

California State University, Northridge
Report of the First Year Planning Committee for the
Learning Centered University Initiative
June 2004

During the academic year 2003-04, California State University, Northridge (CSUN) sponsored activities that included presentations in March from William Plater, Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculties of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, followed by a series of conversations (called “brown bag” dialogues) in April and May hosted by the University president, provost, and vice president for student affairs. Senior administrators, department chairs, faculty, and staff attended these conversations.

What follows is a set of observations from the planning committee that might merit consideration when next steps are crafted. These observations are drawn from the formal discussions at the stimulus events, the response to those events, informal conversations, and reflective exchanges among the committee members.

Preliminary Readings on Where We Are

CSUN has long emphasized excellence in teaching and has been nationally recognized for its accomplishments in this area. Working with students of varied academic preparation, CSUN takes students of promise and helps them realize a higher level of achievement than many dreamed possible. The pride taken in this focus and achievement was reflected regularly in formal and informal comments sparked by the stimulus sessions.

Conversations during the dialogue sessions made it clear that many individual faculty members, informal faculty idea sharing groups, departmental faculty initiatives, and college-level working groups have wonderful ideas and many are far along in the development and testing of innovative instructional strategies, curriculum design and outcomes assessment, supplemental instruction, programs and course redesign to improve student learning, and more. Indeed, the University has a remarkably rich pool of talent and ideas in its faculty and staff who could contribute to the University’s efforts to become a more Learning Centered University.

Cal State Northridge also has support resources that help enhance teaching and learning such as its Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching that offers faculty opportunities each year to share ideas and broaden their classroom skills. In addition, CSUN’s student services professionals and advisors have long been dedicated to improving student academic success and helping students acquire life and leadership skills. The University also has the advantage of having built over the past few years a cohesive and collaborative cross-college leadership team that positions the University to work within and across colleges to share ideas, support promising initiatives, and tackle larger University-level changes. This positions the University to move forward to a new level of excellence and distinction.

The Committee considered the following challenges that will be confronted in this initiative:

- ❖ How will the University create a culture that encourages faculty and staff learning, as well as student learning, and encourages risk taking that goes along with learning?
- ❖ How will the University foster the development of a coherent curriculum?
- ❖ How will the University develop a common vocabulary and a common knowledge base that helps it work across units?
- ❖ How will the University make students active participants in their own education from the outset of their time at CSUN?
- ❖ How will the University align its rewards and resource allocation policies and strategies with the institutional learning centered priorities?
- ❖ How will the University assure that faculty and staff have the basic knowledge and skills needed to be a part of the University's key conversations about learning – course and program design, assessment, instructional strategies, and the like?
- ❖ How will the University assure that the faculty and staff have the data needed to understand the changing characteristics of the University's students and which learning strategies attempted in different programs and departments are producing the best results?
- ❖ How will the University ensure that the different kinds of expertise regarding student learning held in different University units are brought together with some regularity and allowed to enrich and inform each other?
- ❖ How will the University ensure that current examples of exceptional achievement and new ideas relevant to enhancing learning are made public – shared and communicated in some regular way that allows all to benefit and build from success anywhere in the University?
- ❖ How will the University orient new staff, faculty, and administrative leaders to the University's learning centered culture?
- ❖ How will the University continue to move toward excellence and distinction as a learning centered institution during times of constrained resources?

The Committee

The members of the 2003-04 planning committee included: Claire Cavallaro, Cynthia Desrochers, Joyce Feucht-Haviar (chair), Margaret Fieweger, Marilyn Filbeck, Robert Kemmerling, Jerry Luedders, Michael Neubauer, Marcella Tyler, Omar Zahir, and Pattie Ridenour as administrative assistant to the committee.