In Re: Senate Response to the WASC EER Essays

Dear Judi,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and opine upon the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review Essays. Upon receipt of the essays, I specifically requested that they be reviewed by the Undergraduate Council (UgC), the Graduate Council (GC), the Council on Planning and Budget (CPB), and the Executive Board. All other Senate committees were welcome to opine. The Executive Board was generally favorable, but did offer several suggestions for improving the essays, as noted below. The UgC voted to endorse each of the essays (with stipulations), while the remaining reviewing bodies neither endorsed nor opposed the essays, but offered suggestions for improvement.

The Councils’ responses are attached. A general suggestion from the GC and UgC is to address the negative impact of on the economic recession “by reminding readers at different points throughout this document about the serious challenges faced in the implementation of the plans outlined in these essays.” The following narrative encapsulates the comments for each essay.

ESSAY A
All reviewing bodies affirmed the appropriateness of including Essay A, but expressed concerns. The Executive Board and CPB would like to see a more explicit statement addressing the impact of the financial crisis on the time horizon for implementing capstones. The Steering Committee might also consider whether Essay A should note how fiscal exigencies might impact the efforts described Essay D.

Although the document is generally undergraduate-themed, the GC and UgC “suggest incorporating an introductory statement acknowledging that graduate education is central to the University’s mission.”

ESSAY B
The UgC voted to endorse this essay with the proviso that the Academic Senate Review process will not be used as a mechanism for assessing learning objectives and/or assessment plans. “The Council acknowledged that its expectations for the articulation and assessment of learning objectives and how it will affect the Program Review process is unknown.” Both the GC and UgC expressed reticence over the impact of learning assessments on the Program Review Process. “Moreover, the Graduate Council is worried that this intense focus on undergraduate learning assessments and outcomes and their connection to Program Review will take over this process. As such, the Graduate Council fears that such attention, if not rigorously thought through, will have collateral effects on reviews of graduate programs across our campus.”
The GC would like the role of graduate students at UCLA to be emphasized more; toward that end, a stronger introductory paragraph should be added to the section on “Graduate Degree Granting Programs” (pg. 16). It proposes adding the following language:

"Graduate education at UCLA is central to the University’s mission. As a top-tier research institution, UCLA’s graduate students often serve as instructors and mentors to undergraduate students and as colleagues-in-training to the UCLA faculty. Although their scholarly endeavors are well defined at the graduate level, graduate students require faculty time and input at all stages of their graduate careers. They greatly influence the quality of the undergraduate student experience and supplement the instructional expectations of the faculty. Masters theses and doctoral dissertations define the capstone for graduate students, but it is the ongoing collaborations with faculty and the hands-on interactions with the undergraduate students that further enhance the capstone that is the graduate student experience at UCLA."

ESSAY C
As noted in the comment on Essay A, there is concern among all reviewing bodies that the goals of Essay C and the financial realities described in Essay A appear to conflict. As the GC and UgC note, “Essay A directs departments and programs to streamline curriculum, while Essay C asks that curriculum be created or revised to provide students with a culminating experience. This directive seems resource intensive and potentially, might increase faculty workload.” The increased workload, of course, would be performed by a shrinking faculty with increased teaching obligations.

Moreover, the UgC expressed concern that the essay leaves the reader with the impression that “the Undergraduate Council has stipulated that departments are required to develop capstone courses,” when such is not the case. Along these lines, the Executive Board encouraged emphasizing that there would be a range of capstone options, which might be more consistent with a diminished teaching capacity.

ESSAY D
No concerns or objections were raised by any reviewing body regarding Essay D. On the contrary, the UgC voted unanimously to endorse the essay as written.

Finally, the GC and UgC have requested that a written response be provided indicating how the WASC Steering Committee will address the concerns raised.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review and opine on these important essays. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Robin L. Garrell
Academic Senate Chair

Cc: Jaime R. Balboa, Academic Senate CAO
To: Robin Garrell, Chair, UCLA Academic Senate
From: Steven Nelson, Chair
UCLA Graduate Council
Joseph B. Watson, Chair
UCLA Undergraduate Council

Date: November 16, 2009

RE: Comments on the UCLA Report for the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review

Dear Senate Chair Garrell;

The Graduate and Undergraduate Councils appreciate the amount of time and effort that has gone into the drafting and editing of the essays contained in the Educational Effectiveness Review Report prepared for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Our comments below are aimed at improving this report and ensuring that its plans are at once visionary and cognizant of the complicated financial situation facing UCLA.

The Councils feel this is an important matter that warrants a joint response. This memo includes specific comments that evolved from each Council’s discussion of the document. It should be noted that while the Undergraduate Council has endorsed the WASC essays, Graduate Council has not taken such actions.

ESSAY A:
Overall, the Councils appreciate the inclusion of Essay A, which articulates the difficult financial situation facing UCLA and expresses a cautionary note with respect to a number of the ideals and plans noted in the following essays. However, the Graduate Council feels that the tone of the rest of the document is disconnected from reality. Quite simply, Essay A’s cautionary tale about a shrinking university gives way to a document that ignores our current fiscal emergency. How can one make sense of this serious contradiction? One could address such a disconnect by reminding readers at different points throughout this document about the serious challenges faced in the implementation of the plans outlined in these essays.

While the document is, by-and-large, undergraduate-themed, the Graduate Council believes that it affects graduate education as well. Aside from the enormous role graduate students play in the teaching of undergraduates, they also are involved in undergraduate research (this includes the teaching of capstone courses in some units). Additionally, faculty time is divided between graduate and undergraduate students. Hence, the intricate relationship of graduate education to undergraduate education should be both articulated and affirmed in this document. We suggest incorporating an introductory statement acknowledging that graduate education is central to the University’s mission (Essay B; page 16, see below).

The Undergraduate Council voted to endorse the notion that Challenge 45 may be used as one mechanism for departments and programs to streamline curriculum in this environment of shrinking resources. However, the Undergraduate Council emphasized that it gives its support to this initiative with the caveat that departments and programs must preserve and sustain the excellence of undergraduate education in the process.
Members agreed strongly that the Executive Vice Chancellor provide Council with a copy of the report he requested be submitted by the deans by December 15, 2009 that describes the steps taken by departments toward addressing the EVC’s charge for curricular reform, what remains to be done, and how the efforts will be completed in academic year 2009-10. The Undergraduate Council asks also that a reporting mechanism be implemented to keep the Council informed of the revisions to undergraduate requirements made by departments and programs. It might be considered that Faculty Executive Committees [FEC] be asked by the EVC or Academic Senate Chair to submit quarterly reports of the Challenge 45 and/or proposals to revise requirements approved by the FECs to the Council in academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11.

The UgC voted to endorse the essay with the provisos with 12 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and 1 abstention. The students voted 3 in favor, with 0 opposed, and 1 abstention.

**ESSAY B:**
The Undergraduate Council endorsed **Essay B** with the strong proviso that the Academic Senate Review process will not be used as a mechanism for assessing learning objectives and/or assessment plans. The Council acknowledged that its expectations for the articulation and assessment of learning objectives and how it will affect the Program Review process is unknown. It was agreed that this will be a learning process and will be addressed when the amended self-review guidelines are implemented in the 2010-11 review cycle. Concerns were raised about how departments will implement an assessment plan in the environment of diminishing resources. The Graduate Council shares Undergraduate Council’s reticence about the impact of learning assessments on the Program Review Process. Moreover, the Graduate Council is worried that this intense focus on undergraduate learning assessments and outcomes and their connection to Program Review will take over this process. As such, the Graduate Council fears that such attention, if not rigorously thought through, will have collateral effects on reviews of graduate programs across our campus.

As mentioned above, the Graduate Council feels that the role of graduate students at UCLA should be emphasized more and that a stronger introductory paragraph should be added to the section on “Graduate Degree Granting Programs” (pg. 16). Graduate Council proposes adding the following:

> Graduate education at UCLA is central to the University’s mission. As a top-tier research institution, UCLA’s graduate students often serve as instructors and mentors to undergraduate students and as colleagues-in-training to the UCLA faculty. Although their scholarly endeavors are well-defined at the graduate level, graduate students require faculty time and input at all stages of their graduate careers. They greatly influence the quality of the undergraduate student experience and supplement the instructional expectations of the faculty. Masters theses and doctoral dissertations define the capstone for graduate students, but it is the ongoing collaborations with faculty and the hands-on interactions with the undergraduate students that further enhance the capstone that is the graduate student experience at UCLA.

The Undergraduate Council endorsed the essay unanimously with concerns and reservations about how the specific details for assessing learning objectives will be carried out in the Academic Senate Program Review process, with 13 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions. The students voted 3 in favor, with 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions. Members approved unanimously the revised text proposed by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, including the additional modifications requested by Council, on page 17.

**ESSAY C:**
Concerning **Essay C**, “UCLA’s Capstone Initiative,” the Graduate Council is concerned about the implementation of capstones. Quite simply, there is no concrete plan for their execution. In addition, this essay gives the impression that the Undergraduate Council has stipulated that departments are required to develop capstone courses. Such is not the case; moreover, the implementation of capstone courses will be
a nearly impossible undertaking for some units. Exacerbating this conundrum is the absence in the essay of any questioning of how new capstones would be established (and how current ones would be staffed) in light of the slashing of our budgets and the reduction of faculty as well as lecturers across campus. Although there’s no question about the value of capstones to the undergraduate experience, it is unclear that UCLA has the resources to implement them as broadly as the essay indicates.

The Undergraduate Council approved unanimously the revised text proposed by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education on page 23, which was created by the 2008-09 Curriculum Committee Co-Chairs of the Undergraduate Council.

It was commented by both councils that essays A and C seem in conflict: Essay A directs departments and programs to streamline curriculum, while Essay C asks that curriculum be created or revised to provide students with a culminating experience. This directive seems resource intensive and potentially, might increase faculty workload. The Undergraduate Council voted unanimously to endorse the essay with this Undergraduate Council comment with 13 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions. The students voted 4 in favor, with 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions.

ESSAY D:
Undergraduate Council members considered Essay D straight-forward; it reflects accurately efforts to assist faculty to enhance teaching and student learning that are implemented at UCLA. The Council appreciates the innovative use of technology by faculty to advance UCLA’s teaching mission, as well as the continuing development of technology to sustain UCLA’s commitment to excellence in undergraduate education. The Undergraduate Council voted unanimously to endorse the essay as written with 13 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions. The students voted 4 in favor, with 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions.

We do ask, in the spirit of collaboration, that you provide for us a written response that outlines the changes you are willing to make to the essays.

Again, the Councils would like to acknowledge the enormous amount of collaborative work that has gone into this document. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

cc: Jaime Balboa, CAO, Academic Senate
    Kyle Cunningham, Policy Analyst, Graduate Council
    Judith Lacertosa, Policy Analyst, Undergraduate Council
    Dorothy Ayer, Assistant to Senate Leadership & CAO
November 4, 2009

Professor Robin Garrell  
Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

Re: Proposal for the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review

Dear Dr. Garrell:

The Council on Planning and Budget (CPB) has had the opportunity to examine the UCLA proposal for the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review. CPB has examined the document taking into consideration the availability of resources for the proposed plan and being fully aware of the fact that the University of California is going through a very fluid and uncertain financial scenario.

CPB's main concern about the document is related to faculty resources that appear necessary for full implementation of the UCLA capstone initiative. While the merit of the initiative is not disputed, its across-campus implementation may be highly taxing upon ladder faculty members, who will be already having their teaching loads substantially increased in the foreseeable future. Other resources, such as TAs and physical facilities, may also not be adequate for implementation of the plan in the near future.

The timetable proposed for the implementation of the capstone initiative appears ambitious, also given the university’s financial shortage and uncertainty. It is very possible that resources available to the university may become even scarcer than they currently are. With that possibility in mind, full implementation of the capstone initiative by 2012 may not be feasible. It would sound reasonable if departments under which majors are housed had the flexibility to develop their own capstone implementation timetables, where scenarios that included further economic deterioration and scarceness of resources were presented.

Finally, it is CPB’s belief that departments should be given the opportunity to propose alternative methods to evaluate learning effectiveness that are less resource-intensive in parallel with the capstone initiative, if anything as a back up plan in case the university experience a greater financial shortage. Departments should be allowed discretion as to what learning effectiveness evaluation methods best serve their needs.

Sincerely,

Paulo Camargo  
Chair, UCLA Council on Planning and Budget

cc: Jaime Balboa, Chief Administrative Officer, Academic Senate  
    Michael Goldstein, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate  
    Ann Karagozian, Vice Chair, Academic Senate  
    Linda Mohr, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, Academic Senate  
    Council on Planning and Budget Members