REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM

For the Special Visit Conducted at

San Jose State University

March 1-3, 2006

Team Roster

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Description of the Institution and Visit

The team would like to begin by thanking members of the San Jose State University community for their helpfulness, collegiality, and hospitality. The team was impressed with the attention to detail that went into this visit. It made the team’s work easier and enjoyable. The team wishes to thank in particular President Kassing, Provost Sigler, Bob Cooper, Kathleen Roe, Beth Von Till, and all of the members of the Accreditation Steering Committee. Their work, their openness, and their support set a positive context for this special visit.

San Jose State University, California’s first public institution of higher education is located in the heart of Silicon Valley. Currently, it is comprised of seven colleges, 60 departments, and offers more than 150 degree programs. In the last fifteen years, San Jose State University has granted 87,000 BAs and MAs combined, and thus the university has a key role to play in San Jose and in neighboring communities. The institution has a strong sense of its history, its core values and, increasingly, a clear vision of its future. The team’s sense is that SJSU is taking bold steps into the future while remaining true to its mission, history, and the shared commitments that contribute to its culture.

Several key changes in leadership have taken place at San Jose State University since the Capacity and Preparatory Review site visit took place in October 2004. Foremost among these have been the appointments of Carmen Sigler as Provost and Vice President of the Academic Division, of Veril Phillips as Vice President for Student Affairs, of Rose Lee as Vice President for Administration and Finance, and of Fred Najjar as Interim Vice President for Advancement. These appointments have helped
reorganize and focus the administration in ways that have led to greater coherence and
more fully developed institutional planning. The team also wishes to make note of the
Greater Expectations retreat involving 60 faculty, students, staff, and administrators from
San Jose State University in January 2006. This retreat clearly had a significant impact on
the campus and laid the groundwork for a greater sense of direction, commitment, and
focus on integrated learning. Events such as this retreat, fully supported by the campus
leadership, can be instrumental in helping faculty develop consensus and define more
clearly their focus.

This report follows the WASC special visit conducted in March 2006 by Geoffrey
Chase (chair), Teresa Shaw, and Pat Hutchings with assistance from Barbara Wright, the
WASC staff liaison for San Jose State University. The visit took place on March 1 – 3
and involved meetings with administrators, staff, and faculty. Additionally, a secure
email account was established so that any member of the campus community could
provide the team with additional feedback. The focus of this report is on the issues and
concerns raised in the WASC Commission action letter in 2005.

Quality of the Special Visit Report and Supporting Evidence

The Team found the Special Visit Report to be well-prepared and responsive to
the specific concerns raised in the April 2005 Commission letter. In addressing such
concerns or issues, the report made use of appropriate evidence and data. The report was
clearly written and focused, and the links to data and exhibits highlighted in the text of
the report facilitated the identification of additional evidence. The links in the on-line
version of the report were active and useful.
As the steering committee and campus leadership prepares for the educational effectiveness review and visit, the team strongly encourages a shift to an “inquiry based” approach to the process and to the writing. That is, a shift from capacity to effectiveness should be reflected in a shift from “what we can do” to “what are our questions?” “how do we know if we are effective?” and “how do we respond to what we learn?”

Description of the Team Review Process

The visiting team’s process began with a reading and review of the written self-study and linked materials on the Web. Using the framework supplied by WASC, each team member prepared an initial analysis of issues, which were then consolidated and discussed during a conference call the week before the visit. During that call, a number of needed adjustments in the schedule for the visit were identified, and the team is especially grateful to Robert Cooper and his colleagues for accommodating the team’s request for changes.

The visit began on Wednesday morning, March 1, with a meeting with President Kassing; that meeting set the stage for everything that followed, providing the team with a sense of current themes and issues that recurred throughout many of the team’s interactions with faculty and staff. Sessions were organized around key topics from the self-study, and team members were pleased with the range of participants in those meetings, and impressed by their thoughtfulness and candor.

Throughout the visit, the team (which included Barbara Wright from WASC for the first half of the visit) met to compare notes, examine documents, and share drafts of a
preliminary report. Key themes and findings were then represented in a final debriefing session at the end of Friday morning.

Team Findings, Analysis, and Recommendations

Strategic Planning and Institutional Research

Under President Kassing’s leadership, San Jose State University has engaged in a strategic planning process that has been broadly inclusive and that has led to a large degree of consensus on campus about where the university is headed. Broadly shared core values—assessment, inclusive excellence, integrated learning, and a focus on the curriculum—inform the both the Vision and the Goals that the university has set for itself. The goals—Enhancing Academic Quality, Enhancing the Student Experience, Improving Campus Work Environment, and Strengthening Community Alliances—are clearly articulated and have been communicated widely across the campus community. These goals reflect the core commitments of the university and the team was impressed with the high degree of understanding and commitment to these goals (CFRs 4.1, 4.2).

San Jose State University has also developed an elegant and effective strategy that aims to align resources and efforts to reach these goals. Initially developed by the Goals Advisory Committee, the goals have led to Goals 2010 and a Vision for the university. To keep this process working, a second group, the University Planning Council, has
been formed to propose strategies to achieve the goals, to solicit input from panels comprised of faculty, staff, students, and administrators, and to forward initiatives to the Resource Planning Board (RPB). Once the RPB has reviewed proposals, it forwards funding proposals to the President.

This process is still in the early stages but it shows significant promise and the team was impressed with the support the process has across the campus community. The process is well understood, is open and transparent, invites involvement from diverse stakeholders, has served to build a culture of commitment and innovation, and it creates a means through which planning becomes a dynamic process. The strategic plan is designed as a living document and the team was impressed with the degree to which the plan provides direction while also remaining flexible and open.

It is also clear to the team that key administrators have demonstrated their commitment to the shared values of San Jose State University and of the planning process. They have done this through active involvement with the process and, perhaps most importantly, by providing resources to allow campus initiatives focused on student learning to move forward. The result is that faculty have become increasingly engaged and positive about the process. The mood on campus is positive, upbeat, and reflects a phrase the team heard often: “it’s our time.” Increasingly, San Jose State University refers to itself as
“a university of choice” and the individuals with whom we met are proud of that designation. There is a great deal of pride and commitment at San Jose State University and a good deal of that is related to the planning process that has been developed and implemented.

At the same time, the team wishes to note that this planning process is relatively new and it will be important to realize early successes to keep the momentum going forward. This will be challenging given resource constraints and other pressures, but the university is well poised to move forward. *As it does, faculty need to be rewarded for their work and efforts and campus leadership will need to provide them with time and resources to keep moving ahead.*

One way to do this will be to build on the early gains that have been made in the area of institutional research once the new Associate Vice President for Institutional Research is on board. Creating this position and pulling together key staff for this new office will allow the university to continue to build its culture of evidence and inquiry. The new software system (Cognos) the university has purchased will also provide meaningful, useful data at all levels at the university, from the president right on through department chairs, and will provide a basis for ever more alignment between the Vision, the Goals, and the activities and initiatives in divisions, colleges, and departments (CFRs 4.5, 4.6).
Assessment

The assessment of student learning is an essential component of educational effectiveness, and not one that is easily achieved. To build an authentic “culture of evidence” requires wide engagement by members of the campus community and long-term institutional commitment. The team was pleased to see that SJSU has made significant progress toward this long-term goal since the capacity visit. A number of useful processes are now in place, and though they have not yet “taken” equally in all settings, and though clear links with other processes of decision making must still be forged, the team heard notable success stories that can show the way toward more widespread habits of gathering and using evidence of student learning to improve the institution’s educational effectiveness.

Assessment at SJSU is quite well established in the general education program, where the course-embedded model that was initiated in the late 90s is now a regular expectation. The community understands that as faculty submit courses for continuing certification, they must address questions about how student learning of key objectives is assessed. Importantly, this process has consequences: courses in which mechanisms for assessment are deemed inadequate are not recertified (4.4).

The team was impressed by the assessment process in general education, but perhaps even more important is the vision that drives that process. Individuals who have been active on the Board of General Studies (BOGS) are clearly able to articulate the “big ideas” behind assessment: that it begins in clarity about outcomes, entails habits of inquiry and evidence gathering, and values evidence (and analysis and deliberation about
evidence) as essential to ongoing improvement. These are simple ideas but powerful ones that are often not understood, especially when faculty perceive assessment to be someone else’s agenda imposed from outside. In this sense, assessment in general education provides a kind of demystification that can be extremely useful in the more challenging (or at least newer) arena of assessment of the major. Indeed, faculty from several fields reported that their experience with GE assessment enabled them to assist their department colleagues in understanding and embracing assessment. *The team believes that more of this kind of cross-program learning could usefully be encouraged and organized.*

We are aware that the GE program is now attempting to move toward a more integrative model of student learning, and this transition—assuming that the proposed model is approved—will bring new assessment opportunities and challenges. In particular it will raise the need to look across courses at what students’ learning adds up to over time. This will be an important step forward for the campus because *assessment must move beyond the level of the individual course in order to provide the kind of bigger-picture data about learning outcomes that are needed for decision making.* We are aware that there is talk about the use of electronic portfolios as one strategy for more integrative assessment, and, *for the EE visit, the campus will certainly want to showcase assessment processes and results that move beyond the course level, whether through portfolios or other mechanisms.*

Assessment in the major is a newer venture, one that has clearly been moved forward by the “fast tracking” of this goal by the University Planning Committee. The team was pleased to see that departments are moving through a step-by-step, iterative
process that has the potential to generate real progress in the next several years. We heard about departments in which the call for assessment served as a prompt for useful departmental conversations about outcomes, and about the need to make expectations more public and explicit for students. We were particularly impressed by the exercise of mapping agreed-upon outcomes against courses that a number of departments have undertaken, an exercise that uncovers issues about alignment and also helps faculty see that they are not exclusively responsible for all aspects of students’ learning in the major.

The team also heard about useful changes and improvements that have resulted from the assessment process in some departments—developments that should be at the heart of the EE report. For example: based on a careful reading of student papers assigned late in the program, one department decided to introduce a key concept earlier in the curriculum. Another realized that a key outcome had been neglected and built it more explicitly into the program. It is hoped that there will soon be further and more extensive examples of improvement driven by the assessment process.

The team was struck by the decision to invite a focus on one student learning outcome at a time; most departments have little assessment experience, and a broad mandate to assess “the whole program” can be daunting, even paralyzing. Breaking the task up into smaller increments seems a useful approach, and, as indicated here, the team’s conversations with multiple departments and our examination of department reports shows that it has made progress possible.

Predictably that progress is quite uneven. In programs where specialized accreditation has adopted an outcomes-based approach, the concept of assessment is not new and progress has been easier. In one such case, it appears that work on assessment is
now so extensive the program is being advised to cut back, to streamline. But this is
clearly the exception. Departmental documents, and comments by faculty, make it clear
that this new work is difficult. In some settings it has met with hostility; in others,
perplexity. The language can be off-putting in some fields: while some disciplines may
find the idea of “rubrics” appealing, others (the team was told) “glaze over” when the
word is mentioned. And in just about all settings there are workload issues: Faculty are
already pressed from many directions, and where assessment appears to be “one more
thing” (and a thing people do not understand), there is understandable resistance. None
of this is unique to San Jose State University.

The question, then, is how to move forward—especially in settings where
assessment is being undertaken in perfunctory ways, as a bureaucratic requirement that
no one really cares about or believes will make a difference (3.8). Indeed, it was not
clear to the team how departments in need of further support and assistance are being
identified or, for that matter, what kinds of support are planned for the crucial next year
of work to move all programs (even those that are making good progress) ahead. Perhaps
such support can be provided in part by the center that provides support for teaching—
since, after all, assessment should be seen as closely linked with teaching effectiveness.
In any event, this is a critical time for building on what has been done.

One possibility is to find success stories and make them more widely known. The
team was struck by the fact that departments do not have many opportunities to learn
from one another’s work on assessment. (Bringing departments together for the site visit
created useful exchange, as several participants noted.) Hearing examples of successful
approaches is key to further progress. What would be especially powerful is to organize
occasions where programs (including general education) could share examples of cumulative assessment which looks at learning over time rather than only in discrete courses.

Drawing on lessons from other institutional settings may be helpful as well. Nothing that the team observed at San Jose is unique; many institutions have faced the same challenges. In fact we heard about a very useful consultation with an expert from the CSU system who offered a workshop and individual departmental consultations; many appeared to have found this useful. More opportunities to draw on expertise from other settings may be a good investment.

But perhaps the most important next step will be to ensure that assessment comes to be seen as making a difference. Without a sense of consequence, many faculty will conclude that assessment has simply been a bureaucratic exercise. What’s needed is a much firmer, more concretely imagined set of links between assessment processes and data and institutional planning, decision making and allocation of resources. Many of the individuals we talked with were hoping such links would be made but unclear about how that would happen, what it would look like. Certainly the program planning process is a crucial link, and the team suggests finding ways to illustrate how assessment will be part of the new program planning process. That will both lower anxiety and create new visions of what’s possible. It is, of course, when assessment is used as a basis for significant institutional decisions that people will fully appreciate its usefulness (4.3). A few high visibility, positive examples of this in the next year would be extremely valuable.
Finally, the team believes that assessment must be factored into current discussions about faculty roles and rewards. We are aware that RTP guidelines are currently under discussion but as things now stand most faculty seem persuaded that work on assessment will not count—at least not much. It would be useful, too, to assist faculty to “make the case” for their work on assessment (and related matters of teaching and curriculum) as a form of scholarly work.

Enrollment Management

In the sixteen months since the preparatory review team visit to the SJSU campus, the faculty and staff have made enormous progress in developing an enrollment management plan that is comprehensive, inclusive of student retention and satisfaction, and based in a strategic planning process. The visiting team believes that there are talented and resourceful people in place who can guide the approval and implementation of the enrollment management plan with skill and professional understanding. We found a high level of ability to manage the aspect of enrollment management related to setting targets and forecasts, a well-informed approach to recruiting and communication plans for admitted students, and a deep commitment to enlarging the view of enrollment management from a traditional focus on “bringing in bodies” to a broad focus on student affiliation with SJSU, retention, and satisfaction. In addition, we found that the campus has a solid foundation of information technology resources, availability of data, improved
reporting tools, and advising resources based in the PeopleSoft data management system. The technology and data resources, in turn, are clearly linked to the goals of the entire plan.

The Enrollment Management Panel associated with the strategic planning process has been meeting intensively for most of the past year, and has developed a comprehensive plan that will be considered for approval this spring by both the Faculty Senate and the University Planning Council (UPC). Many specific action steps and milestones are already in place, but several key elements must still be realized (see below). The next year will be critical for approval of the plan, allocation of resources, coordination of those actions steps already underway, and implementation of the complete plan. While the enrollment management plan as an integrated initiative is thus at a fairly early stage, and the plan is ambitious in its linkages with assessment, student support, and progress to degree, the team believes that the institution has the capacity for success. Several factors led to the team’s conclusion:

1. The enrollment management process and the responsibility for implementation are clearly integrated into the university’s strategic planning process, its articulated goals (Goals 2010), and its structure for decision making and resource allocation. The Enrollment Management Panel, like other “Panels” associated with specific goals of the University, is chaired by a member of the UPC and includes both interested members of the SJSU community as well as key faculty and staff who have knowledge, capacity, and responsibility for the plan’s different components. In turn, the UPC and the Faculty Senate will approve the plan developed by the Panel. Both the planning process and the
1. Approval process are clearly understood, communicated to the community, and consistent with the university’s broader strategic planning and goal setting activities (CFR 3.8).

2. The enrollment management plan is based on a university-wide process that links decision making about numbers and types of students, and numbers and types of programs (the traditional “supply and demand” approach to enrollment management) with other goals of the university, specifically the enhancement of the student experience (through enhanced connections between the student and university community, enhanced tracking and advising, and enhanced capabilities to understand and respond to different students’ needs). The team found that this integrated approach is clearly understood by the faculty and staff.

3. The team found that the enrollment management process at SJSU is a clear example of the alignment of people and resources with the strategic objectives of the University (CFR 4.2). We also found that, while the potential for a full and regular “feedback loop” in which evidence of student learning and institutional effectiveness continually informs the process will take some time to realize, the enrollment management plan provides the structure for success in this area (CFR 4.3). Indeed, we found examples of this already happening:

- Enrollment management issues and questions have been integrated into the five-year cycle of program planning and review for each department on campus. External examiners now consider issues of configuration of degree programs, demand, balance between graduate and undergraduate programs, and optimal enrollment as part of the overall review process. Already the faculty and administrators in programs have made some significant decisions as a result of
this process. For example, the Department of Social Science has decided no
longer to admit graduate students, and the Department of Psychology eliminated
one graduate program and in order to concentrate its resources on others.

- The enrollment management plan’s emphasis on advising is informed by evidence
  in the NSSE study and from an analysis of current practice by an SJSU marketing
class that suggests that students need more contact with and mentoring by faculty
and more opportunities for connection with the campus community. For example,
in response to recommendations from the marketing students, the Student Affairs
office has staffed an information kiosk. This is supportive of other goals and
themes of the strategic planning process, such as SJSU as a “university of choice”
and “learning and belonging.”

- Campus advising as well as a greater attention to recruiting and tracking students
  are supported by the “degree audit” component of the PeopleSoft system that
allows students and faculty to access quickly a summary of progress to degree,
including a “what if” function that creates a scenario for those considering a
change of major. The student affairs staff and faculty also have the capability,
through a tracking system, to identify students who may need immediate contact,
for example students whose GPA falls below a certain point. Such intervention,
not an easy thing with a large student body, is part of the retention efforts built
into the overall enrollment management plan. This is a high level of functionality
that brings individuals and information together, and it is supported by a strong
PeopleSoft training program for faculty, staff, and students.
• The enrollment management plan is also clearly linked to broader campus initiatives on student success, helping students develop “roadmaps” to the undergraduate and graduate degree or credential, and retention. One example of the type of academic program that both informs and is informed by these efforts is the “Success in Science” course (SCI 002) for first year science students. Science faculty and Academic Services staff worked together to design a course that has already had a measurable positive impact on retention, GPA, and general academic standing for students who complete the course. The development of this course represents, it seems to the team, an ideal coordination of disciplinary knowledge, understanding of best practice in student retention and success, and use of institutional data for program development and refinement (CFR 4.4).

4. The advising emphasis mentioned above is particularly impressive. The team observed a strong understanding of advising as key to retention and thus enrollment management. Some new systems for enhancing advising and communication have already been implemented in response to needs identified through the planning process and focus groups. For example, a Communication Plan that establishes and tracks consistent, frequent, and action-oriented contacts with prospects and admitted students has been implemented. The plan reflects an overarching strategy of integrating students into the University community as early as possible. Regarding advising of enrolled students, ten general staff advisors in Academic Services are deployed as liaisons to colleges for the purpose of improving linkages between general education advising and advising in the major. A coherent and consistent schedule of required advising points for
all undergraduate students is being implemented. This will allow for contact with students at critical points in their progress toward their degrees. A full proposal has been developed for an enhancement of advising that will include a central “hub” for electronic information on university requirements, a system of “peer advising” that will train to students to advise other students on basic issues and requirements while freeing faculty to advise students on more individual issues of career planning, focus, and research, and the establishment of an “advising guru” who will coordinate these activities with information resources and processes. The plan demonstrates both a clear integration with campus decision-making, an alignment of resources, a clear commitment to student progress and success, and a clear understanding of the use of information and data to enhance student success (CFR 3.8, 4.2, and 4.3). When fully realized, the advising component will be part of an informed quality assurance process (CFR 4.4).

Overall, then, the team is convinced that in relation to enrollment management the university has developed a strong team, the right information resources, an integrated set of goals and strategic priorities, and a clearly-understood process for aligning resources with processes that further those priorities and goals. Several key needs are apparent as the process moves forward and in order for the process to succeed:

- The enrollment management plan will be considered for approval by the Faculty Senate and the UPC, and the Resource Planning Board will consider the Plan’s resource and funding requests, this spring. The advising proposal will also be considered this spring, and also has funding requests associated with it. *Along with the obvious need for approval, the team also wonders how the resource*
allocation process will “play out” over the next year, that is, how these plans will be implemented if total funding requests are not granted.

- The team was impressed that the enrollment management and advising planning processes have included an awareness of faculty workload concerns, which are significant on this campus. For example, the advising committee is concerned that enhanced advising should also be an enhancement of faculty work, and that faculty advising should be a rewarded activity (e.g., included in the RPT process). The team agrees and encourages further attention to these issues. This would represent a further alignment of workload and activities with University identity, mission, and goals.

- Some additional information and technology resources are necessary, including a common e-mail address system for the University that will vastly improve communication with faculty and students.

- Overall, the team was impressed by the number of items outlined in the enrollment management plan that have already been implemented and integrated into university processes and academic advising. For example, dashboard reports have been developed for use in planning at the level of the provost and the president, the program planning (review) process has been revised to include enrollment management considerations, first-year experience courses have been expanded and revised to include emphasis on persistence, graduation, and roadmaps to success, and the “My SJSU” student portal provides students easy access to advising resources such as the degree audit. Nevertheless some items in the plan are in development or have not been fully implemented, such as the new
advising plan. While the Enrollment Management Panel is working across the
university, with each college, in order to develop a campus-wide vision for SJSU,
this process is still underway, and a shared understanding of the right “mix” of
enrollments (by college and department, graduate and undergraduate, transfer
students, distance education, off-campus programs, etc.) will be critical in the
near future. The team encourages the faculty and staff to continue to work for full
implementation, and full integration of the various aspects of the enrollment
management plan.

- As the enrollment management plan is more fully implemented, a key challenge
will be to continue to ensure that information gathered from assessment activities
within schools and across the university are integrated into the more “nuts and
bolts” matters of FTE targets. This is critical for effective advising, tracking of
degree progress, and responding with appropriate changes in program offerings
and design. And this is the type of institutional learning that should become more
apparent as SJSU prepares for the education effectiveness review (CFR 4.2, 4.3,
4.4, and 4.5).

Other Issues
San Jose State University has made impressive progress in the past year and a half
and the team was struck with the positive mood on campus, the commitment to core
values—“learning and belonging,” “social justice,” “great cities have great
universities”—and to a shared sense of purpose: “it’s our time;” “university of choice.”
At the same time, the team noted that many faculty were, by their own admission, tired.
The commitment to the university among those the team met was extraordinary. Faculty and staff care about San Jose State University, and they are justifiably proud of what they have achieved together.

The team was also aware, however, that much of the work that has been achieved is still in its early stages and that much work remains to be done. As the university moves ahead with this work, it will be critical to attend to faculty work load issues, to provide appropriate rewards, and to broaden campus involvement to help meet the challenges that remain.

Meeting the Expectations of the 2001 Handbook

The team is confident that San Jose State University meets the expectations of the 2001 Handbook in regards to capacity and that it is well positioned to move ahead with the educational effectiveness stage of the reaccreditation process.
Major Recommendations and Summary of Findings

1. Strategic Planning and Institutional Research: As noted earlier in this report, San Jose State University has made considerable progress in the areas of strategic planning and institutional research. The team recommends that this work continue, and that as the university moves into the future, it tracks and illustrates how planning contributes to increased educational effectiveness. Specifically, the university needs to continue to extend and develop the alignment that shows such promise in guiding the work of faculty and student learning.

2. Assessment: San Jose State University has made significant progress with regards to student learning outcome assessment. As the university prepares for the Educational Effectiveness Report and site visit, it needs to (1) pay particular attention to approaches that move from course-based to more integrative/cumulative student learning outcomes. The university needs to extend work already underway and be prepared to demonstrate the use of student learning outcomes at the program level. Additionally, the university needs to (2) work with departments and units that are in the early stages of understanding assessment so that there is less disparity across campus. The team believes the university can achieve in this, in part, through the identification of more assessment “success stories” in which findings have been used to make important changes in teaching, curriculum, faculty development, planning and resource allocation. Finally, in preparing for the educational effectiveness visit, the university needs to (3) move beyond a description of assessment processes to an evaluative analysis of how those processes lead to improvement.
3. Enrollment Management and Planning: The team recommends that the university continue toward full approval and implementation of the enrollment management plan and the advising plan. As it does so, the university should focus especially on the integration of enrollment management with strategies for retention and student success, and on using data and institutional research capabilities to inform initiatives and decisions. The team feels that the elements for success are in place (informed and capable professional staff, information resources, alignment with strategic goals of the University, and a clear process for securing funding for components of the plan) and will make such integration possible.

4. Preparing the Educational Effectiveness Report: San Jose State University has developed a strong vision and direction. Based on the significant progress the university has achieved since the site visit in 2004, the team recommends that the Educational Effectiveness Report focus on inquiry, evaluation, and analysis rather than on description. The team believes it is important for the university to focus its efforts around key issues related to educational effectiveness rather than to attempt broad coverage of all facets of the university community.