

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

This self-study has been a review of Santa Clara’s progress in achieving the goals of its *Strategic Plan*. Over the course of this self-study, we have learned many things about Santa Clara’s strengths and weaknesses. We discuss our major conclusions, recommendations, and questions below.

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### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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In the body of this self-study, we have offered conclusions and recommendations regarding each area that was studied. As we formulated these recommendations, we tried to avoid simply repeating the goals that are already included in the *Strategic Plan*—goals that are themselves recommendations for action.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Santa Clara has identified learning outcomes for both the baccalaureate program and the graduate programs. It has amassed a considerable amount of data about student performance in relation to these outcomes, particularly at the undergraduate level. A large portion of the evidence, however, is in the form of self-reports rather than direct measures of performance. At the undergraduate level, the data show that Santa Clara graduates have strengthened and can employ skills in critical thinking and problem solving, can communicate effectively, and are able to include ethical concerns in decision making. But we would like to see a higher absolute level of achievement on these outcomes.

More in-depth assessment is needed (and scheduled) regarding student performance related to learning objectives for information technology; mathematics and the natural and social sciences; and American, Western, and world cultures.

The most challenging aspect of assessing learning outcomes for Santa Clara is defining and measuring the triune concept of “competence, conscience, and compassion.” The challenge is to explicate this concept more fully, operationalize it without trivializing it, and figure out what Santa Clara’s particular contribution to the development of these qualities is. The evidence to date suggests that Santa Clara may have a mild positive influence, but this evidence is not conclusive.

We have made four recommendations regarding learning outcomes:

- *Continue to explore ways to clarify, promote, and measure the goal of “competence, conscience, and compassion” as a distinctive outcome of an education in the Jesuit tradition.*
- *Provide the expertise needed to support assessment of learning outcomes with more use of objective, longitudinal, and comparative data.*
- *Strengthen the connection between the evaluation of teaching and the assessment of student learning.*
- *Implement a more systematic process of assessment-based review of academic majors and co-curricular programs that allows for local experimentation guided by identified learning outcomes.*

## **COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS**

Santa Clara faculty and staff report a strong sense of community which is bolstered by intellectual collaboration, an emphasis on the teaching scholar model, and diverse perspectives and experiences. Faculty esteem their colleagues, and many find their colleagues congenial partners in collaborative work or in discussions on scholarly topics. The teaching scholar model is endorsed by a majority of the faculty. Many faculty and students report that they work collaboratively with one another. New governance structures have improved communication among faculty, staff, and administrators. The continued efficacy of Santa Clara’s collaborative efforts should be assessed from time to time. At this time, the successes of these efforts constitute a good basis on which to build even more effective systems of collaboration in support of the community of scholars and to correct the problems that do exist. Recent organizational changes have created an environment in which faculty and student affairs staff can work more

effectively with one another. Involvement of graduate students in the life of the university beyond the classroom is an area requiring increased attention by the University.

We have made two recommendations for improving the community of scholars:

- *Promote increased use of practices and structures that bring members of the University community together across disciplinary and organizational boundaries.*
- *Determine the optimum size and composition of both the faculty and the student body within the context of a central focus on student learning and support of the teaching scholar model.*

## **INTEGRATED EDUCATION**

Santa Clara has initiated several strategies that challenge and support students to make connections among different forms of knowledge, understanding, and experience. Showcase programs in each school show promise of creating a learning environment that enables students to integrate more fully rigorous inquiry, creative imagination, reflective engagement, and active contribution to the common good. Experiential learning opportunities, such as the Eastside Project, can be transformative experiences for students that result in greater awareness and understanding of social issues, ability to link theory and practice, and increased empathy for others. The Drahmman Advising and Learning Resources Center is positioned to define advising more in terms of the developmental model envisioned in the 1992 advising plan. The restructuring of academic affairs and student affairs under the Provost was a critical organizational change to enable the University to create a more seamless learning environment for students. While the emerging centers of distinction have established themselves as important integrative structures within the University and between the University and the broader community, they are faced with challenges related to the breadth of their mandate, sustaining themselves through external funding, and the faculty status of program staff. The creation of the new Center for Multicultural Learning offers potential for integrating multiculturalism into student learning. Preliminary results suggest that these strategies have the potential to effective vehicles for integrated education at Santa Clara.

We have made five recommendations for strengthening our efforts to provide an integrated educational experience:

- *Continue to develop learning communities, particularly residential learning communities, as a principal means for promoting the coherence of student learning.*
- *Root experiential learning, with particular emphasis on community-based service learning, more strongly within the curriculum.*
- *Make student advising and learning assistance a vehicle for promoting integrated learning.*
- *Assure that the emerging centers of distinction create stronger connections linking faculty scholarship, student learning, and off-campus programs.*
- *Realize more fully the learning opportunities represented by the diversity of the University community.*

## **RESOURCES FOR EXCELLENCE**

The systematic and imaginative alignment of resources with strategic priorities must recognize the interrelationships of human resources, the physical environment, technology and information resources, and financial resources. In this self-study the examination of our effectiveness in developing and focusing our resources was generally conducted discretely for each particular resource area. Although we acknowledged the interdependence of resources, we were not successful in identifying ways of assessing the interactive effects of planning and decision making across resource areas. In addition, the self-study made clear that we have more work to do in identifying performance measures, setting specific targets toward which we are working, and benchmarking those measures over time against relevant comparators.

*Human Resources.* Santa Clara has made substantial progress in aligning its human resources with its mission and goals through tighter position controls, clearer faculty hiring guidelines, major administrative reorganization, a more flexible faculty evaluation system, a new staff performance management system, expanded employee development offerings, better recognition programs for both faculty and staff, completion of a new *Staff Policy Manual*, and work toward a new *Faculty Handbook*. Faculty and staff overwhelmingly state that they are familiar with the *Strategic Plan*, generally support its goals, and find Santa Clara a good place for them. The self-study, however, also uncovered some important vulnerabilities: the reward system should be strengthened, staff turnover has increased dramatically, competitiveness of salaries is a pressing

issue, and housing costs threaten the University's ability to recruit and retain accomplished faculty and staff necessary to achieve its vision.

*Physical Environment.* The University has made excellent progress in implementing major components of its current Campus Master Plan and in setting priorities for future campus improvement projects. The closing of The Alameda, the construction of new academic facilities, and the design of these facilities have not only improved the basic physical infrastructure of the campus but also actively advanced the goals of building a community of scholars and providing an integrated education. The University has also made progress in reducing deferred maintenance and creating a financial structure to manage repair and replacement of existing facilities and infrastructure in the future.

*Technology and Information Resources.* The University has made significant improvements in planning strategically for technology, providing a state-of-the-art infrastructure, replacing administrative systems, replacing desktop technology on a regular schedule, and increasing collaboration among the units that provide information resources and services. It has seen a tremendous growth in the use of technology in teaching and learning, but it still lacks a coherent strategy for encouraging and supporting faculty use of technology. Areas that need particular attention include faculty and staff development for technology use, improved facilities for Information Services, and more aggressive development of Santa Clara's Web site as an important educational, promotional, and management tool.

*Financial Resources.* Santa Clara has made significant improvements in its financial planning and decision making processes. Strategic policies and more deliberate practices have been adopted related to tuition, financial aid, budgeting, endowment stewardship, and investment management. The increase in annual giving achieved in the last campaign has been sustained, and preparation for a campaign in conjunction with the sesquicentennial celebration is well underway. Cost containment guidelines have been adopted based on the recommendations of the Budget Advisory Committee, and some progress has been made in redirecting funding to support the priorities of the *Strategic Plan*. There is clear evidence that Santa Clara is operating from a position of steadily improving financial strength.

We have made four recommendations regarding resources for excellence:

- *Integrate the planning and management of all University resources within a process that*

*recognizes the interrelationships and interdependence of human resources, technology and information resources, the physical environment, and financial resources.*

- *Assure that those who exercise leadership responsibilities at every level of the University develop and use the knowledge, skills, and sensitivities needed to effect organizational change.*
- *Implement a comprehensive compensation strategy that is affordable within the University's resources, addresses the problem of housing costs, and is sufficiently competitive to recruit and retain excellent faculty and staff.*
- *Engage more faculty and staff in innovative uses of technology, especially the Internet and Web-based resources.*

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## **OBSERVATIONS ON STRATEGIC PLANNING**

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Although it is not specifically addressed in the body of the self-study, another question deserves attention here: How effective has Santa Clara been in using its *Strategic Plan* as a framework and a stimulus for continuous improvement? In general, we believe the evidence shows that Santa Clara has done a good job of strategic planning. Our success may be gauged by the answers to several questions.

*Does the plan address the right issues?*

We believe that, for the most part, it does. The vision of educating for “competence, conscience, and compassion,” the emphasis on building a community of scholars and providing an integrated education, and the commitment to align resources with this vision give Santa Clara a distinctive mission and identity that is consistent with its Jesuit heritage and the needs of society as we understand them. The initiatives and goals outlined in the *Strategic Plan* touch on the major issues facing the University and either call for continuing progress on commitments already made or attention to new areas that have not yet received sufficient attention. We do not see a need to make major changes in the plan at this time, although this accreditation self-study has identified several important issues that are not explicitly addressed in the *Strategic Plan*. When the plan is revised the next time, some attention should be given to clarifying the

relationship between “Building a Community of Scholars” and “Providing an Integrated Education” and minimizing redundancy between these two initiatives.

*Is the plan framed in a way that encourages its use as a guide for action?*

We believe that it is. Instead of promulgating another “laundry list” of priorities such as the 125 goals, objectives, and strategies listed in the final chapter of Santa Clara’s 1987 self-study, we have tried to focus on a smaller list. The current *Strategic Plan* lists three broad initiatives, under which there are a total of 11 strategic challenges and 41 goals in response to those challenges. In the context of Santa Clara’s non-bureaucratic and collegial culture, the challenges are intentionally framed as questions to encourage reflection and creativity rather than lockstep compliance. And reflecting the culture of Silicon Valley, which some members of our Board of Trustees helped to shape, the *Strategic Plan* is also designed to be a dynamic framework that evolves in response to a changing environment rather than a rigid five-year plan. It has already been revised once, in February 1998, after its first approval in May 1996. By speaking in broad conceptual terms, the plan is able to retain flexibility and is more easily remembered and referenced by members of the University community. The price paid for this generality and flexibility is that less attention has been paid to setting specific targets and deadlines. With unclear criteria for what constitutes success, there may be some loss of accountability.

*Is the plan actively promoted, implemented, and monitored?*

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a pervasive skepticism about planning at Santa Clara, based on a perception that previous plans had been filed and forgotten after being formulated with great fanfare. This perception was only partially true, but it was accurate enough to result in widespread resistance to the very idea of planning. The University’s better record with implementation of the “Plan for 1990–95,” the strong commitment of Father Locatelli and the Board of Trustees to strategic planning, and more focused staff support for planning all helped overcome some of this resistance.

While there is still skepticism about the value of planning, there is strong evidence that the *Strategic Plan* launched in 1996 has been more effectively promoted, implemented, and monitored than any previous plan at Santa Clara. The University Planning Council monitors it; the President and the Provost mention it in virtually every public address they make; faculty, staff, and students reference it often in public discussion of University issues; campus

publications contain frequent references to it; decision-makers use it as an explicit criterion for decisions on matters ranging from special budget requests to the staff performance management system to staff recognition awards; and it serves as an umbrella for plans and “action agendas” at every level. Never before has a University plan at Santa Clara been “managed” with such resolution and tenacity. A striking (and unexpected) finding of this self-study is that 92.2 percent of faculty and 91.9 percent of staff responding to surveys last year said they were familiar with the *Strategic Plan*, and 88.8 percent and 95.6 percent respectively said they supported its goals. Given the fact that disagreements over various aspects of the plan have often been expressed in public forums, this level of support is impressive indeed. It is probably fair to say that the campus has moved from planning skepticism to planning fatigue.

*Has the plan resulted in documented changes that improve Santa Clara’s quality?*

We believe that this self-study has documented steady progress on each of the plans three initiatives.

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## LESSONS FROM SELF-STUDY PROCESS

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Apart from the specific recommendations above, what have we learned from the process of conducting this self-study? As indicated in the Introduction, we have made progress, but are not as far along the learning curve as we had anticipated. We have more work to do in identifying performance indicators, tracking our performance over time, using benchmark data, learning from the best practices of other institutions and organizations, and setting measurable goals or targets for continuous improvement. We have not yet incorporated assessment into the fabric of what we do.

Some of the specific lessons we have learned from the process of carrying out this self-study will be useful to us over the next several years and, we hope, to WASC.

### LESSONS FOR SANTA CLARA

One lesson we have learned—too late—is that it can be surprisingly difficult for an institution undertaking an accreditation self-study to shed a “compliance” mentality. The

tendency to carry old ways of thinking into new situations may, paradoxically, have been accentuated by the particular self-study design we proposed to WASC. Our *Strategic Plan* may have offered too convenient a template, providing an opportunity for our self-study to become a compliance exercise based on our own, rather than WASC's, standards. The template was both prescriptive and broad, addressing so many topics under the three strategic initiatives that to cover them all meant covering none in great depth. Too often, as a result, the self-study became more mechanistic and less intellectually challenging than it should have been. Rather than prompting unsettling arguments about meaning and direction, it sometimes seemed to be an exercise in documentation. It was difficult for committees and task forces to pose fresh and challenging questions, either based on existing evidence or as a prelude to further study. We need more practice to become a true "learning organization"—one that uses the kinds of skills faculty routinely practice in their disciplines to understand the institution more deeply and more usefully. In retrospect, we believe we might have had a more satisfying self-study experience if we had selected one or two themes to explore in depth rather than trying to cover an entire institutional plan.

A second lesson that became increasingly apparent was that we need to manage institutional time very carefully. Santa Clara has invested so much energy over the past several years developing and implementing its *Strategic Plan*, along with related plans at the school and division level, that fatigue had set in even before the self-study got underway. Father Locatelli made clear his own orientation, when he said in his 1995 convocation speech that what is important "is a process and culture of thinking and acting strategically, more than the drafting of lengthy plans." The emphasis has been on implementing plans rather than studying them. In trying to create a culture of "inquiry, evidence, and action," we have done a better job in terms of action than of inquiry or evidence. Each new round of documentation, either of planning or of self-study, led to an increasing sense throughout the University that people were stretched to their limits. One of the most common complaints in everyday conversation at Santa Clara is that people do not have enough time to do what is expected of them—and that planning and self-study activities have been major contributors to this.

A third lesson, already touched on in the recommendations, is that we need to structure our assessment efforts more effectively. We need to expand our assessment repertoire to include more objective, longitudinal, and comparative data. We need to be more systematic about doing

periodic program reviews. And we need to create an infrastructure to support program review and assessment efforts focused on student learning. To address these needs at Santa Clara, we will probably achieve more success if we approach this infrastructure as a faculty and staff development function rather than as a bureaucratic or reporting function. This means that we will need to devote careful attention to teasing out the differences between institutional research, marketing research, and learning outcomes research, with appropriate support targeted for each.

## **LESSONS FOR WASC**

Whatever the limitations of Santa Clara's self-study, we believe that it has been much more rewarding than it would have been if we had conducted a traditional self-study based on the nine standards and numerous subordinate standards of WASC. We are grateful for the opportunity to have experimented and to have learned from this experiment. We believe that the general approach to self-study that WASC is now taking is the right approach, and we support the principles articulated in the Policy and Planning Committee's "Invitation to Dialogue II: Proposed Framework for a New Model of Accreditation." We encourage WASC to continue experimenting with self-study models, emphasizing a consultative approach wherever possible.

One issue on which WASC staff have been correct in principle but lax in practice is the importance of a pre-visit during the development of a special self-study report. Our discussions with WASC from the beginning envisioned a visit by a small consultative team that would form the nucleus of the visiting team one year later. This consultative visit did not take place. We surmise that the main reason it did not was that WASC, like Santa Clara, has experienced time management problems as it has become more ambitious in the role it plays and more experimental in the way it approaches this role. Nonetheless, we believe that a consultative pre-visit in fall or winter 1998 would have provided immensely valuable feedback, guidance, and motivation at a critical point in the self-study process. We encourage WASC to build consultative pre-visits into the process for special self-studies.

Based on our experience, we believe that self-studies—if they are to take full advantage of the opportunity for probing inquiry—should be sharply focused. While we believe Santa Clara's self-study has been very useful and provides a good foundation for further work on assessment, it might have been more intellectually satisfying and practically useful if we had focused on one or

a few issues in depth rather than covering the entire gamut of issues in our *Strategic Plan*. We encourage WASC to work with other institutions embarking on special self-studies to assure appropriate thematic focus.

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## CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

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We expect Santa Clara’s interaction with the visiting team around our strategic planning and assessment efforts to be a valuable consulting opportunity—an opportunity to receive informed and thoughtful advice from colleagues at other institutions who have dealt with many of the same issues as those discussed in this report. At the end of Chapters II through V, we have included questions for further study and discussion. Here we would like to pose four more global questions which require further consideration and on which we would welcome advice from the visiting team:

- What additional actions or changes, beyond those suggested in this report, should Santa Clara consider to assure that it “makes student learning its central focus” and “exhibits organizational learning,” as envisioned in the University Mission statement?
- How can Santa Clara better foster a “culture of inquiry, evidence, and action”—incorporating planning, assessment, and improvement into the fabric of what it does—without overwhelming people and diverting attention and resources from the primary business of education?
- How can Santa Clara better organize itself to carry out the multifaceted aspects of research—institutional research, marketing research, and research on learning outcomes—that we now require?
- What has Santa Clara overlooked in its planning and assessment that may be more obvious to knowledgeable outsiders than it is to us?

We look forward to discussing these and other issues with the visiting team.

