors and Residential Life staff to engage student

residents in co-curricular activities designed to connect classroom material and knowledge to real world experience. Campus-wide programming based in the **HUB: A Center for Diversity, Vitality and Creativity**, and the **Center for Community Engagement** increasingly serve to integrate curricular, co-curricular, and residential programming efforts.

## A COMMITMENT TO THE ARTS

SSU has especially strong arts facilities that are home to exceptional fine and performing arts programs. Most noteworthy is the **GMC**. Additionally, the outstanding Person Theatre houses the theatre and dance programs and performances. The Department of Art and Art History houses the **University Art Gallery**, an outstanding facility in which visitors can view stimulating and challenging works of art from private and public collections as well as new work directly from artists' studios. SSU has become central to the North Bay arts scene and is recognized in the CSU for having premier arts resources.



*University Art Gallery.*

Much attention has been paid since its opening to how the university can more fully integrate its academic mission with the GMC, and President Sakaki is now actively working with the GMC Advisory Board to improve integration. Recruitment for new membership in the Advisory Board and for an Executive Director will be done in keeping with this goal. The GMC Academic Integration Grant Program has funded programs and initiatives in diverse disciplines across campus, ranging from physics to history. In the last two years, faculty have worked collaboratively to infuse arts programming and engagement into non-arts curric-

ula, resulting in innovative partnerships between theatre and business and math and music. The number of students attending art events on campus continues to increase because of these efforts and the university has begun to embrace its cultural vision as a university that is infused, informed, and integrated by the arts and that, in turn, positively impacts the North Bay community through the arts. See **appendix 8.1** for GMC attendance data.

## A COMMITMENT TO PLACE

The geographical location of the campus distinguishes SSU and complements the University's COPLAC affiliation. Fifty miles north of San Francisco, the university is situated in one of the premier viticultural regions in the world and 25 miles away from some of the most beautiful coastlines anywhere. Capitalizing on this setting, the School of Business and Economics is home to the **Wine Business Institute**, the first program of its kind offering degrees and certificates focusing on Wine Business; today the Wine Business Institute is recognized as a global leader in the field.



*Untitled work, created in 2011 by Joe Benziger, part of the Imagery art collection donated to Sonoma State University.*

This distinctive program also exemplifies the integration of professional education with an industry grounded in aesthetic sensibilities and close ties to the arts, exemplified in Imagery Winery's donation of its art collection to SSU with the express understanding that it would connect the University Art Gallery to the Wine Business Institute. The art will be studied and curated by students in the career-based minor in museum and gallery methods.





The Fairfield-Osborn Preserve

SSU has three preserves, the furthest (Galbreath Wildlands) 60 miles away in remote Mendocino County and the closest (Fairfield Osborn Preserve) less than 10 miles away. Altogether, the preserves encompass 4,200 acres replete with a remarkable range of habitats, environs, and flora and fauna. SSU has distinguished its preserves by administering them under the umbrella of the **Center for Environmental Inquiry (CEI)**, a public-private endeavor that “provides lands, facilities, databases, and programs that inspire participation, collaboration, and innovation in education and research.” Thinking beyond their use as research stations, CEI coordinates four academic-corporate “collaboratives” surrounding water, technology, education, and the arts. By promoting the preserves as “integral to a university education, regardless of major,” since 2010, the number of students participating yearly in the preserves has increased from 200 to 1,700. CEI has developed its mission to align with SSU’s COPLAC identity, while taking advantage of these unique university resources and prioritizing sustainability as its fundamental pedagogical and visionary objective.

## A COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

A concern for social justice at SSU grounds programs and continues to serve as the basis for new initiatives. The School of Social Sciences has in its mission and programs a commitment to social justice. This commitment is infused across campus in academic centers, student support areas, and in physical manifestations.

*Reflecting its commitment to social justice, SSU Buildings are named after Rachel Carson, Ruben Salazar, and Adlai Stevenson II. In 2012 the Mario Savio Speakers’ Corner was dedicated in memory of the free speech activist.*

Distinctive **Academic Centers, Institutes, and Projects** promote student, faculty, and community engagement in questions surrounding topics such as diversity, sustainability, and justice. For example, the **Anthropological Studies Center** has a national reputation for longstanding and dedicated work assisting environmental firms, non-profit organizations, private property owners, and government agency clients with archaeological sites, Native American concerns, and historic buildings. SSU’s recent addition of a *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* and thriving on-campus lecture series, such as the Feminist Lecture Series, the Africana Lecture Series, the H. Andréa Neves and Barton Evans Social Justice Lecture Series, and the War & Peace Lecture Series, reflect the collective allegiances of the institution to social justice.

*The Holocaust & Genocide Memorial Grove, dedicated in 2009, has one of eleven (in the U.S.) saplings from the “Anne Frank Tree”; it also has a large glass and steel sculpture memorializing communities that endured genocide.*

## A COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS

Joined to these liberal arts and science elements and social justice concerns, however, are initiatives and programs connecting student educational paths to meaningful careers, elements perhaps more typically manifest in professional programs. There has been increasing attention across campus to developing internship opportunities, leadership training, cross-disciplinary linkages, and robust career advising for students. The **Career Center for the School of Business and Economics** for example has had a distinct impact on the regional workforce economy, and its

structure. The Career Center connects business and economics students to approximately 300 internships and 100 professional mentorships each year, and the Accounting Forum helps place more than 100 students in accounting positions annually ([SBE Press Release 9/14/16](#)). The Career Center for the School of Business and Economics has served as a model for other school-based student support centers.

Embedded in the [School of Education](#) teacher preparation programs are expectations that its students “create and work in collaborative and inclusive communities”; its graduates have a strong record of achievement as teachers and educational leaders in the region, and the program has an outstanding reputation for its special education focus. The school is also noted for its strong emphasis on clinical experiences and community partnerships. For further details, see the school’s most recent external [accreditation review](#).



*“The Maker Movement is internalizing how we see ourselves and how we build things from the inside out... [With this grant, at SSU] We are merging science with art.”*  
– Jeremy Qualls, Physics Professor, 2016

Collaborating with the SEIE and the Sonoma County Office of Education, the School of Education has developed a [Maker Certificate Program](#), the first program of its kind, which offers a series of mini-courses for people seeking to lead maker activities in schools, clubs, community centers, libraries, and other organizations. In a parallel initiative, in fall 2015 the Schools of Science and Technology and Business and Economics, with the University Library, pooled funding to create a pilot makerspace featuring

3-D printers, electronics kits, and other maker equipment. The pilot space became the weekly lab for SCI 220, a spring 2016 experimental course in science and entrepreneurship, and the library funded student participation in a local maker competition. In December 2016, faculty received a large NSF grant to create a cross-campus maker program with a designated facility housed in the library for students and faculty to design, create, build, and innovate. SSU is one of five CSU campuses with such a space and, perhaps representing the distinct character of this university, the SSU investment in maker thinking highlights its commitment to innovation and collaboration.

# 9

## Conclusion

### Reflection and Plans for Improvement



Sonoma State University is at a defining moment in its history as an institution of higher learning. President Sakaki's appointment has brought real enthusiasm for change that creates an unusual opportunity for growth and for re-imagining the future of the institution. Writing an accreditation self-study at this moment is challenging because the institution is in a profound change process and decision-making is still in progress. It is also beneficial because it provides a baseline for future actions, a moment to reflect on the history of the institution, and a space to recognize its strengths today. The self-study also lets the campus community take stock of what needs to change. Every self-study offers that opportunity, but this time in the history of Sonoma State is particularly liberating and energizing. A reflective document, prepared through substantial campus participation, helps the university seize the day.

### IDENTITY AND DISTINCTIVENESS

One of the most important lessons learned through the self-study process concerns the identity and distinctiveness of the institution. The integration of the liberal arts and sciences with professional programs was inherent in the activities of the university, yet somehow hidden from view. The self-study process, along with the institution's change agenda, allowed the university to recognize those integrative pathways and discover that the two focuses open the possibilities of collaboration, invention, and

innovation that make the institution distinctive among the campuses of the CSU system. Discussions around identity and distinctiveness led SSU to take advantage of the seldom-used optional chapter offered by the accreditation handbook. The task now becomes finding ways to promote that identity in the community and in the recruitment of students, faculty, and staff.

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Student learning and student success are the reasons the institution exists, and committing to a cycle of continuous improvement is critical. Since the last accreditation visit, the institution has improved program review and better assessed student learning in the programs, in first- and second-year programs, and in core competencies. There is, however, more to do. The institution needs to make the program review process more consistent and more meaningful for the departments undertaking that work. New program review guidelines and a stronger MOU process, with collaboration between faculty and administrators around action steps and resources, will strengthen the academic programs.

The institution is moving towards ILOs that can make manifest SSU's mission and create a shared understanding of how to measure student learning. Consistency in assessment practice will be a real focus of the next accreditation period. Learning outcomes should be more visible and measurable, assessment processes should include direct



and indirect assessment, and faculty should ask questions about student learning that are meaningful and relevant to them and their students. A sustainable GE assessment plan will help faculty improve the curriculum. Successes in assessment in first- and second-year programs, as well as in composition and the sciences, should be followed by assessment in other parts of the curriculum. The pilot projects in core competency assessment that took place over the last year must be evaluated by faculty to create sustainable processes for core competency assessment in the years ahead.

Curricular change should continue as we seek to attract more diverse students and serve the needs of the region with graduates who can have a creative, educational, social, scientific, or economic impact on the state and its people. The institution needs to look carefully at curriculum in both the majors undergraduate and graduate and in GE, asking how SSU can serve students better by building pathways or roadmaps that are easier for students to follow and easier for departments to schedule.

Finally, the institution must continue to improve retention and graduation rates. While SSU can demonstrate some success in improving six-year graduation rates for freshmen and four-year graduation rates for transfer students, the institution must focus on four-year and two-year rates. Graduation Initiative 2025 has uncovered a number of barriers for students that need to be addressed—improvements in advising at all levels, attention to the needs of under-represented students and transfer students, better academic and fiscal planning to prevent bottlenecks in the curriculum, review of policies and procedures that hinder persistence and timely graduation, and continued expansion of writing intensive courses.

## **CULTURE OF CARING & RESPONSIVENESS**

As SSU takes stock of what needs to change to improve student success, among the most important is continuing the effort begun under the new leadership to create a culture of caring and responsiveness, particularly related to administrative processes and missing services that are essential to a quality student life. Too often in the past, the focus of processes and systems has been on the benefits to and convenience of the administrative entity. In a culture



of caring and responsiveness, the focus must first be on the benefit to and impact on the primary constituents at SSU—the students and faculty. The institution must continue its efforts to identify processes and systems where requirements do not match the realities of SSU students and faculty, creating unnecessary burdens and obstacles, and, once identified, aggressively seek to address them. Additionally, a culture of caring and responsiveness must identify the missing elements in services to students, and seek to respond programmatically to those needs. The challenge will be to refashion existing processes and build new systems and programs that are intentionally balanced to meet the needs of the campus community broadly.

## **DIVERSITY**

In the previous accreditation review process, the review team noted that SSU needed to create an atmosphere that would enable a diverse student body to flourish and succeed. In the interim, the university has become substantially more diverse, and SSU now seeks to be formally recognized as a Hispanic-serving institution. That recognition sends a message to prospective students—and to prospective faculty—about the university’s commitment to diversity. The advantages include recruitment of an even more diverse student body and faculty and access to resources that would allow the institution to define and promote student success. The challenge is to create an inclusive and proactive environment, where SSU closes the achievement gap on retention and graduation for all



students. The challenge is also to ensure that both services and the curriculum support the many types of diversity represented in the campus community.

## **SERVING THE COMMUNITY**

Changes to the organizational structure of the institution will maximize the potential of the institution to better serve its students as well as the community and region. The rebuilding of Student Affairs, the increased importance of Academic Affairs, the changes to Advancement and Administration and Finance, and the integration of the GMC into the academic enterprise provide opportunities to align the organizational structure with the institution's long-term goals. The institution will review its strategic plan and focus more on student success and community engagement. SSU must look outward, using assets like the GMC, the preserves, and connections to education and local industry to build stronger relationships with regional partners.

SSU has great potential, and the moment for change and growth and new direction is now. With new leadership, committed faculty and staff, and a changing student body, the institution will take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead for itself and the communities it serves.

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# List of Commonly Used Abbreviations

<b>AAC&amp;U</b>	Association of American Colleges & Universities
<b>ACE</b>	Academic and Career Exploration
<b>AFS</b>	Academic Freedom Subcommittee
<b>APARC</b>	Academic Planning Assessment & Resources Committee
<b>AS</b>	Associated Students
<b>COPLAC</b>	Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges
<b>CSU</b>	California State University System
<b>DSCR</b>	Debt Service Coverage Ratio
<b>DSP</b>	Directed Self Placement
<b>EER</b>	Educational Effectiveness Review
<b>ELM</b>	Entry level Math Test
<b>EOP</b>	Educational Opportunity Program
<b>EPC</b>	Educational Policy Committee
<b>EPT</b>	English Placement Test
<b>FBR</b>	Faculty Bill of Rights
<b>FERP</b>	Faculty Early Retirement Program
<b>FLC</b>	Freshmen Learning Communities
<b>FSAC</b>	Faculty Standards and Affairs Subcommittee
<b>FTES</b>	Full Time Equivalent Student
<b>FTF</b>	First Time Freshmen
<b>FYE</b>	Freshmen Year Experience
<b>GE</b>	General Education
<b>GIG</b>	Graduation Initiative Group
<b>GMC</b>	Green Music Center
<b>GWAR</b>	CSU Graduate Written Assessment Requirement
<b>HIP</b>	High-impact Practice
<b>HSI</b>	Hispanic-Serving Institution
<b>IEEI</b>	Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators
<b>ILO</b>	Institutional Learning outcome
<b>LEAP</b>	Liberal Education and America's Promise
<b>MAP</b>	Multilingual Achievers Program
<b>MEAP</b>	Migrant Education Advisor Program
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MQID</b>	Meaning Quality and Integrity of Degree
<b>NSSE</b>	National Survey of Student Engagement
<b>PLO</b>	Program Learning Outcome
<b>RLC</b>	Residential Learning Community
<b>RTP</b>	Retention Tenure & Promotion
<b>SEIE</b>	School of Extended and International Education
<b>SETE</b>	Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness
<b>SLO</b>	Student Learning Outcome
<b>SPR</b>	Statement of Professional Responsibility
<b>SSU</b>	Sonoma State University
<b>STEM</b>	Science Technology Engineering Math
<b>SYE</b>	Sophomore Year Experience
<b>UGRD</b>	Undergraduate
<b>UPRS</b>	University Program Review Subcommittee
<b>URM</b>	Under Represented Minorities
<b>WASC</b>	Western Association of Schools & Colleges
<b>WEPT</b>	Written English Proficiency Test
<b>WIC</b>	Writing Intensive Courses
<b>WSCUC</b>	Western Senior College and University Commission