

DATE: November 4, 1996

MEMORANDUM

TO: Melanie Bloom, Chair
Academic Senate

FROM: ^{QHP} David Provost, Chair
Special Commission

RE: **FINAL REPORT ON ACADEMIC QUALITY, RESOURCES AND
SUPPORT FOR ACADEMICS, AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE ON
CAMPUS**

Enclosed is the Final Report of the Special Commission appointed by the Academic Senate. As called for in the Senate's charge of March 18, 1996, the Special Commission held three publicly announced open hearings on faculty and staff concerns--though it should be noted that students and administrators also participated. The required preliminary report was submitted to the Academic Senate in May 1996.

The charge additionally directed the Special Commission to issue "recommendations for future actions" including "recommending a planning process." Accordingly, the Special Commission (1) requests the Academic Senate formally receive its Final Report, and (2) submits for adoption two formal recommendations on planning and funding.

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Enclosure

**Final Report on Academic Quality, Resources and Support for Academics,
and the Quality of Life on Campus**

by
The Special Commission
Appointed by the Academic Senate

Members of the Special Commission

David Provost, Chairman
Vonda Epperson
Warren Kessler
Robert Merrill
Beth Newell
George Raney
John Shields
Fred Schreiber
Ephraim Smith

November 4, 1996
California State University, Fresno

Introduction

On March 18, 1996 the Academic Senate adopted a resolution creating two special committees; one, an "Ad Hoc Administrative Accountability Committee" to answer a range of questions which had emerged about administrative expenditures, appointments, etc.; the second, a "Special Commission to Address Issues of Academic Quality, Campus Priorities and the Quality of Life on Campus." While this action was an immediate response to controversial e-mail messages widely distributed on campus, it is clear that for a long time faculty and staff have had serious concerns about academic quality, distribution of resources, administrative priorities, morale and the quality of life on campus.

Complaints have been expressed in recent years with regard to the quality of education provided by California State University, Fresno (CSUF). A number of students complain that teachers spend too much time teaching at a low level and that grading practices are often subjective and erratic. A growing number of faculty members express concern about the presence of under-qualified students in their classrooms. And employers have been heard to say that CSUF graduates lack expected competencies.

The Commission believes the growing anger and frustration and the declining morale are partly the result of a reduction in support, by all segments of the campus community, for high academic quality. Contributing causes include the widespread perception that 1) there is an inadequate share of state and non-state funds spent on instruction, 2) there is a decline in the number of students prepared to do university level work, 3) the administration, Academic Senate and schools are not providing sufficient leadership in terms of academics, 4) the administration is disproportionately allocating resources to itself rather than to the entire campus community, and 5) many faculty members have lowered their academic standards and expectations of student performance. Furthermore, current problems will be compounded in the future by a dramatic increase in the number of eligible students and growing competition from other colleges and universities.

Though the focus of this report is on problem areas the Commission identified, its members wish to make it clear that many dedicated faculty, staff, and administrators are working hard to provide students at CSUF with a high quality education. Moreover, the Commission recognizes several administrative initiatives to address academic quality. It is in this spirit that the Commission notes deficiencies and makes suggestions.

This report focuses on concerns of and related suggestions made by students, staff and faculty about: 1) academic quality and support for academics; and 2) campus morale and quality of life.

History

In the last five to six years economic problems in California caused a drastic state budget reduction in support for the CSU system. Allocations to schools, departments, library, plant operations and virtually every office were cut. Faculty and staff received layoff notices. Actual layoffs, bumping and fear of layoff caused serious demoralization throughout the university. As of 1995-96 the faculty was approximately 120 tenure track positions short of what it had been in 1991. Twenty-five tenure track faculty were hired and several senior faculty retired last year. Since 1991 class sizes and average student-faculty ratios are up by 14.5 percent. Library acquisitions are down. Deferred maintenance has a backlog in the millions of dollars. The pervasive sense that academic quality is deteriorating has been mirrored by a serious deterioration of campus facilities, including classrooms and labs.

In March 1993 the administration asked the Academic Senate to do an appraisal of the academic program to determine if resources could be reallocated and certain programs could be eliminated. This procedure began a process of confronting scarcity in ways that threatened jobs and the very existence of programs and departments. As things turned out, the program reductions were few but nonetheless heavily felt. The anguish during and after this process further demoralized faculty and staff.

Four years ago, President Welty developed a *Plan for the 90s* with input from a variety of sources. The *Plan* laid out an ambitious set of objectives centered around a mission statement and a vision statement which were approved by the Academic Senate on April 26, 1993. This plan created a framework for identifying university priorities for some years to come.

The administration obtained a grant from the Pew Foundation for the purpose of strategic planning. A Pew Roundtable consisting of faculty, administrators, and staff met throughout the year discussing challenges to the university such as: changes in society, funding sources, new technologies, demographic changes, and the future educational needs of our region. It made a number of suggestions for changes to improve the university and position ourselves for challenging circumstances that may come.

In June 1995 a number of faculty found themselves drawn together by common concerns about academic quality issues on campus. Designating themselves "The Group for Quality Education," this body attracted about fifty members and several more interested parties. It held an open forum with the Vice President for Academic Affairs in October 1995. In March of 1996 the "Group" published a detailed draft report, *A Quest for Academic Excellence*, on such issues as admission policies and practices, academic standards, academic freedom, grade inflation, the importance of administrators teaching, and a number of other issues that are of concern to the campus community.

Finally, in the context of current controversies, the California Faculty Association (CFA) submitted to President Welty and the Senate a paper entitled *CFA Positions* covering eighteen areas in which improvements were suggested. It was expected that the administration and the Academic Senate would deliberate these positions.

Methodology

In order to determine official commitment to excellence in academics and dedication to high quality programs, the commission reviewed university publications from various administrative offices. These documents included, but were not limited to, the President's *Plan for the 1990s* (June, 1993), University Outreach Services' California State University, Fresno informational brochure, and the *General Catalog, 1995-96*.

In order to better understand efforts in achieving and/or sustaining high quality educational standards and a campus dedicated to academics, documents from a number of groups were studied. These documents included several memoranda from the California Faculty Association Fresno Chapter, the Group for Quality Education's *A Quest for Academic Excellence*, and the report from the Quality Teaching and Scholarship/Learning Subcommittee of the Roundtable on the University Future 1994/95. Additionally, Commission members informally interviewed students, staff, faculty and administrators on ideas about academic quality and campus morale issues.

The final procedure for gathering information was mandated by the Academic Senate's resolution of March 18, 1996 which required public hearings. Three open hearings to address issues of academic quality and campus morale were held on April 25, April 29 and October 9, 1996. At the beginning of the hearings, an information sheet with ground rules and possible categories for discussion was distributed. This sheet also had space for written comments, which could be returned to any member of the Commission. Sessions were tape recorded so that summaries of oral statements could be made. Notes on stated concerns and suggestions were written in condensed form for selective incorporation into this report. Within the limited time frame and resources of the Commission it should be noted that a formal comprehensive survey could not be undertaken. Commission members are confident, however, that the major concerns of students, staff and faculty have been identified. Subgroups of the Quality Commission took responsibility for writing sections of this the report subject to final editing and approval by all members.

Concerns

On paper CSUF is clearly committed to quality and excellence, but the Commission found that relatively little is being accomplished towards these ends. There were many, different concerns expressed about the quality of the education being provided at this campus. Some were widely mentioned whereas others were noted by only a few individuals. What follows is a brief listing of identified concerns. Those considered more significant by the Commission members are in bold type.

About Academic Quality and Support for Academics

- ◆ Faculty objected to a lack of prerequisite checking and delayed completion of General Education core requirements such as the requirements in English and mathematics.
- ◆ Many professors and several students expressed the belief that there are too many students who are unprepared for college level instruction. This is corroborated by the data on EPT and ELM fail rates. In addition many students are unready for class or simply fail to attend.
- ◆ There was nearly universal complaint among those attending the hearings that library resources are inadequate. Students and faculty alike deplored the shortage of current periodicals and books. Restrictions on library hours are also of substantial concern.
- ◆ Several complaints were made involving either insufficient access to computers or computers that were obsolescent. None have CD-ROM capability yet our own faculty are developing CD-ROM teaching technology. Much of the older, still usable, equipment is not maintained and open hours of labs are insufficient. This is at the same time the administration is urging increased use of instructional technology.
- ◆ Several faculty and staff expressed the perception that funding for fundamental academic programs had been allowed to languish, while non-state funds seemed readily available for administrative perks and non-academic enterprises. This perception is widespread and appears to be a major source of demoralized feelings

- ◆ Several faculty members complained of a deterioration of deportment among a small but disruptive segment of students, a lack of respect for professors, and a need that has arisen in recent years to assert authority over talking in class, the reading of unrelated materials and early unannounced and disruptive departures from class.
- ◆ Some professors expressed concern that large classes where personal contact with students was minimal create an environment where learning was less likely to occur. Mechanically scored tests, which have replaced essays and other writing in some upper division courses, may further reduce learning. This issue is of special concern given the changing demographics of our student body.
- ◆ There is widespread acknowledgment that heavy work schedules, economic hardships, and family burdens contribute to poor academic performance for many students.
- ◆ A related concern, expressed by faculty and students, was variable grading practices and/or course work requirements among faculty. A student said, "Some sections of the same course require maximum effort for a C; others minimum effort for an A."
- ◆ There was a feeling on the part of many that grade inflation was rampant. Repeated inquiries about grade inflation suggest a deeper concern regarding the integrity of grading practices on campus.
- ◆ There were assertions that cheating and plagiarism are extensive. A faculty member reported being told by a high level administrator to "let it go" since it was easier for the university to ignore such happenings than it was to pursue them.
- ◆ Several students complained that advising was either nonexistent or haphazard, leading them to the conclusion that faculty did not care about their students.
- ◆ Several professors expressed a belief that students are allowed to withdraw from classes too easily, thereby removing one impetus for good performance.
- ◆ Students complained of a lack of classes especially required courses in their majors. One summed it up this way: "The fees are increased for decreased value."
- ◆ Several faculty members raised questions about student evaluations of instructors as an adequate measure of teaching effectiveness. It was indicated that there has not recently been a determination of reliability or validity of the forms used on this campus.
- ◆ A related concern raised questions over the relationship between student evaluations and grade inflation. It was feared that overemphasis on the results of student evaluations during the tenure, promotion, tenure review and PSSI processes may lead some faculty members to "dumb down" courses in order to secure favorable evaluations.

About Morale and Quality of Life

- ◆ **The academic core of the university feels as if it has been left out of the important planning processes. Decisions are “handed down from on high” with little or no input from staff, students or faculty.**
- ◆ **Enrollment planning and related recruitment has opted for the “any warm body” approach rather than the “qualified and motivated student” approach. Even in the short run the latter will improve morale and quality of life for all concerned.**
- ◆ **Several who spoke believe that the administration has been less than forthright in answering questions posed by the faculty and staff. This has served to cast suspicion in the minds of many members of the campus community who now find it difficult to believe that the highest administrators are focused on the best interests of the campus as a whole.**
- ◆ **Faculty and staff have become angered and demoralized by the failure of the state to keep abreast of inflation and pay rates of comparable universities. This anger and demoralization is more focused when faculty and staff view the ever-widening gap between their salaries and those of the administration.**
- ◆ **Faculty and staff expressed concern that both the administration and peer committees are using personnel decisions such as tenure, promotion and pay for performance to increase workload demands. Many also thought that there are inequities in the handling of these personnel decisions.**
- ◆ **Quantity and diploma-factory tactics have overshadowed the on-paper commitment to high quality. “The focus of this educational institution often seems far away from education.”**
- ◆ **Many of our employees are in desperate need of ergonomic furniture because of work related injuries and have not had the necessary furniture purchased for them by CSUF. Several have either retired on disability or are in the process of retiring in the near future. Certain campus areas border on being unsafe or unhealthy. At least one campus building has been identified as a “sick building” due to its numerous ventilation problems.**
- ◆ **In many instances instructional facilities and equipment at CSUF are worse than at local high schools.**
- ◆ **Racial relations remain troubling on our campus.**
- ◆ **Concern was expressed that many tasks and responsibilities have been added to the faculty workload without commensurate work reductions in other areas. Thus one competitive advantage over other institutions, greater faculty contact with students, has been undermined. This problem is made more serious by the fact that the normal CSU teaching load of 12 units is one-third higher than national average for comprehensive state universities. Moreover, on our campus average class sizes have increased by more than 14 percent since 1991.**
- ◆ **Faculty and staff members alike reported that they are disheartened by the fact that some colleagues have “given up.”**

Suggestions

It is widely recognized that there are extensive problems on this campus both in the areas of the quality of education and the quality of life. The following suggestions relating to academic and morale issues are presented as the beginnings of potential solutions for grave problems. As with the concerns above those believed to be of paramount priority by the Commission are in bold face type.

For Improving Academic Quality *"Let's have a Red Wave for Academics."*

- ◇ **Establish a set of goals for campus academics like Athletics did in preparation for joining the WAC. Then do the planning to reach those higher academic goals.**
- ◇ **The administration must work to insure that the academic programs of the university receive an adequate level of funding from both state and non state sources. There should also be a balanced distribution of the funds that flow to this campus.**
- ◇ **Provide additional funds for the library with faculty and student voices in their allocation.**
- ◇ **Set and enforce minimum standards and requirements for student performance at the department, school and university level. Do this within GE and within each major and/or department. Articulate these standards to students both in writing and in personal advising. There should be consistency in the minimum amount of work required of students for comparable courses.**
- ◇ **Faculty should be reminded of the important role of student advising as part of their responsibilities and as part of the educational process. The increasing percentage of at-risk students demands that the faculty involved in the mentoring process take this role seriously.**
- ◇ **Establish a focused and well-planned recruiting effort that has as its goal not only a diverse student body but also one that is qualified and motivated.**
- ◇ **Establish an Honors Program with a higher set of performance standards for all involved.**
- ◇ **The university must address and prepare itself for maintaining the quality, standards and integrity of the educational process in the face of projected growth in student numbers and the proposed alternate delivery mechanisms such as distance learning. In order to have good morale on this campus, such standards need to be fairly but effectively monitored by administrators, department chairs and faculty members themselves.**
- ◇ **Faculty and administrators must guard against increasing work load demands in the way personnel decisions such as promotions and pay for performance salary increases are implemented. Steps must be taken to assure equity in these decisions.**
- ◇ **Establish a focus group to address the issue of improving the quality of education for a student body that is largely one of commuters. How do we as faculty, who are largely products of residential campuses, engender a better sense in our students of what an education is and why it should be valued?**

- ◇ Departments should make every effort to schedule core and required courses as frequently as possible at optimum days and times, so that students will have the opportunity to progress towards their degrees as expeditiously as they wish. Course substitutions in programs of study should be minimized.
- ◇ Student evaluation forms should be standardized, at least at the school level. Students should also receive standardized instructions as to the proper use of student evaluations. There should be a professional determination of the reliability and validity of the evaluation instruments currently being employed. To this end a focus group with students, faculty, and administrators should be established to identify criteria for ways of improving the assessment of teaching effectiveness.
- ◇ In determining teaching effectiveness, student evaluations should be considered in conjunction with other data: instructor's course objectives and requirements, the difficulty of the subject matter, the percentage of A and B grades awarded (compared with department and school averages), whether the instructor's courses meet GE requirements whether he or she does his or her own grading, as well as student evaluator profile information.
- ◇ Assist students needing remediation before they are mainstreamed by developing a program of intensive studies for students with deficient academic backgrounds, so that when they proceed into their main academic course work they can obtain the best education the university has to offer. Do not, however, use remediation as a long term solution to the lack of college preparedness.
- ◇ Tighten up and strictly enforce the withdrawal policy. Currently, adherence to university policy on withdrawals is spotty at best with some instructors following it closely and others ignoring it completely. Once a policy has been agreed to, faculty and administrators should follow it to insure fairness to all students.
- ◇ Faculty must assure a learning environment free of distractions caused by students who fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. Department chairs and administrators must support faculty in maintaining a disruption-free learning environment.
- ◇ Substantial steps must be taken by faculty and administrators to guard against what some consider a present day epidemic -- cheating and plagiarism.
- ◇ Provide improved financial support and quality of advising to students. Encourage students to give their education higher priority .
- ◇ Quickly and sensibly complete the review of General Education.
- ◇ Thoroughly include the Academic Senate and the staff and faculty unions in setting the agenda for the use of computers and technology. Improve support for computer maintenance and workshops.

For Improving Morale/Quality of Life “Quality not Quantity!”

- ◇ **All university funds, including unrestricted foundation funds, lottery funds, rebate funds , grant and contract overhead/indirect savings, interest earned on account balances, unrestricted endowment gifts, Auxiliary Corporations’ Funds, and Extended Education funds should be integrated into a discussion of university priorities. Utilize the vast majority of these funds in support of academics so that students are the prime beneficiaries. It is fundamental for good faculty and staff morale that the utilization of all discretionary funds be open for faculty and staff viewing.**
- ◇ **All budgeting and accounting procedures should be integrated into an open, transparent, and understandable reporting system that can be easily accessed. This reporting system must cover both state and non-state funds as indicated above. This open and accessible reporting system is absolutely essential for good faculty and staff morale.**
- ◇ **There should be both a beginning-year budgeted/allocated accounting of these funds by disaggregated categories and a year-end accounting that shows disbursements/expenditures and transfers of those funds by the same categories.**
- ◇ **The travel reporting/accounting system should be reviewed twice yearly by the Academic Senate with regard to how travel benefits the university. A system of accounting for the costs and especially the purposes of administrative travel should be on file for review by the faculty, staff, and particularly the Academic Senate The justification for any administrative travel needs to meet the same standard to which faculty and staff are held.**
- ◇ **The hiring of tenure track faculty and permanent staff must be a top priority. Faculty, staff and students must believe that the university is building for the future.**
- ◇ **Deans, department chairs, and supervisors must not be encouraged in any manner by the administration to restrict highly favorable staff evaluations used for Pay Based Salary Increases (PBSIs) or Discretionary Pay Increases.**
- ◇ **The administration must work with faculty and department chairs to insure the maintenance of reasonable expectations and equity in the way personnel decisions, promotions, and Performance Salary Step Increases (PSSI) are implemented. Wherever possible faculty and administration should be sure that faculty are mentored toward promotion and PSSI, rather than working to limit promotions and PSSIs.**
- ◇ **The university must continue its efforts to improve racial relations.**
- ◇ **Faculty, and not just administrators and students, must be held accountable for a quality education. Highly motivated students and faculty, whose presence is essential to good morale, must sense that they are not alone in their quest for academic excellence.**
- ◇ **Establish a mechanism whereby faculty are able to work closely together to help one another reach a higher set of standards for their performance. Keep this mentoring mechanism separate from the mechanisms used in the tenure and promotion process, thus allowing for a true mentoring process which can be accessed even by tenured full professors.**

- ◇ Encourage faculty participation at department/school conferences and workshops for the exchange of ideas and scholarship. The administration should expand on-campus efforts, outside of the promotion, PSSSI and PBSI processes, to recognize and reward faculty and staff who contribute to a climate of excellence.
- ◇ There is a need to improve communication, understanding and trust between the administration, faculty and staff and to maintain a level of civility in our dialogue.
- ◇ Administrators should take steps to understand what goes on in the educational process, including teaching their own courses where feasible, visiting classes (preferably at the invitation of faculty) and talking with students, staff and faculty about courses, advising, etc. Administrators teaching in the classroom build a commonality with faculty and send a clear message that our academic offerings are a priority on the campus.
- ◇ The wide disparity in grading practices and the disproportionate number of A's and B's across the campus is demoralizing to the faculty and students alike. The Academic Senate, working with the administration, needs to address the problem of grade inflation.
- ◇ Whenever possible, faculty should do their own grading. This demonstrates to students and to faculty that instructors do indeed care about what happens in the classroom.
- ◇ The university should concentrate its focus on quality rather than quantity.

Conclusion

While there is plenty of room to criticize the administrations past and present, it is primarily the responsibility of the faculty to assert the academic needs of the university, to build and maintain a culture of excellence, and to defend the quality of education and service we provide to students and the community. A climate of academic excellence and quality of life on campus will reflect our highest aspirations and assure that the integrity of our institution is assured no matter who is in university administrative roles and no matter what elected and appointed state officials do.

The administration has a responsibility to exercise leadership in support of faculty and staff in achieving those goals. The administration should seek a level of financial support to provide the resources necessary for the university to fulfill its mission. Working within the principles of shared governance, with respect for the academic expertise of faculty and the legal requirements of collective bargaining, the administration has a responsibility to assure fairness and high standards in personnel matters. The administration has the ultimate legal authority for the operation of the university; however, academic excellence, quality service and good morale are best maintained when the administration works honestly and cooperatively with faculty and staff through academic governance and collective bargaining. Straightforward communication and shared decision making are pivotal to good morale and good performance.

Recommendations

In order to move California State University, Fresno beyond current levels of frustration and bring the campus together in a positive way, the Commission strongly urges the Academic Senate to adopt the following recommendations immediately:

- 1) Endorse a broad-based university planning process -- to begin immediately -- in which the issues of academic quality, resources, priorities, and morale are addressed and a consensus is developed about goals, objectives and strategies for at least the next five years.
- 2) Establish an open, transparent and understandable budgeting and accounting system for all university funds (from both state and non-state sources) that is accessible to faculty and staff, so that all funds can be integrated into open discussions of university priorities and budget allocations.

The Commission urges the faculty, staff and administration to use our current crisis as a means of pulling together for the first time in years. The campus community needs to debate and identify its most basic goals and values, and then finalize a plan to make California State University, Fresno a university that truly excels as a vibrant community, in which it is a pleasure to teach, work and learn.