

Accent on Excellence: Distinctive Universities/Supportive System Report from a Planning Conversation at San Diego State University

January 26, 2007

I. Executive Summary

Close to 350 faculty, staff, students, community members, and invited guests participated in a “conversation” that took place at San Diego State University as part of the CSU strategic planning exercise “Access to Excellence.” Through presentations, discussions, and surveys, participants explored the relative strengths of SDSU and the CSU and the steps necessary for each to ensure that students have access to educational excellence in the long term.

The conversation resulted in specific proposals as the CSU strategically maps the next ten years. The conferees agreed that the present centralized “franchise” model, with a strong central system office and satellite “campuses,” should be reconceptualized to provide more autonomy to the individual universities. To this end, the system office should

- Adopt a more supportive rather than controlling role.
- Value, encourage, and recognize the diversity and academic distinctiveness of the universities.
- Embrace the philosophy of “centers of excellence,” empowering the individual universities to build on their strengths and supporting their aspirations and unique claims to distinction.
- Review functions in the Chancellor’s office that are redundant with those at the universities and reduce or eliminate them, distributing the savings realized to the universities.
- Maintain more budget transparency at the system level.
- Develop a financing model more responsive to the universities’ specific needs and unique strengths.
- Encourage the universities to develop alternative funding mechanisms.
- Advocate more effectively on behalf of the CSU and higher education in California.

The CSU strategic planning process should focus and capitalize on the diversity among the CSU universities by challenging and requiring each university to articulate its vision, goals, and appropriate metrics by which the board of Trustees would hold each university accountable for its progress.

II. Introduction

In response to the call from the California State University's Board of Trustees, close to 350 faculty, staff, students, community members, and guests gathered in San Diego State University's (SDSU) Arts and Letters lecture hall on Friday, January 26, 2007 to participate in the "campus conversation" portion of the California State University's long-range planning initiative. The event, prepared and coordinated by the Senate Executive Committee, was titled "Accent on Excellence: Distinctive Universities, Supportive System." Guests included CSU Trustee Murray L. Galinson, former Trustee Fred Pierce, former Trustee Ralph Pesqueira, and Elizabeth Ambos, Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research Initiatives. Lewis Michaelson served as the facilitator for the session.

The title of the event, "Accent on Excellence: Strong Universities, Supportive System," was intended to emphasize the importance of excellence to the mission of the CSU. As SDSU President Stephen Weber put it in his opening remarks, "access is meaningless if it is not access to excellence." Access means more than increasing enrollment; meaningful access implies membership in a community actively involved in scholarship, research, and knowledge production and dissemination as well as active engagement in the diverse communities that surround us. Low income does not mean low ability; California's students want and need access to the best they can get. In this sense, access does not conflict with excellence; in fact, serving the underserved populations of California means giving them the same high opportunities that the more privileged traditionally enjoyed. Excellence gives value to access and drives the continuous learning in which all members of the academic and professional communities are engaged and which constitutes the primary motor of the advanced economy for which our students are preparing. It is for this reason that it is important to capitalize wisely on the unique strengths of both SDSU (and the other CSU universities) and the CSU system in order to maximize the opportunities for access to excellence for California's students.

The event was structured around the three major questions posed by the CSU Trustees:

1. What are the strengths of SDSU and the CSU now?
2. What would you like either or both to be doing better in the future?
3. What changes are needed in the university-system office relationship in order for each to maximize their effectiveness?

The specific "domains" suggested for discussion were explored, as appropriate, under these broader headings. Selected expert presenters addressed each question, from different perspectives. Speakers included SDSU President Stephen Weber; President of Associated Students Matt Keipper; Vice-President for University Relations and Development Mary-Ruth Carleton; Senate Chair Fred Hornbeck; Provost Nancy Marlin; Dean of Undergraduate Studies Geoffrey Chase; Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs Eric Rivera; and Chair of the Senate Committee on Academic Resources and Planning Gene Lamke. Each presentation was followed by an opportunity to respond to survey questions related to the topics covered by the presenters. Prior to the event, all participants were also asked to respond to an online survey; the responses to the survey provided the basis for many of the questions posed during the session.

Participants were able to voice their opinions on these questions through the use of clicker technology, with the responses displayed instantaneously to provide data for further discussion.

The following report summarizes the substance of the “conversation” in terms of each question and the emergent conclusions and recommendations.

III. Discussion

1. Strengths of SDSU and the CSU System Today

SDSU: The Premiere Urban Research University

In spite of the unfavorable budgetary climate, over the last decade and a half SDSU has emerged as the premiere urban research university for the 21st century, even as state support diminished from 40 percent of SDSU’s budget in 1995/6 to 28 percent in 2005/6. The quality of SDSU’s performance is born out by the data:

- Between 2001 and 2006, applications to SDSU increased by 61%, compared to 19% for the CSU system as a whole.
- Between 1997 and 2004, the average SAT score for SDSU’s first-year class increased by 126 points, compared to 45 points for first-year students in the CSU system.
- Between 1998 and 2006, the need for remediation in English decreased 16% among SDSU students, compared with 1% for students in the CSU system generally.
- Between 1998 and 2005, the need for remediation in Mathematics decreased 36% at SDSU, compared to 18% for CSU students generally.
- Between 1996 and 2004, first-year-to-second-year retention increased by 8.3% at SDSU, compared to 3% for the CSU system.
- Between 1996 and 1999, six-year graduation rates increased by 15% at SDSU, compared to 4.5% for the CSU system as a whole.
- Between 1996 and 2006, the number of students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program increased from 876 to 1217.
- Between 2004 and 2006, the number of students enrolled in the Summer Bridge Program increased from 57 to 132.
- Between 1996 and 2006, the number of international students attending SDSU rose from 650 to 1400, while the number of SDSU students studying abroad rose from 167 to 1250.
- Between 1996 and 2005, faculty of color increased by 9% at SDSU, compared to 5% in the rest of the CSU system.
- Between 1996 and 2005, the percentage of women faculty increased by 12%, as compared to a 1% increase for the CSU system.
- In 2006, SDSU awarded 49 of the 61 joint doctorates that were awarded by the CSU system.
- In 2004, SDSU brought in 37% of all of the external funding for research that was awarded to CSU universities.

- Between 1996 and 2006, SDSU's external fundraising has increased from \$18 million to \$55 million. While other CSU universities have enjoyed a 183% increase in fundraising between 1996 and 2005, SDSU's increase has been 254%. This fundraising has resulted in an increase in SDSU's endowment from \$17.5 million in 1996 to \$117.9 million in 2006. SDSU generates ten times as much federally supported research funding as the average CSU university.

SDSU's plans for achieving continued student success include:

- Identifying and addressing academic support needs of our student population
- Increasing six-year graduation rates beyond current levels (54%)
- Further improving the academic achievement of graduates

In working to accomplish these goals, SDSU is using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement. Based on these data, SDSU is

- Developing MAPS to graduation for all students
- Instituting Bounce Back Program for students on academic probation
- Increasing early focus and intervention on and for undeclared students
- Focusing orientation and new student-parent programs on steps necessary for academic achievement and graduation

In addition, the Divisions of Undergraduate Studies and Student Affairs are working together to

- Design and implement curricula aimed at particular needs and cohorts of students
- Design and implement learning communities for both residential and commuter students
- Collaborate and coordinate with other divisions and auxiliaries who are partners in increasing student success

Student success is also facilitated by the online services available to SDSU students through the student web portal. These services include:

- Degree audits as well as links to courses that fulfill different degree requirements, so that students can move easily between degree requirements and course descriptions.
- MAPS, which provide students with semester-by-semester plans for graduation.
- Online voting, which allows for elections to be held without paper ballots.
- On-line registration. In addition, an automated waiting list is being implemented, which will assure students access to classes they wish to take in their order of registration priority.
- Faculty evaluation forms, which will be available online throughout the campus soon. They are already available online for students in some majors.

Overall, SDSU students enjoy, in the words of Associated Students President Matt Keipper, "phenomenal access to information."

All this activity needs to be adequately supported. The major challenge for SDSU is the provision of long-term resources to sustain the growth and excellence of the university in the face of continued enrollment growth (in Fall 2007, SDSU expects 5,100 total incoming first-year students). Among these resources are adequate faculty salaries to retain and attract talented and active faculty (according to President Weber, the salary of CSU faculty trails peers by 14.4%, while SDSU faculty probably trails peers by 25%), as well as budgetary mechanisms that recognize and reward academic distinctiveness, recognizing and addressing the specific problems faced each of the CSU universities, and that recognize and support unique areas of success.

Strengths of the CSU System

The CSU system was founded by the passage of the Donahoe Act in 1960, a law that formalized the Master Plan for Higher Education in California. The goal of the CSU was to provide baccalaureate education, teacher preparation, and graduate education at the master's level on a scale exceeding the capacity of the University of California. Many of the universities that comprise the CSU predate its creation (the institution that is now San Jose State University was founded in 1862). San Diego State University was founded in 1897; thus, it was 63 years old when the CSU system was founded and had already established a reputation for high quality education. The CSU has emerged from its confederation beginnings as a constellation of diverse and distinctive universities with specific and distinct traditions and strengths, rather than a university with separate "campuses," as the system's rhetoric would suggest.

The major strengths of the CSU system include:

- Commitment to and success in providing meaningful access to baccalaureate education (although the State's commitment to funding that access has steadily decreased over time).
- Effective intersegmental coordination of student admission and transfer, including a steady increase in high school academic requirements for admission to the CSU.
- Meaningful outreach, including early assessment, which San Diego State University pioneered in its Compact for Success with the Sweetwater School District, and which has now been adopted for the entire system.
- Utilizing bulk purchasing power to aid libraries and other entities across the system with powerful and much-used resources that might otherwise have been unavailable.

However, in the wake of the "Cornerstones" project, the CSU has struggled to make progress in the following areas:

- Support for faculty teaching, scholarship, research, and creative activity
- Graduate and continuing education
- Support to cover increasingly higher costs of education

These areas are critical to the continued success of San Diego State University, and they are the ones where the CSU system has, by its own admission, not done nearly enough. The challenge faced by the CSU system is to develop both a philosophy and a long-range financing strategy

capable of supporting the unique strengths of the universities and thus of sustaining the long-term momentum and excellence of the CSU system as a whole.

2. What Should SDSU and the CSU Do Better in the Future?

SDSU's Vision of Excellence

In spite of systematic under funding and lack of support, SDSU remains committed to its vision of being a premier urban research university for the 21st century, global in its thinking, student focused, and community engaged, regionally and internationally.

As one way of funding this vision and ensuring its long-term excellence, SDSU has initiated a major capital campaign, one that is focused on funding student scholarships and faculty chairs and thus enhancing both access and the quality of the educational experience. The campaign aims to

- Maintain SDSU's competitive edge in the educational marketplace and in the quality of the education it offers its students in the fast-changing and increasingly competitive global environment
- Capitalize on SDSU's high reputation, nationally and internationally
- Build on SDSU's academic and geographic distinctiveness
- Further enhance SDSU's most outstanding programs
- Boost fundraising for the long term (national studies indicate that a comprehensive campaign raises levels of annual giving as well)

Suggestions from participants at the forum also included increasing student fees and/or implementing an "excellence fee" (SDSU fees are 52% below those at comparison universities, and 13% below the least expensive comparison university), removing the salary cap, which discourages faculty grant productivity, and lobbying the state legislature to change the way education is funded (since higher education is one of the only discretionary parts of the state budget).

SDSU's Vision of a Supportive CSU

Participants agreed that the current administrative policies of the CSU do not support the vision and mission of SDSU or the long-term excellence of the CSU system. At the heart of the problem is the tendency toward increasing centralization and the lack of recognition for and appreciation of the academic distinctiveness of the CSU universities.

"The CSU system is an extraordinary array of universities," Provost Nancy Marlin asserted in her presentation. It comprises large universities and small, old and new, urban and rural universities, including two polytechnic universities and the Maritime Academy. By not acknowledging this distinctiveness and acting as if the CSU were one university with 23 campuses, the system does a disservice to one major source of excellence and dilutes the

potential effectiveness of the planning process. This non-differentiating approach was apparent in the “one-size-fits-all” plan for the “Access to Excellence” conversations.

The assumption of uniformity impoverishes the planning process, which should focus on the distinctiveness and unique strengths of the universities. Yet, it is the individual university that is the locus of the educational experience for students. The affiliation of faculty, staff, students, alumni, surrounding communities, and donors is also with an individual university, not with the CSU system as such. In the case of SDSU, for instance, the assumptions that CSU students are non-traditional, older, working, part-time, and first generation are not representative of SDSU’s student population, since SDSU’s average freshman is 18 years old, only 15% of freshmen are first generation college students, 75% of first-time freshmen are residential, and the majority of freshmen do not work at all during the school year. The assumptions about the “average CSU student” thus result in planning recommendations that are neither particularly helpful nor appropriate to SDSU.

In consideration of the diversity and distinctiveness of the CSU universities and to ensure the long-term growth and continued excellence of public higher education in California, as well as to capitalize on its unique strength as the largest public higher education system in the nation, the CSU should thus

- Adopt a more supportive rather than controlling role.
- Value, encourage, and recognize the diversity and academic distinctiveness of the universities.
- Embrace the philosophy of “centers of excellence,” empowering the individual universities to build on their strengths and supporting their aspirations and unique claims to distinction.
- Review redundant functions and reduce or eliminate them, distributing the savings realized to the universities.
- Maintain more budget transparency at the system level.
- Develop a financing model more responsive to the universities’ specific needs and unique strengths.
- Encourage the universities to develop alternative funding mechanisms.
- Advocate more effectively on behalf of the CSU and higher education in California.

3. Distinctive Universities/Supporting System: What Changes Need to Occur in the University-CSU Relationship to Maximize Their Mutual Effectiveness?

To build on the unique strengths and potential of both individual universities and the CSU system, the relationship between the system office and the universities needs to be reconceptualized to recognize the academic distinctiveness of the universities and to support and reward their unique achievements. The present “franchise” model with the strong central system office and “campuses” located around the state should change. Significant resources are devoted to the system-level because of all the academic functions and the complex bureaucracy required to maintain standardized policies, procedures, and committees. As one example, last year, 2006, 184 coded memoranda and executive orders were issued by the system to the universities; that’s

one every 1.3 working days throughout the calendar year. Instead of the present arduous and ultimately futile effort to standardize the campuses, the system office should provide more autonomy to the individual universities, reduce its central operation, and use the savings from a smaller central operation to fund the individual universities more adequately.

The CSU strategic planning process should focus on and develop the academic differences among the universities. It should challenge and require each university to articulate its vision, goals, and appropriate metrics by which the board of Trustees would hold the universities accountable for their progress. The strategic planning process should also review and clarify the roles of the system office and of individual universities. There are and will remain vitally important roles for the system: legislative affairs, maximizing state funding, conducting collective bargaining, negotiating volume purchasing and licensing agreements, and the entire myriad of functions that the CSU system is responsible for as a legal entity, such as issuing bonds. However, academic functions should not be based nor coordinated at the system-level; these are roles of the universities.

A planning emphasis on academic distinctiveness, coupled with decentralization, may produce greater participation from the universities and thus yield better results. Such an approach can contribute meaningfully to long-term increase in the academic reputation and quality of the universities. Such achievements will in turn redound to the CSU system collectively and increase the value of the students' degrees. Emphasizing academic distinctiveness also allows students and their families to make more informed choices. Such an approach would allow all the universities and the CSU system as a whole to make an even greater contribution to the state of California.