REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM

CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW

To University of Southern California
October 29-31, 2008

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Reaffirmation of Accreditation

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

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SECTION I – Overview and Context

IA - Description of Institution and Visit

Institutional Background

Established in 1880, the University of Southern California (USC) is one of the world's leading private research universities and is regarded as a global center for arts, technology and international trade. The University's central mission which links these many facets together is "the development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit." According to published information about the University, the principal means by which the institution's mission is accomplished is through "teaching, research, artistic creation, professional practice and selected forms of public service." For the 2007-08 academic years USC reported more than 33,000 students (16,500 undergraduates and 17,000 graduates, including 5,800 regularly enrolled international students) and nearly 3,200 full-time faculty.

The primary campus of USC, known as University Park, is a 226 acre complex located in downtown Los Angeles. This campus houses the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School, and most of USC's 17 professional schools. A few miles to the northeast is the 61 acre Health Sciences campus that is home to the Keck School of Medicine, the School of Pharmacy, programs in Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, as well as three major teaching hospitals. USC also serves its constituency through a number of off-campus and online programs, which are listed later in this document.

Accreditation History

USC was first blanketed into membership as a WASC accredited institution in 1949. Since that time the University has maintained a strong history of accreditation and engagement with WASC. USC's last reaffirmation of WASC accreditation occurred in 1998.

Prior to and subsequent to its last reaccreditation USC has received approval for a number of distance education and off-campus programs. These include (1) an off-campus Ed.D. program in Hawaii in 1969; (2) a distance education MS in Engineering Instruction in 1971; (3) an off-campus MBA in Irvine, California in 1990; (4) an online MS in Gerontology in 1998; (5) an online Masters in Long-Term Administration in 2002; (6) a MS in Education with a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist Teacher Training Credential in 2002; (7) an off-campus Executive MBA (EMBA) in Shanghai, China n June 2003; (8) an online MS in Regulatory Science in 2004; and (9) expansion of the off-campus EMBA to San Diego, California in 2006.

In October 2005, USC submitted its Institutional Proposal to the WASC Commission on Accreditation. The two thematic areas included in the Proposal (i.e., 1] *Spanning Disciplinary and School Boundaries to Focus on Problems of Societal Significance*; and 2] *Increasing Responsiveness to Learners*) provided the focus of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) submitted to WASC in December 2007. As part of the completion of this CPR process, the timeline for USC's Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) report and site visit will be scheduled and serve as the concluding phase of USC's current WASC reaccreditation cycle. Due to the difficulty of WASC to bring a whole team together in time, this CPR visit was postponed from spring to fall semester 2008. The University's CPR report was filed in December 2007 for a spring visit, and a supplement to that report was provided to the team several weeks prior to this review.

The Site Visit

The site visit to the University of Southern California occurred October 29-31, 2008. The team was provided with excellent hospitality and work accommodations both on campus and at the hotel. Over the course of the visit the team met with members of the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, professional staff, and students. All representatives of the University were open and candid, providing the information necessary for a thorough CPR process.

The team would like to extend its appreciation to President Sample and his leadership team for the openness with which they responded to questions and the provision of additional materials as requested. A special thank you is also extended to Robin Romans, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Programs for his extraordinary effort in facilitating every aspect of a well organized site visit. In addition, the orientation to and assistance with the review process provided by Ralph Wolff, as the WASC liaison, were helpful and greatly appreciated.

IB - Quality of the Capacity and Preparatory Report and Alignment with the Proposal

The organization of the CPR report follows the general content presented in the Institutional Proposal, including a detailed treatment of the selected institutional themes. Additional content on diversity, internationalization, and technology-enhanced learning is also included in the CPR report in accordance with conversations between members of the accrediting team and officials the University.

The CPR report proved to be useful in describing the numerous impressive and curricular and co-curricular programs the University has mounted in the past several years, especially those under the direction of the new Provost and his staff. The report identified some strategic challenges, but on the whole concerned itself with listing individual program initiatives without much discussion of how these initiatives related to the larger, longer-term vision of undergraduate education. In this regard, it should be noted that the new program initiatives, including the

development of more than 100 minors, only reach a minority of undergraduates, thus leaving

unanswered questions about whether and how the University plans to extend the educational

benefits more broadly throughout the student body. The report also failed to identify areas under

the WASC Standards where greater attention might be placed, especially in looking forward to

the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). Moreover, the CPR report did not explain the

extent to which academic programs have already engaged in systematic assessment in preparation

for the EER visit and how the University plans to address student learning outcomes assessment

outside of the General Education program.

IC - Response to Previous Commission Issues

The following issues were presented to the University in its 1998 reaccreditation letter

from the WASC Accrediting Commission.

Continued Development of the Data Portfolio
The University was urged to streamline the collection of institutional data, analyze it, and use said data meaningfully in planning, priority setting, and resource allocation (1998 Commission Letter, pp. 2-3).

Since the l998 visit USC created the position of Academic Information Officer (AIO) to help address the Commission's concern. The AIO subsequently developed a data team from existing staff in offices that generate and work with relevant data. The data team produces the Institutional Data Portfolio and college Data Profiles annually. The WASC site team could not determine if the USC data team has the capacity to produce analysis for meaningful use in planning, priority setting, and resource allocations. Additional attention is given to this finding later in this report as part of the review of WASC Standards II and IV.

Continued Refinement of the Strategic Plan
It was recommended that the University develop a "second order of *definition* in order to translate the broad goals into a more detailed blueprint identifying specific areas of emphasis and the steps that must be taken for implementation…Second, measures should be taken to align the management system and derivative functional area of the University to better support achievement of the Plan." The 1998 team also recommended a number of ways by which the budget system might be improved to enhance collaboration and support new ventures, as well as strengthening the Provost's Office to oversee the implementation of the Strategic Plan (1998 Commission Letter, p. 3).

The University is to be congratulated on the progress it has realized in addressing this recommendation. The reallocation of resources now allow the Provost to take a leadership role in implementing the plan, including investing in recruiting faculty (including faculty clusters) with demonstrated interdisciplinary interests.

Program Reviews and Quality Assurance
The Commission endorsed the recommendation of the 1998 site visit team that "USC initiate a vigorous and continuing program review process. The review process should include an evaluation of undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as the more traditional review of departmental distinction in research and scholarship." In addition, the Commission suggested that such program review incorporate data developed through the Data Portfolio, build a benchmark comparison, and be linked to key indicators developed by the University. The Commission also endorsed the team's recommendation that the University's (then) new General Education program, new writing program, and new system of minors be reviewed within a specified time frame (1998 Commission Letter, pp. 3-4).

Following the 1998 WASC report, USC put in place a vigorous program review process designed to advance the academic quality of the institution. However, at the end of its first 8-year cycle, the process received mixed reactions. The review process has now been revised for the second cycle, and while it is still too early to judge, previous concerns about supporting recommendations with resource allocation appear to have been corrected. Unlike the team and Commission recommendation, however, the program review process focuses primarily on graduate education and does not incorporate attention to student learning outcomes as currently required by WASC Criterion for Review (CFR 2.7). The University has continued to develop an innovative method for assessing its writing and critical thinking programs in an exemplary manner.

Student Learning and Student Outcomes
Although the Commission recognized that the Data Portfolio had begun to generate initial data on student learning and outcomes information from across the University in both academic and non-academic areas, the Commission urged the University to continue to develop data for use in such areas as the General Education program, the writing program, and the implementation of program reviews as a way of validating academic excellence. The Commission also urged that the University continue to emphasize teaching excellence and the need to improve data collection on the quality of instruction to ensure progress toward the University's effort to provide a learner-centered education (1998 Commission Letter, p. 4).

The team saw evidence of continuous improvement in the core functions (Teaching and Learning, Scholarship and Creativity, and Support for Student Learning) underlying the education of USC students.

The University provides a rich social learning environment for its students and has begun the process of collecting and analyzing data related to non-academic co-curricular and extra-curricular programming as a means of validating its educational excellence in these areas.

Outcomes for the general education program were adopted with the revision of the program in 2005, and those programs where professional accreditation calls for assessment of learning outcomes have established such outcomes.

On the other hand, the team found that the University needs to give careful attention to better demonstrating the educational effectiveness of those undergraduate degree programs that already have student learning outcomes and are engaged in assessment.

Effort is needed to work with the many other departments that have yet to develop and assess learning outcomes. Attention also needs to be given to furthering the integration of the University's institutional research capacity with assessment efforts for educational effectiveness.

Undergraduate Selectivity, Student Retention and Advising
The Commission urged that the University continue to develop student advising, including clear information and support to enable students to make the best use of the rich range of opportunities available at the University (1998 Commission Letter, p. 4).

One of the most remarkable changes that has occurred since the last visit is the improvement in the University's selectivity and retention. USC is now comparable to or better than most of its peers, and efforts are underway to continue to improve. The University also excels in the area of student advisement, including the dissemination of information regarding the rich curricular and co-curricular opportunities available to students. Further improvement in advising and retention/graduation is a focus for the Educational Effectiveness Review as well.

SECTION II - Institutional Themes

Two themes were identified by USC to guide their CPR process. These are: (1) *Spanning Disciplinary Boundaries to Focus on Problems of Societal Importance* and (2) *Increasing Responsiveness to Learners.* Throughout the site visit the team had ample opportunity to observe the commitment of faculty and administration to these themes in planning, resource allocation and program development. (CFR 2.2; 3.1; 3.4; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.6)

IIA - Spanning Disciplinary and School Boundaries to Focus on Problems of Societal Significance

The CPR report discusses two ways in which USC employs this theme to support academic excellence in their undergraduate programs. First, emphasis is placed on the inclusion of undergraduates in the production of research and knowledge and where possible, in an interdisciplinary context. Second, a global perspective that emphasizes societal needs is increasingly integrated into students' curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities. The primary methods used to achieve this curricular innovation occur through the shared efforts of faculty and administration to span school and disciplinary learning boundaries.

The Interdisciplinary Environment

A variety of programs exist and more are being introduced, to provide undergraduates with interdisciplinary educational experiences that emphasize research. Examples of these opportunities include the Renaissance Scholars, Discovery Scholars, and SOAR (Student Opportunities for Academic Research) initiatives. These programs create incentives for undergraduates to take interdisciplinary courses and participate in programs of research. Students are encouraged to enroll in double majors or select a minor from the large number of minors offered to organize their educational experiences and support both "breadth and depth" in learning. A new program, Visions and Voices, provides a growing mosaic of rich offerings and activities which clearly enhances the formal curriculum. Increasingly, these impressive learning options are becoming a "signature" of excellence for USC, attracting highly motivated and adventurous students. (CFR 2.8; 2.9; 2.11)

University representatives with whom the team met recognize that the effort to create an interdisciplinary learning environment, including meaningful educational experiences which emphasize societal issues (local to global) is a substantial undertaking that is not yet complete. One primary institutional challenge is to eliminate barriers to implementation. USC has traditionally been a highly decentralized university with limited resources controlled by the center. The 1998 reaccreditation team specifically noted that insufficient resources were available to the Provost to initiate or broker activities that cross-school boundaries. The University is to be congratulated on the progress it has realized in resolving this issue and providing the Provost with the means to effectively implement the goals of the strategic plan. Contributing substantially to this result has been the recruitment of a significant number of deans who are committed to inter-school collaboration. In addition, the reallocation of resources has enabled the Provost to implement boundary spanning activities and support the recruitment and development of faculty (including faculty clusters) with demonstrated interdisciplinary interests. These changes have already helped the University to create and benefit its many areas of shared excellence. Although,

the team did not test all aspects of the institution's interdisciplinary environment, it does appear that the University has been successful in breaking down many of the barriers that often inhibit faculty and students from carrying on interdisciplinary work—for example, by developing a methodology for the equitable allocation of indirect costs.

However, less progress appears to have been made in eliminating barriers to the institution's interdisciplinary teaching. While the important issue of tuition allocation seems to have been addressed, faculty reported that problems persist in the clarification of faculty teaching loads when divided between schools or other academic units, or as a result of team teaching. Undergraduate representatives also indicated that students pursing interdisciplinary studies sometimes experience difficulty in registering for courses offered outside their primary program or school. In particular, obtaining required signatures when registering in multiple programs remains more complicated than it should be. In addition, some faculty regard the path for approval of new courses as cumbersome, and even arcane. The redefined role of the central committee seems unclear, a situation that does not bode well for encouraging the development of interdisciplinary courses. These concerns warrant attention, since the CPR states, "… the recent reform of the university curriculum process was designed in part to remove obstacles to interdisciplinary academic programs and courses and to facilitate important aspects of interdisciplinarity." Further work is also needed with regard to the development of student learning outcomes and systematic assessment to evaluate the educational effectiveness of the structured interdisciplinary programs.
(CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4;2.7; 3.3; 3.4; 3.11; 4.5; 4.6; 4.8)

It should be noted that the University has already initiated several special studies that will be presented as part of the EER. The first of these studies will emphasize a careful evaluation of the utility of the minors program, including an evaluation of its goals and purposes and the extent to which minors achieve the stated goal of providing both the depth and breadth in students' undergraduate learning. The development of learning outcomes and assessment measures for the

specialized programs such as the Renaissance Scholars, Discovery Scholars, and SOAR

programs, may also be beneficial to determine the degree to which these initiatives are effective

in attracting and engaging students in interdisciplinary study and research. (CFR 1.2; 2.7; 3.1;

4.4)

Infusing a Global Perspective

As part of its theme, *Spanning Disciplinary Boundaries to Focus on Problems of Societal*

Importance the University has attempted to integrate a global perspective into the learning

experiences of its undergraduate students. The institution appropriately takes pride in having the

largest cohort of international students among all U.S. universities. USC regularly enrolls 5,800

international students (1,481 undergraduates and 4,330 graduates in fall 2008) from more than

100 countries. The top five countries of origin are India (26.5%), China (17.1%), South Korea

(11.5%), Taiwan (8.6%) and Canada (4.3%). The University also recognizes the benefit of its

proximity to the diverse sub-cultural communities of Los Angeles, as well as its location in one of

the leading cities of the Pacific Rim.

The University is also actively involved in developing an international infrastructure to

support its global goals. Examples include: (1) University institutes that emphasize global issues

(e.g. USC Global Health and the US-China Institute); (2) international strategic alliances with

other universities (e.g., the Association of Pacific Rim Universities www.apru.org); and (3)

overseas offices which recruit international students, manage international programs, and advance

alumni relations. Professional schools have developed similar strategic relationships. Recognition

of these efforts is included in the sections of "A Vision for USC's Future" which focus on

Meeting Societal Needs and Expanding Global Presence (USC's Plan for Increasing Academic

Excellence, October 6, 2004). (CFR 1.6; 3.6; 4.1; 4.2; 4.6)

Although USC is in the initial stages of infusing a global perspective into the experiences

of its undergraduate students, it is ahead of many in this regard. Beyond conventional study

abroad programs, the University is mounting an increasing number of short term programs which

provide structured, thematic experiences for students during school breaks and summer term. For example, the Office of Student Affairs offers several Alternative Spring Break programs with volunteer work in other countries. The Global Scholars program, a program analogous to the Renaissance Scholars and Discovery Scholars programs, encourages students to build an international component into their educational experience. Most of the academic opportunities are being developed through the schools, such as the efforts of the Annenberg School for Communication and the Marshall School of Business to integrate global opportunities into their undergraduate programs. As the University continues to pursue its international goals, attention needs to be given to developing appropriate learning outcomes for its global programs, including program reviews and assessments of educational effectiveness. (CFR 1.2; 2.7; 3.1; 4.4)

The WASC team applauds the many creative interdisciplinary and global initiatives that the University has developed to engage faculty and students in socially relevant international studies and research. These experiences enhance cultural understanding and serve to advance academic capabilities and personal development. However, the team observed that the meaning of globalization is defined independently by each academic unit. It is recommended that additional attention be given to developing a shared definition of globalization that furthers institutional synergy and supports the University's strategic global imperatives. Not only is it important that the many international activities occur within the strategic priorities of the University in ways that are sustainable, but that global initiatives align with the institution's research and teaching strengths, and that funding and other incentives are constantly adjusted to this end. (CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4)

In addition, the team felt that USC's international profile has the potential to add a great deal to diversity learning. There is a clear sense at the institution that more can be done to encourage interaction between international and domestic students. However, an overwhelming number of the University's foreign students are enrolled in the professional schools (e.g., Accounting, Business, and Engineering), where the coursework may offer limited opportunity for

such interaction. This suggests that the most promising opportunities may exist outside the classroom. The team heard positive accounts of diversity learning (of all kinds) in the University's residential halls. The team agrees that expanding international residence halls would greatly enhance diversity learning and be of benefit to both foreign and domestic students alike. Indeed, USC's plan for residential housing for students and the mixing of international and US students throughout the undergraduate years is supported by the team as a high priority. In the interim, USC is encouraged to further develop activities (i.e., projects and community service opportunities) which support both domestic and international students to engage with each other in shared learning.

The team recognizes the many positive services provided to international students and the dedication of staff in this area. The team feels that USC would benefit from a closer study of the actual experience of its international students and recommends that it consider participating in surveys such as the International Student Barometer which provides feedback on all aspects of the international student experience and enables comparison with peer research universities (see: www.i-graduate.org). Universities already using this survey include Yale, Penn State and Ohio State, as well as major universities in the UK and elsewhere. (CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.7)

IIB - Development of Learner-Centered Education

Assessment and Learner-Centered Education

The University has launched a comprehensive initiative at the undergraduate level to enhance student learning. This wide-ranging effort includes improved student advising, an increasingly residential college built around houses with live-in faculty, technology-assisted learning, and service learning opportunities to enhance social awareness and civic engagement. Underlying these improvements is a firm conviction that the extra-curricular is not something separate and apart from formal coursework but an integral part of undergraduate education.

The team commends the University administration for embracing the idea of assessment as an essential step toward improved student learning. To this end the University has started the process of asking departments to develop learning outcomes for its degree programs and academic initiatives. Specifically, it has begun to develop innovative methods for measuring students' progress over time in the key skills of critical thinking and writing. The steps already taken in these areas are sufficient to place the University among the leaders of major private research universities. Important as these accomplishments are, of course, these developments are only a beginning. There are many other degree programs and academic initiatives at the University that will benefit from the same type of innovation and excellence. The University needs to continue engage in the development of student learning outcomes for its many undergraduate programs, as well as identifying methods of assessment and self-scrutiny that can evaluate different forms of learning and identify weaknesses that need to be corrected.

In taking stock of what remains to be done, University leaders might keep in mind the end to which assessment is an essential means. What should ultimately take root in all colleges and universities is a culture of continuing improvement which begins with a wide variety of efforts to assess student progress. Faculty and administration can then work together to identify and analyze problems, conceive of possible solutions, and test these ideas in order to retain the innovations that work while discarding those that don't. By successfully introducing such a process at multiple levels—institution, school, department, and individual course—a university becomes a true "learning organization" engaged in continuous self-scrutiny, experimentation, and improvement.

With this goal in mind, it is immediately clear that a university cannot achieve the desired end without enlisting the willing participation of the deans, department chairs, and entire faculty. An administration can develop methods of evaluation and conduct its own assessments. But faculty must take responsibility for using the data to conceive of imaginative ways of improving student learning and incorporating successful innovations into their regular teaching. The faculty

is unlikely to do its part if it does not understand and support the enterprise and approve of the means by which it is being carried out. (CFR 1.2; 3.11; 4.6; 4.7)

Based on admittedly limited observation, the team gained the distinct impression that understanding and acceptance of assessment and its uses have not penetrated very far within the faculty or even among the department chairs. In our conversations, the team heard repeated expressions of opinion to the effect that professors were already able to evaluate progress through the normal grading process, and that successful evaluation could succeed only if it proceeded from the bottom up rather than the top down. Some professors seemed unaware of what the University had already done to develop assessment methods. Others indicated that success was unlikely to occur since the existing incentive structure did not encourage professors to participate in assessments or to experiment with new ways of teaching to improve student learning. Based on what we heard, the faculty will need to understand the process much better and participate in its design and execution much more widely before it will give its wholehearted approval and cooperation. (CFR 2.4; 2.6; 3.11)

In light of the above, the team recommends that the University administration proceed to develop and implement a plan for drawing more members of the faculty into its assessment program by informing them of existing evaluation efforts, discussing the reasons why these are important, and engaging professors in helping to develop additional assessment techniques, analyze results, and engage in experiments to discover ways to overcome weaknesses in students' learning. In order to accomplish these steps and achieve real results, University administration will also need to examine and consider modifying its incentive structure to ensure that it supports, encourages, and rewards faculty participation in continuous self-scrutiny and improvement. (CFR 1.2; 2.4; 2.6; 3.3; 3.4; 3.11)

The steps just described will doubtless prove frustrating at times. Gaining acceptance from the entire faculty and enlisting their efforts in designing and implementing a successful process of assessment and improvement will lengthen the time required to achieve success.

Nevertheless, these steps are essential if the effort is not to bog down—as it has in many other institutions—and merely lead to a massive accumulation of data that lies unused in administrative offices. Fortunately, there is still time to avoid this result and plenty of good will to help the University leadership succeed in its efforts to make the institution a leader in this important new step in the process of higher education.

SECTION III - Evaluation of Institutional Capacity Under the Standards

IIIA – Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purpose and Ensuring Educational Objectives
The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with its purposes and character. It has a clear and conscious sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in the higher educational community, and its relationship to society at large. Through its purposes and educational objectives, the institution dedicates itself to higher learning, the search for truth, and the dissemination of knowledge. The institution functions with integrity and autonomy.

USC provides its constituencies with clear public statements of its purposes. The University mission statement, "the development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit is accomplished is through teaching, research, artistic creation, professional practice and selected forms of community service that focus on problems of societal significance." (CFR 1.1)

The University's educational objectives are aligned with its stated purposes and strategic educational goals. There is a well defined process for periodically evaluating and redefining those goals. Indications of success in achieving the goal of promoting interdisciplinary work in support of societal purposes are reflected in activities such as the aggressive, far-reaching biomedical research on autism and childhood obesity and the development of an emergency network for pediatric care, the search for future fuels and alternative sources of energy, the application of scientific knowledge and ideas to create innovations that benefit society, and cross-disciplinary research on the challenges and opportunities associated with immigration in the United States. In addition, documents and site visit interviews contained thoughtful discussions of the goals of undergraduate education and suggested criteria for measuring progress. For example, the Joint

Educational Project is one of USC's signature service learning opportunities which places over 2000 students in 50 community agency sites every year. These placements are connected to the various curricula through courses that require students to reflect on their community experience in valuable ways. Another exemplary example of interdisciplinary learning is the Visions and Voices program. This program has been very successful at integrating the arts and humanities with science courses. USC has a variety of other outstanding undergraduate educational programs and services. The Student Affairs Assessment Center (SAAC) has also been successful in enunciating learning outcomes from students' co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences. Through 39 workshops for staff and a staff certification program, the SAAC process promises to make significant contributions to the University's assessment efforts. Despite these promising beginnings, the team was not provided with clear evidence that assessment data is yet being systematically collected and analyzed for the purpose of continuous quality improvement of academic programs. (CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.6; 2.7; 3.11 4.5; 4.6; 4.8)

The University has a system of measuring student achievement in terms of retention, and student completion. Data on student achievement is made available at the institutional and degree levels. During the past 15 years, USC has been unusually successful in enhancing the quality and diversity of retention and graduation rates of its undergraduate student body. According to USC's CPR Report (p. 1), "the average two-part SAT for entering freshmen has climbed from 1180 in 1993 to 1366 in 2007." Further, the *Update to the Capacity and Preparatory Report* compares the graduation rate reported in 1998 to the rate reported in 2008, showing a remarkable increase from 64% to 88%. (CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.7; 4.5; 4.6; 4.8)

Over the past 15 years the University has compiled a remarkable record of improvement marked by high performance, appropriate responsibility, accountability, and integrity in developing and sustaining a learning environment that exemplifies excellence in scholarship and commitment to academic freedom. The quality of the institution's leadership is also reflected through the University's published academic information, central operations and sound business

practices that permeate all levels. The University continues to demonstrate its commitment to honest and open communication with the Accrediting Commission, as witnessed throughout this reaccreditation process. (CFR 1.3; 1.4; 1.6; 1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 3.10)

The University has demonstrated institutional commitment to the principles published in the WASC Statement on Diversity. Indeed, the University is justifiably proud of its domestic and international diversity even as it has increased significantly its selectivity. Efforts to address diversity are deliberately made through residence hall programs and activities in the Vision and Voices program. In addition, there is an innovative project to study the effectiveness of the University's courses approved to meet the core General Education diversity requirement. Students and staff interviewed by the review team are generally satisfied with the inclusiveness of the campus climate for students from under-represented racial, ethnic, and religious groups, although more could be done to expand opportunities for students from all backgrounds to live, study and work together. (CFR 1.5)

IIIB - Standard II: Achieve Educational Objectives through Core Functions
The institution achieves its institutional purposes and attains its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning. It demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively and that they support one another in the institution's efforts to attain educational effectiveness.

Assessment and Educational Effectiveness

As USC prepares for the next WASC review demonstrating "Educational Effectiveness," one of the University's most challenging tasks will be the development of stated outcomes for most or all undergraduate degree programs. While some professional schools (e.g., Engineering and Music) have prepared and refined such statements for their professional accreditation associations, the majority of degree programs in the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, have considerable work to do. This can be accomplished only by further orientation and education activities designed to elicit the buy-in and active participation of the faculty. (CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.7; 3.11; 4.5; 4.6; 4.8)

Considerable attention will also need to be given to furthering the assessment of degree programs. Whereas anecdotal evidence of accomplishments is abundant, (e.g., the accomplishments of students in key programs – Renaissance Scholars, Discovery Scholars, and Global Scholars – reflect particular achievements), the team did not find systematic collection of information that would allow a meaningful evaluation on a program-by-program basis. Again, some of the professional schools are the exception. The University acknowledges this and has included in its EER-focused activities recognition of the need to: (a) give careful attention to better demonstrating the educational effectiveness of its undergraduate degree programs that are already engaged in assessment, and (b) identify and support the degree programs that need to further their development of learning outcomes and systematic assessment. As the University pursues these goals, the opportunity exists for USC to document its academic excellence through the many and varied performance measures that exist in music, capstone experiences, portfolio collections in the arts and humanities majors, and research projects in the sciences. USC could benefit from an examination of already available comparative data shared through AAUDE and also from the expertise of its Rossier School of Education faculty. USC may likewise wish to consider a systematic study of its alumni including the use of: (1) inventories of their post-graduation employment and education activities, (2) surveys of attitudes toward their undergraduate curricular and extracurricular experiences, and (3) surveys of employers. (CFR 1.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.7; 3.11; 4.5; 4.6; 4.8)

Regarding assessment of General Education core curriculum, USC has done much promising work in the assessment of writing and critical thinking. Furthering this work will require both faculty commitment and more coordinated technical support. However, the team questioned whether the requirement of a 32 unit General Education curriculum is sufficient for a successful liberal education. (Compare, for example the Guideline to CFR 2.2.) The team was concerned that students could easily graduate with no college level math or quantitative literacy and without content in moral reasoning. It is therefore recommended that the University review

its General Education curriculum and give particular attention to evaluating the breadth and depth of content obtained by students who take the minimum 32 units without a minor. In this respect, the University might conduct transcript audits to determine if graduating students acquire a broad liberal arts education. As part of this effort, careful attention should be given to the evaluation and inclusion of such familiar components of General Education as quantitative literacy and moral reasoning. (CFR 2.2a)

Attention should also be given to developing clearer criteria for General Education diversity courses. The team observed that some of the courses included in the current list of approved General Education diversity courses do not reflect clearly the goal of strengthening students' understanding of diversity and cultural competency described by University representatives. Furthermore, the team was informed by some faculty representatives that there seems to be an assumption that any instructor is qualified to teach diversity courses. This assumption, if it exists, overlooks the degree of difficulty involved in teaching such courses effectively. Faculty also reported that there is currently not much help with learning how to teach diversity courses, unless the instructor goes to the Center for Excellence in Teaching or unless he or she has a faculty mentor to give assistance. The University might consider creating opportunities to develop and share best practices in diversity instruction that will help ensure that the institution's goals for diversity learning are achieved. Finally, the University is encouraged to continue to develop plans to: (1) utilize residential units as effective venues for diversity learning; (2) promote service learning in local communities of diversity; (3) encourage the formation of diverse student groups for course work, community service, and other activities in order to help students from different backgrounds learn to live and work together effectively; and (4) develop research and applied studies that emphasize diversity themes. (CFR 1.5; 2.2a)

Scholarship and Creative Activity

The special recognition programs (e.g., Renaissance Scholars, Discovery Scholars, SOARS, and Global Scholars) mentioned throughout this document as well as the many other

opportunities in research, the arts, and community service learning reveal a thriving community of scholarship and creative activity among undergraduates. At the faculty and graduate/professional student levels, attention to what is learned from the reviews completed by the University Committee on Academic Review – particularly under the recently revised process – should help the University leadership and faculty to both demonstrate and continually improve the scholarship and creativity of faculty and professional students.. (CFR 2.8; 2.9; 2.11)

Support and Student Learning

The University has strong evidence of continuous improvement in the core functions (Teaching and Learning, Scholarship and Creativity, Support for Student Learning) that contribute to the education of USC students. Support for teaching through technology, library resources, and the Center for Excellence in Teaching appears well organized and substantial. Two support technologies – the Advisement Database and the STARS Interactive Audit Report – have particular promise. These two resources should assist students, faculty, and staff advisors to achieve even higher levels of retention and academic learning. The Audit Report should also help individual students explore alternative majors and minors and enable them to "take charge" of their education. (CFR 2.5; 2.8; 2.9; 2.10; 2.12; 2.13; see also 3.6; 4.6; 4.7; 4.8)

Program Review

Following the 1998 WASC report USC put in place a vigorous program review process that was intended to be a primary driver for advancing the academic quality of the institution. The University Committee on Academic Review (UCAR) oversees the program review process, which is an important part of the institution's system of learning and improvement. However, at the end of its first 8-year cycle, the process received mixed reviews. Following the first cycle there was concern over the length of time between completion of the review and meetings with the administration and with the amount of support and resources given to help implement the recommendations. Subsequently, the review process has been revised for the second cycle, and while it is too early to judge definitively, the previous disconnection between recommendations

and resource allocation seems to have been corrected. Special attention should be paid to follow-up – both in terms of timeliness and agreements about results, so that chairs and faculty have confidence that the process has value.

In addition, the institution has made a clear decision to use the program review process to focus on making significant improvements at the graduate level in an effort to move each department to a higher national ranking. As a result, issues arising with undergraduate education are not a primary focus and are addressed more incidentally. The WASC Commission in CFR 2.7 and in its rubric on general education clearly suggested that the process address undergraduate education as well and incorporate attention to achievement of program learning outcomes. While the team supports the clear focus of the current process, it is also the responsibility of the university to demonstrate that it systematically reviews the quality and effectiveness of its undergraduate programs in a manner that incorporates assessment of learning outcomes and improvements based on the evidence and data collected and analyzed. (CFR 2.7; 3.1; 4.4; 4.6; 4.7; 4.8)

IIIC - Standard III: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through its investment in human, physical, fiscal, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high quality environment for learning.

Developing and Applying Resources

USC is successful in recruiting and hiring faculty with the expertise to support the educational purposes of the institution. In particular, the University has paid close attention to hiring faculty and providing faculty development activities that align with the institution's interdisciplinary and global initiatives. (CFR 3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4)

The University continues to enjoy a sound financial condition that helps it to maintain the impressive momentum it has been achieved over the past 15 years. A serious institutional

constraint in the past was the decentralization of resources, with the Provost's having only about $6 million at his discretion to support cross-school initiatives. However, since the institution's last accreditation this issue has been addressed. The financial report for fiscal year 2008 reveals that the Provost's resources include more than $73 million in "participation" which, together with other financial resources he can use to advance the University's purposes and pursue broad institutional goals through more effectively aligning resources with organizational structure and aspirations. In addition, the team noted that a number of programs have been launched with external support from grants or donations. The University is to be commended for its success in obtaining such support. During our visit, representatives of the administration expressed their firm commitment to assuring the continuity of these successful programs. (CFR 3.5)

University resources have clearly been utilized to create and sustain a learning environment that is replete with state-of-the-art facilities and technologies. The University is to be commended for its attention to these issues, as well as for the priority given to assuring that the needs of all aspects and members of the University community are considered as resources are allocated. (CFR 3.5; 3.6; 3.7)

Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

The University has a well-developed and ongoing planning process that sets goals consistent with the institution's educational purposes, its several schools, and its concern for incentives that span school boundaries. In addition, it is clear that the administration and faculty at USC have made student learning a priority and have taken some promising steps toward measuring that learning. However, as the University prepares for its EER visit attention will need to be given to building strong organizational structures and processes to influence the successful development and use of assessment. It was unclear to the team if the needed support structure is currently in place to achieve this goal. Given the strength and commitment of the institution's administration and faculty, these issues are undoubtedly resolvable. (CFR 3.8; 3.10; 3.11)

IIID - Standard IV: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement
The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving itseducational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution, and revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.

Strategic Planning

USC has a deep commitment to an ongoing and broad-based strategic planning process. The process appears to be accepted institution-wide and manages to transcend individual schools, despite the considerable autonomy the 17 schools are given in deciding how best to interpret and implement strategic objectives. (CFR 4.1; 4.2)

Strategic plans were developed in 1994 and 2004, and the institution is currently in the preliminary stages of additional efforts to review the current plan and build on the reaccreditation process. A standing Planning Committee reviews the institution's progress with strategic initiatives each year, modifying the plan as needed and developing new initiatives as required. This flexibility is essential to the USC planning process—especially given USC's dramatic advances in the quality of its undergraduate student body, its increased student enrollment, the number of degrees granted, and the increase in the number of its full time faculty. The Planning Committee issues annual progress reports to inform the University community of updates and changes. These annual reports provide specific examples of steps taken to implement the institution's Strategic Plan. (CFR 4.1; 4.2; 4.6)

It is also important to note that since 1994 USC's strategic planning process has become increasingly faculty-driven and has achieved greater integration of the University-wide plan into each of the school's strategic plans. Documents given to the team provided examples of ways in which the faculty are involved in strategic decision-making. These developments have been fostered and maintained by an increasing flow of central resources to strengthen the College faculty. This support has been essential for building successful interdisciplinary programs which

link professional school and College faculty in strong collaborative partnerships for teaching and research. (CFR 4.1; 4.2; 4.6)

Provost Nikias' faculty Working Group on the Strategic Planning Process will meet through the 2008-09 academic year to devise a timetable and recommend a process for the next strategic plan. According to the Provost's October 24, 2008 memo to deans, faculty and staff, the forth-coming plan will emphasize:

1. The benefits to students of a strong College coupled with the University's unique combination of professional schools, many of which are very interdisciplinary; as well as the ways in which these partnerships form the foundation of the signature features that make USC's education distinctive.
2. The future of knowledge creation, representation, preservation, and translation.
3. Academic Culture – enriching its intellectual community and educational environment through its commitment to the arts and humanities, campus and residential life, and multiplying forms of learning beyond the classroom.
4. Structures of Learning – including inquiry-based and hands-on learning, distance learning, and technology enhanced learning.
5. USC's unique position with respect to internationalization/globalization, including the increasing diversity of its student body, its location in Los Angeles, the capital of the Pacific Rim, and the changing realities of international competition related to the "business" of education.
6. USC's local connections and interactions with the community, service learning by its students, and the economic initiatives and philanthropic efforts in neighborhoods adjacent to the University.

Institutional Research

The 1998 reaccreditation review called for streamlining the collection of institutional data, and then analyzing and using the data meaningfully in planning, priority setting, and resource allocation. The self-study prepared for that review indicated that "consideration is being given to reinstituting an Office of Institutional Research. A small, highly professional staff could assure the adequacy and consistency of internal data while reaching out to include relevant information from external sources." USC created the position of Academic Information Officer (AIO) to help implement this proposal, and the AIO has created a data team from existing staff in offices that generate and work with relevant data. The data team produces the Institutional Data Portfolio and college Data Profiles annually. (CFR 4.5)

The accreditation team recognizes the University's effort to improve its institutional research systems. However, the data team needs to work toward providing the information in more user-friendly formats and developing and providing information of greater strategic value. For example, the Institutional Data Portfolio and college Data Profiles report USC trend data collected from members of the data team in table form only. Providing these same data also in graphic form will allow users, including the analysts who serve as members of the data team, to more quickly spot trends. In addition, the administration reported that it engages in benchmarking activities, using several different peer or aspiration sets of universities for comparisons, but none were provided in the CPR. During team interviews, benchmarking was not mentioned except in response to specific questions. (For example, it was noted that USC has passed UCLA and Berkeley with regard to SAT scores for entering students.) Systematic collection of comparative data would allow the university to measure its progress against the status of its peers, providing a helpful context from which to understand institutional vs. environmental change.

USC does have access to comparative data through the AAU Data Exchange, the National Clearinghouse, and publicly available national datasets, including WebCASPAR and IPEDS, and will have additional information about graduate programs through the National Research Council's Research Doctorate Assessment in the near future. Providing the information required to participate in the AAU Data Exchange, making use of the rich comparative datasets for analytic and strategic purposes, and placing the data in the hands of those who can best use the information to effect change will likely require additional staff resources. The University needs to give careful consideration to these steps and to the overall effectiveness of its institutional research processes as it prepares for the EER visit. (CFR 4.5)

SECTION IV - Major Findings and Recommendations

Major Findings

First and foremost, our findings highlight the enormous change and progress made by the University. Notable and worth commending are the institution's:

- Installation of a strong and dynamic leadership team;

- Improvements in the fiscal support available to the University;

- Development of a learning environment that provides state-of-the-art resources and facilities necessary to ensure faculty and student scholarship;

- Achievements in scholarship and research;

- Dramatic improvement in the qualifications of incoming students, retention, and the exceptional diversity of the student body;

- Clear commitment of the administration and faculty to student learning and scholarship, especially at the undergraduate level;

- Efforts to strengthen the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences; including the attention given to increasing the quality of scholarship that is fundamental to other institutional objectives;

- Development of a General Education core curriculum that is required of all undergraduate students;

- Development of innovative approaches for assessment in both its writing and critical thinking programs;

- Efforts to study its General Education core curriculum and minors option represent a commitment to continuous curricular renewal;

- Creation of a vibrant social-learning environment that promotes opportunities for faculty and student engagement;

- Efforts to create rich interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students;

- Creation of a globalization initiative, including the development of opportunities for study abroad and student scholarship in related areas; and

- An on-going effort to increase its residential units in order to gain the full benefit of the rich diversity of the campus and provide further extra-curricular learning opportunities related to diversity and cultural competency.

Recommendations

Interdisciplinary Learning

- Whereas it is evident that the University has been successful in breaking down many of the barriers that often inhibit faculty and students from achieving interdisciplinary engagement, it is recommended that further attention be given to addressing the administrative impediments that can affect the success of the University's focus on interdisciplinary work (including the process for approving new courses, shared cost allocation, and clarification of faculty teaching loads when divided between school or other academic units). This effort should include investigation of the degree to which students pursing interdisciplinary studies experience difficulties in registering for courses offered outside their primary program or school.

Assessment

- Whereas the richness of the learning opportunities for students at USC was well represented in the CPR, it was also found that the University administration and faculty did not share a full understanding of assessment. As such it is recommended that the University place a priority on developing systematic methods of assessment (including the clear identification of student learning outcomes and measures) that support the demonstration of educational effectiveness in both the General Education core curriculum and the undergraduate degree programs. Priority should be given to enlisting the cooperation of faculty and department chairs in using and analyzing assessment results to improve teaching and learning.

General Education

- The team found that the required General Education curriculum was modest in size and scope. It is recommended that the University review its General Education curriculum and give particular attention to evaluating the breadth and depth of learning by students who take the minimum 32 units without a minor. The University should also give careful attention to the introduction of quantitative and moral reasoning requirements in the General Education program. As part of this process the University should consider conducting transcript audits to determine if graduating students acquire a broad liberal arts education.

- Attention should also be given to developing clearer criteria for the General Education diversity courses. The team observed that some of the courses included in the current list of approved General Education diversity courses do not reflect the goals related to strengthening students' understanding of diversity and cultural competency described by University representatives. The University should encourage faculty to develop best practices in diversity instruction to help ensure that the institution's goals for students' diversity and cultural competency learning are achieved. Although the University enjoys a climate of harmonious race relations and has a reputation for fairness and concern for diversity, the administration should search for more diverse ways to bring groups together both in courses and in residential and extra-curricular activities. Every effort should be made to include foreign students in these collaborations in order to make the most of this rich cultural resource and contribute to the understanding of all concerned.
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SECTION V - Preparations for the Educational Effectiveness Report and Review

In talking with the team, University leadership outlined five key areas that will guide their preparations for the Educational Effectiveness Report and site visit. First, the University will continue to utilize its institutional themes (*Spanning Disciplinary Boundaries to Focus on Problems of Societal Importance*, and *Increasing Responsiveness to Learners)* as an overarching focus for its EER activities. In addition, the University has already initiated two special studies that will be presented as part of the EER. The first of these studies will emphasize a careful evaluation of the utility of the minors program, including an evaluation of the goals and purposes for the minors program, and the extent to which minors enhance both the depth and breadth in students' undergraduate learning. The second study supports the review of the University's General Education core curriculum through evaluation of its diversity courses, writing program and multi-media learning opportunities.

In addition, The University will likewise be actively engaged in furthering the development and integration of its globalization initiative into its degree programs. Furthermore, the University will continue to examine data as a means of better understanding students' engagement in extra-curricular activities, retention and graduation rates.

Last, and most important in preparing for the EER visit, the University should (a) give careful attention to better demonstrating the educational effectiveness of undergraduate degree programs that are already being evaluated, and (b) make efforts to work with units and programs that need to improve their development of assessment methods. Given the abilities and dedication of the University's administration and faculty, the team is confident that the University can complete a meaningful evaluation of the educational effectiveness of the institution's undergraduate program by the time the EER visit is scheduled.