

## Appendix I

### Mills' Response to WASC Concerns

#### WASC Accreditation History:

Mills College has been accredited by WASC since 1950. The most recent self-study for reaffirmation of accreditation was submitted to WASC in December 1998. A full re-accreditation visit and review occurred in spring 1999. At the same time, the College submitted a substantive change report for the proposed Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, the first doctoral level program to be offered by Mills College. The new program in Educational Leadership was authorized to begin in September 1999.

The WASC Commission requested that Mills demonstrate the effective implementation of the Ed.D. program in a Special Visit scheduled for March 2004. Following a site visit by a WASC special visit team in March 2004, the College received an action letter from the Commission in November 2004. That action letter required the submission of a progress report from Mills in March 2006 and outlined the future accreditation schedule for the College: the institutional proposal, October 15, 2007 (revised proposal submitted and accepted, March 15, 2008); the capacity and preparatory review, report due December 10, 2008 and site visit March 4-6, 2009; and the educational effectiveness review, summer-fall, 2010.

#### WASC Commission Action Letter Response:

Since 1999, WASC Commission Action letters have focused on four issues for Mills: (1) planning; (2) financial viability and resource development; (3) enrollment management; and (4) educational effectiveness. Mills has made substantial progress in these areas as noted in the Progress Report submitted to WASC in March 2006. The themes identified in the Institutional Proposal of March 2008 and discussed in this Capacity and Preparatory Report also address WASC's recommendations.

**Planning:** The 1999 letter urged Mills to "examine how institutional planning, financial planning and assessment can be better integrated." Following the 2004 Special Visit, the Commission noted that more work needs to be done "to fill in the Strategic Plan so that there is a clear set of implementation goals and activities which are monitored and achieved." Further, "Mills should carefully assess the impact of expanding undergrad and graduate enrollment programs on existent programs and on the financial strength of the institution."

In the 2004-2005 academic year, the College undertook a curricular review funded by the Mellon Foundation. Planning for this review included the entire faculty in a process intended to move beyond department or program level planning to create a set of goals and priorities aimed at moving the whole institution in the directions detailed in the Strategic Plan. (The Curricular Development Plan is included in the Analytical Data Portfolio III.)

Since the 2004 Special Visit, Mills has completed and evaluated the accomplishments of the 2003-2007 Plan. (The *Strategic Plan 2003-2007* and the *Mills College Strategic Plan 2003-2007: Final Report on Accomplishments, January 2007* are included in the Analytical Data Portfolio III.) The 2006 WASC Commission letter made no explicit mention of the College's planning work, but acknowledged the positive outcome of planning efforts in such areas as finance and enrollment management. The final report on the 2003-2007 Strategic Plan formed the basis for the development of the 2007-08 to 2012-13 Strategic Plan, which now

includes specific financial goals. The *Mills College Strategic Plan 2007-08 to 2012-13* was endorsed by the Board of Trustees in May 2008 and is included in the Analytical Data Portfolio III. The Strategic Plan and the budget planning process are now linked. In addition, both the Mills reaffirmation process and the new Strategic Plan pay careful attention to the role of graduate education.

**Financial Viability and Resource Development:** The 1999 letter noted concern over student retention, the need to enhance non-tuition revenue and to make the campus community aware of financial issues. The 2004 Special visit started a dialogue with Mills concerning the use of quasi-endowment funds, and the Commission's response to the 2006 Progress Report encouraged Mills to implement "its cost revenue tool in assessing the financial viability of its programs as well as to fully understand the interplay between the undergraduate and graduate programs..."

Through discussion on campus, Mills has increased awareness of the financial issues the College faces. Survey data show approximately two-thirds of the faculty are aware of the financial planning activities at the College. Mills has changed its policies for funds use and has strictly adhered to its endowment payout policy while enhancing its history of strong investment returns, successful capital campaigns, and continued growth in the endowment corpus. The *Mills College Strategic Plan 2007-08 to 2012-13* recognizes the need to acquire non-tuition funding for new initiatives and carefully spells out the resource targets for budgeting purposes. Mills has committed itself throughout the reaccreditation process to the evaluation of the role of graduate programs, both academically and financially.

Mills has strategically allocated its quasi (or Board designated) endowments over the past four years to supplement student financial aid. The goal was to increase net tuition revenue and overall enrollment. The Analytical Data Portfolio III contains a series of slides that illustrate the use of quasi endowments to support financial aid and the resulting increases to net tuition revenue and enrollment, thus achieving the strategic goals.

This has also placed Mills in a favorable strategic position to weather the current national financial downturn. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, families and students will increasingly look to institutions that can demonstrate sustainable strong financial aid, strong enrollment and strong endowments. As of the 2008 NACUBO Endowment Study Preliminary Results, Mills' endowment ranks number 248 of over 800 institutions surveyed.

**Enrollment Management:** Retention has been a continuing challenge faced by Mills. As noted in the 1999 Commission letter, Mills needed to "establish benchmarks as to the level of attrition that is appropriate for the College and a clear plan for improving performance in this area." Further, the Commission urged Mills to find the appropriate "balance between undergraduate and graduate student enrollment."

Mills has set a target goal for retention and, as described in the 2006 Progress Report, has pursued a number of initiatives to better retain first-time, transfer and resuming students. Mills has been attentive to the continuing message in the WASC comments regarding the role of graduate education at the College.

The College has re-instituted a high-level enrollment management committee composed of the Dean of Undergraduate Admission, the Associate Vice President for Student Finance and Administrative Services, the Administrative Dean of Graduate Recruitment and Enrollment, and the Executive Vice President. The committee reviews recruitment, enrollment, and

financial aid for both undergraduate and graduate programs; works with the Office of the Provost and the Division of Student Life to enhance programs designed to increase student retention; and is studying a tuition differential for graduate programs. Program enhancements now include detailed assessment plans delineating the outcomes desired, the measurable criteria for those outcomes, the delivery method, area responsible, measures used, and the standard of success being applied. The information gleaned is then used to support programmatic changes and to garner the appropriate resources. This Capacity and Preparatory Review Report discusses in detail the College's recent retention initiatives.

**Educational Effectiveness:** Starting in 1999, the Commission has encouraged Mills to "expand its efforts to assess student learning and to focusing its energy on the use of data to improve teaching effectiveness and learning." At the 2004 Special Visit, WASC noted the "the College has taken some initial steps in assessing educational effectiveness, but will need to show much further progress to achieve ...standards." The May 2006 response to the Progress Report emphasized the "College's need for continued attention to the full realization of the program review and assessment processes."

Mills has taken these comments seriously. As this Capacity and Preparatory Review Report will demonstrate, the College has made significant progress in fostering a culture of evidence and institutionalizing plans for the comprehensive assessment of student learning. Progress has been especially notable with respect to the general education program and the capstone experience. Much of the effort in this reaffirmation process is focused on college-wide assessment of student learning.