

**REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

To

Mills College

October 5-8, 2010

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Reaffirmation of Accreditation

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The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution under the WASC Commission Standards and Core Commitments and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration.

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I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Visit

Mills College is an independent liberal arts college for women with graduate programs for men and women. It was founded in 1852 as the Young Ladies Seminary in Benicia, California, and renamed after the Christian missionaries Cyrus and Susan Mills purchased the school in 1865. After moving to Oakland, California, in 1871, Mills was chartered as the first women's college in the west in 1885. Graduate degrees were first offered in 1920 to both men and women. In 1990, faced with declining undergraduate enrollment and financial crisis the Board of Trustees voted to open undergraduate enrollment to men. A student-led protest supported by alumnae and faculty persuaded the Board to reverse its decision, and Mills emerged recommitted to its historical mission. Although graduate programs had been added slowly throughout the twentieth century, the last decade saw an accelerated growth in this area as well as increased undergraduate enrollment. The total student population is now over 1500, approximately 60% undergraduate and 40% graduate students, with men making up just over 18% of graduate enrollments. Mills offers the BA and BS for undergraduates, and the MA, MBA, MFA, MPP, and EdD for graduate students, as well as a variety of certificate and non-degree programs. Mills is classified as a Carnegie Masters, medium institution and has no off-campus sites.

In 1999, the Commission reaffirmed Mills' accreditation, approving the proposal to offer a new doctorate in education, and scheduled a fifth year visit which was to focus primarily on the effectiveness of the implementation of the new degree. The 2004 special visit resulted in a formal Notice of Concern primarily based on financial questions, but also requesting that any additional new site or graduate degree programs be regarded as a substantive change requiring prior approval. This Commission action scheduled a special report and visit in 2006. After Mills requested and received a review of this action, the Commission withdrew its prior action letter and issued a new

one with a report but no special visit required. In 2006, a Substantive Change Committee approved a request from Mills to offer a new Masters of Public Policy degree, and an Interim Report Committee approved the institution's progress report with further encouragement to continue advances in financial management, academic assessment, and long-range planning. The current accreditation review began with a Capacity and Preparatory Review visit in March 2009. The CPR report affirmed Mills' progress in preparing for the Educational Effectiveness Review, while urging the institution to continue to push forward with engaging faculty, developing and implementing assessment plans and procedures, and articulating student learning outcomes at the school as well as the course, major, and program levels and mapping the relationships between these outcomes.

B. The Educational Effectiveness Review Report: Alignment with the Proposal and Quality and Rigor of the Review and Report

Mills set the following goals for the Educational Effectiveness Review process in its 2007 Institutional Proposal. The college will have: 1) Implemented a complete "cycle" of assessment in at least 60% of its academic programs; 2) Developed and adopted a vision for graduate education that is mission-driven and has an appropriate role in financial planning; and 3) Developed, implemented and assessed a comprehensive retention plan that has begun to increase retention in Mills undergraduate student population. The visiting team found Mills was committed to the accreditation review process and leveraged the process to help achieve their goals.

For the EER review, Mills structured its report on four themes, which in response to the CPR visit and campus discussions about the strategic plan were slightly restructured from the initial three themes in the proposal. The EER themes were 1) Assessing Educational Effectiveness; 2) Assessment of Mission, General Education, and Academic Programs; 3) Retaining and Graduating Undergraduate Students; and 4) Graduate Education in a Liberal Arts College. Although the

original three themes from the proposal were refined, with the broad assessment theme divided into two parts, this adjustment was addressed in the report and was useful and appropriate. In general, the EER report closely followed the plan set forth in the proposal.

The overall EER report was well-organized, lucid, and well-written, and the supporting documents were selected and organized carefully and well. The report was completed with the support of multiple academic committees whose work related to each theme, and broad institutional participation was evident in the structure and content of the report. Although there was considerable over-lapping membership in the various committees that participated in the review and report process, it was nonetheless clear that the majority of full-time faculty had a role in and knowledge of the assessments that contributed to the Mills accreditation review. The report accurately represented conditions found by the team on the campus visit. Each essay articulates the research questions related to its theme and the methods used to explore them, both of which matched well with the goals of the review. Evidence was cited in support of the report's analyses, with the detailed data available in appendices, on the college intranet, and provided in the visiting team's work room. The report includes a variety of direct and indirect measures of student learning, including use of benchmarks and longitudinal comparisons. Also included are faculty/staff and student satisfaction surveys. Disadvantageous data was included in the analysis (such as some faculty resistance to assessment found in the Assessment Survey), and the report includes frank admissions of shortcomings in some areas (e.g. design of quantitative literacy assessment tool). A chart mapping the report themes to specific standards and criteria for review was a helpful tool. In sum, the report persuasively illustrates how Mills' self-review led to a greater understanding of the institution's effectiveness, systems of quality improvement, and student learning, and how it plans to close the loop by adjusting its practices on the basis of this analysis. (CFR 1.9)

C. Response to Issues Raised in the Capacity and Preparatory Review

Mills includes in its EER report a section on the recommendations of the CPR visit and a clear summary of institutional response to these recommendations. First, the CPR visiting team recommended “that the administration engage in more open and clarifying communication with the campus community to build on the ample foundation of shared mission and values.” Mills reports that its senior administration, including the president and provost, have engaged in regular conversations with faculty and staff about the budget in particular. Additional opportunities for the faculty to interact with Board of Trustees members included arranging for the chair of the Faculty Executive Committee to be present at Board meetings and to play a role in major searches, as well as broader meetings of faculty members and trustees around specific topics of interest to both. The presidential search committee includes faculty, an alumna, a staff member, and students, in addition to trustees. The team’s experience on campus made clear that faculty and staff feel significantly more involved in decisions about Mills’ future and a greater degree of partnership with and support from the administration than they did at the time of the CPR visit. To some degree this shift may be a natural result of seeing firsthand the benefits of assessment, but much of it can be attributed to the efforts of the president, provost, and the rest of the college officers. (CFR 1.3)

The second recommendation was that “Mills should encourage its auditors to include in their audit the calculation of the Composite Financial Index.” Mills has added this calculation to its annual fiscal monitoring practices. (CFR 3.5)

The third recommendation suggests that in preparation for its EER review, the institution should “keep to a plan of completion of one cycle of assessment and program review for all of its programs.” While not all academic programs have yet completed a cycle of assessment, 81% have done so. The rationales for exempting most of the remaining programs (no enrollment, new curriculum, critical courses not being taught, recent state review) are generally compelling. All

Division of Student Life departments and the student administrative services center have undergone program reviews. Also, more than 600 courses have gone through an online course revision process that seeks to align learning goals for an individual class with those of a department and the institution as a whole. While some kinks in timing and coordination apparently need to be worked out, Mills is farther along in this respect than might have been expected given where they were eighteen months ago. (CFR's 1.2, 2.11, 4.4)

The CPR visiting team's fourth recommendation was that Mills "delineate priorities in the new strategic plan, as well as the fiscal, physical, and technological resources needed to fulfill the plan." Assessment plans for two of the three strategic plan goals have been developed and discussed with the Board, with a draft plan for the third goal under discussion. (Appendix G: Strategic Plan Documents) These assessment plans outline precise indicators of progress on the various parts of the plan, but the order of priorities and resources dedicated to support them remain somewhat obscure in the written plans. Evidence of the college officers' leadership is seen in a 2010 paper by the president and provost on "Challenges and Opportunities for Mills in the Next Decade." This paper takes stock of the impact of the financial crisis on higher education and highlights a smaller number of institutional priorities to navigate this challenge in the areas of fiscal sustainability, academic planning, and academic planning. While it does not explicitly relate their recommendations to the strategic plan, nonetheless it does capture clear priorities while also providing room for the new president to put his/her stamp on the institution's direction. (CFR 4.1)

A fifth recommendation was "to align the budgeting process more clearly with the recently developed strategic plan and communicate the budgeting decisions widely." Mills has used evidence collected by its Retention Task Force to select budget priorities, and expects to extend these budget alignment practices in the program review process, where new faculty positions and other resources were granted to departments that made persuasive cases for their needs. (CFR 4.2)

Sixth, the CPR team recommended that Mills “develop a plan to assess the critical data collection function.” The EER report describes such an assessment plan for the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Academic Assessment (IRPAA) and initial steps taken so far. Elsewhere in the report, some attention was paid to the efficacy of various measures and the distribution of results to campus constituencies. Many faculty and staff who met with the EER visiting team were well-versed in the evidence gathered by IRPAA. (CFR 4.5)

A recommendation about Theme I in the CPR report (Student Retention and Persistence) was that Mills “continue to study and implement programs that will ensure that [the] rich mix of learners receives a quality experience in and out of the classroom,” with transfer students and “resumers” in particular called out as needing more attention. In addition, student experiences with advisors and the administrative student services center (the M Center), and overall retention and persistence across all four years of student attendance were cited as areas for future enhancement. Mills has responded by expanding the IRPAA to increase data collection and analysis about retention, appointing a Retention Task Force charged with examining this data and creating a plan to address their findings, and a Retention Action Committee charged with implementing changes. One of IRPAA’s projects was a Transfer survey instrument that, along with disaggregated data from overall persistence studies, gave Mills more information about the factors contributing to the non-retention of specific student populations. With this data, Mills has created plans for improved academic support for transfers, stronger and more ongoing transition experiences, and improved curriculum and pedagogy (for instance with a project aimed at multilingual students). With regard to graduate students, the Mills response to the recommendation included the appointment of an Associate Dean of Student Life charged with addressing graduate student orientation, services, engagement, retention, “a sense of belonging” to the Mills community, and integration with the undergraduate student body and greater Oakland community. The Division of Student Life (DSL)

used the Graduate Student Academic Experience and Services Survey as an indirect measure of their success. A research project was launched to further identify the non-academic needs of the graduate student population. And, finally, a comprehensive service improvement plan was implemented for the M Center which will assist with persistence of all students. (CFR's 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14)

Regarding Theme 2 (Graduate Education), the CPR report suggested that the college work to integrate the College's learning outcomes more clearly into its graduate programs, and to link undergraduate and graduate educational outcomes. In the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators, it was difficult to find specific graduate learning outcomes and unclear as to how the undergraduate learning goals or outcomes would be assessed in terms of a graduate educational experience. Generally speaking, the graduate programs have the same course learning outcomes with an additional graduate requirement and/or stated expectation that the quality of the work should reflect a "deeper" understanding, analysis or application of the course objectives. However, the program assessment plans, program review assessments, and annual assessment reports referenced in the EER for Dance (MFA), Interdisciplinary Computer Science, and Music graduate degree programs, for example, provided a good understanding about how the College is meeting their specific graduate level curricular goals. (Appendix D: Assessment Reports) Conversations with faculty during the visit bore out the observation that faculty assessment practices may be more advanced in distinguishing appropriately between graduate and undergraduate learning outcomes than the documentation shows. (CFR 2.3)

Lastly, the CPR report made a number of recommendations related to the third theme (Assessment), all aimed at creating a deep and widespread culture of assessment at Mills that would be sustainable through the EER visit and beyond. Mills has articulated institutional learning goals that have been incorporated into program curricular matrices, which have been created by every program to show the alignment between mission and program goals. An online Course Approval

and Revision Process requires each instructor to identify the mission, general education, and program goals that a specific course supports. Every program now has an assessment plan that states goals and measurable criteria that will be reviewed in annual progress reports and regular program reviews. Eighty percent of programs have implemented some assessment measures and used the data to plan improvements in the curriculum and teaching. Faculty development opportunities have been increased. Overall, Mills embraced these recommendations and made impressive progress in creating and sustaining a culture of evidence and continual improvement. (CFR's 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7)

II . EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS UNDER THE STANDARDS

A. Evaluation of Educational Effectiveness Inquiry

Theme I: Assessing Educational Effectiveness

Since the CPR team's visit in March of 2009, Mills College faculty and staff have made considerable improvements in assessing educational effectiveness at course, program and degree levels. The team believes that Mills has indeed "deepened and broadened its understanding of the meaning of assessing educational effectiveness" as they assert in their essay. Though there are still gaps, and progress is uneven, the work accomplished in the last 18 months has been extensive and effective. On the whole the institution is on its way to developing a sustained culture of evidence.

Program Reviews and Annual Assessment Reports as primary vehicles for developing a culture of evidence

Though Mills has had an on-going program review policy and procedures, these primarily focused on program demographics and less on student learning. Just prior to the CPR visit in March, 2009, the college revised its procedures, now requiring the description of formal summative

assessment of student learning in reviews that are submitted on 5 year intervals (CFR 2.7). The first of these enhanced program reviews were submitted in the last academic year. Also, annual reports from each academic department and program are now required to describe formative and summative assessments of individual program goals. Appendix D in the *College's Reports on Educational Effectiveness of Curricular and Co-Curricular Programs and Services* (on Mills CD) sets forth 12 program reviews and 22 annual assessment reports (CFR 2.2).

Most of the program reviews use a template with the headings: Goals and Observable/Measurable Criteria, Types of Evidence and Process, Benchmarks, Summary of Assessment Data and Interpretation, Results of the Assessment, Changes/ Improvements Recommended to describe their process of review (CFR's 2.6, 2.7). Some of the reviews provide excellent descriptions of their review process and findings. For instance, the MFA Dance program gives a more specific sense of rubrics they use (e.g. detail, phrasing, nuance, rhythm, awareness and self evaluation) than many of the other reviews which simply say they use a rubric but don't explicitly state what the rubric is (CFR 4.6). Some of the reports don't describe assessments for all learning outcomes or have missing elements. Though it provides a good overview of their process, the Child Development BA program reviews only three of their five learning goals, while others, for instance the Intermedia Art program simply leave some of the table blank or give an extremely brief response. The team expects that as departments and programs gain more experience in the program review process, these gaps will be addressed. It also hopes that the faculty will develop further expertise in developing rubrics, moving, for example, from using a quantitative, one-dimensional "none, some, more, most" type of rubric to more sophisticated qualitative ones.

Appendix D also details the 22 undergraduate and graduate academic assessment reports submitted as part of the new plan for annual reports. Many of the reports use a template provided

by an assessment expert, Linda Suskie, to help evaluate their assessment processes. Using the Suskie template, departments:

- Named the learning goal to be assessed
- Explicitly set forth the measurable criteria
- Identified where criteria are assessed (in which courses and/or assignments)
- Identified how assessed and how often
- Provided a summary of results
- Described how results are being used
- Made other comments to clarify results or plans

Most of the 22 reports are very comprehensive and describe department assessment processes and results with clarity and completeness (CFR's 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6). Many also use a matrix indicating the extent to which a learning goal is introduced (I), practiced (P), and/or mastered (M) in a course (CFR 2.1). This helps departments review the developmental nature of their curricula.

The MA in Educational Leadership and BA/BS in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology provide good examples of complete and more transparent assessment processes. They clearly spell out what assignments and field work are assessed, how often, through what means, their findings, and how they plan to improve the teaching and learning of a given learning outcome (CFR 2.4, 2.6). Though some reports were less complete overall, the assessment reports show a solid grasp of assessment principles and practice.

To determine the depth and sustainability of the institution's approach to program review and the meaningfulness of the new annual assessment reports, one team member conducted a focused interview with four members of the English Department. This department used the results of their program review from several years ago to begin a process of regular course review that will lead to their next program review in 2013. In the past academic year, they assessed the first course in the sequence, English 10, and several other undergraduate courses in poetry. They also reviewed

the MFA Thesis class and two other master's levels courses. They developed explicit rubrics and assessment guides to score whether students met course and program outcomes (CFR 4.4).

Two of the four faculty interviewed were full time adjuncts or visiting faculty; the other two were tenured members of the department. This distinction is important since the two adjuncts praised the assessment guides and the rubrics as a way to “ground them as teachers” and provide the whole department with a common language they can use to hold a department-wide conversation on teaching and assessment (CFR’s 2.8 4.4, 4.6). “We don’t feel that we are teaching in the dark,” commented one adjunct, and noted that they feel they are part of a coordinated approach to developing the learning goals of the program. This is powerful evidence of involvement of the adjunct faculty in the academic life of the campus, an excellent practice. As another faculty member said: “We often become seduced by content and forget to focus on important learning goals.” They believe that the process helps them focus on how each course builds toward expected learning goals and has enhanced consistency of standards across multiple sections of the same course.

The faculty also noted that making their assessment standards explicit has helped them move from a “climate of individualists to a more cohesive department.” Using their rubrics as guides has helped them talk more meaningfully to each student about the grades they award on assignments, what the student has learned and what is needed for improvement (CFR 2.5). The dean of this division encourages and supports faculty in writing papers and presenting their assessment inquiry at regional and national meetings (CFR’s 2.8, 2.9).

The team also reviewed program reviews in the evidence room. As noted before, some reviews were more complete than others. However, all attempted to close the loop, taking what was learned from their review and making plans to improve curricula, courses, and assessments, and sometimes showing how the plans were implemented. There is also a “response document” for each review. This document is a one page overview of a meeting of the provost, vice provost,

director of institutional research, planning, and academic assessment and chair of the reviewed department that summarizes what the department learned, what changes or improvements are needed, and what resources would assist the department to make the changes (CFR's 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). This meeting of the top academic leadership with the program heads is not only an example of closing the loop but also of improved communication between faculty and administration and a means for determining resource allocations in future budgets (CFR's 4.1, 4.2, 4.6).

New course review and revision process (CARP)

Another approach to sustaining a culture of evidence reached full implementation since the CPR visit: the Course Approval and Revision Process (CARP). The college now requires that all new courses and revised courses explicate their learning goals, indicate how they will collect assessment data, and how course goals fit the curricular maps of the major or general education programs. In order to prepare for the EE Review and to help faculty determine learning goal alignment, all courses went through the review process in the past year. This was a considerable undertaking. New software was developed and guides provided for this process. Though program heads reported to the team that the process was often difficult and some faculty saw much redundancy in the effort, they also reported that the Director of IRPAA and the provost's office assisted in important ways and helped faculty complete the reviews (CFR 4.1). One salutary result, reported by the Faculty Executive Committee to the team, is that faculty are much more aware of the overall learning outcomes of the college and are much more explicitly linking course goals to college mission, to general education goals (where appropriate) and to program goals.

New academic structure: Assessment Committee

The college also reframed its Assessment Committee "to facilitate the process by which faculty articulate learning goals, measure the degree to which students reach these goals, and use the resulting information to inform improvements in curricular and co-curricular programs." This

committee is composed of a faculty member from each academic division, the Vice Provost, the Director of IRPAA, and the chair of the Assessment Team of the Division of Student Life (DSL). Faculty interviewed indicated that although the committee was somewhat inactive during its first year or two, it became more involved and helpful as the college ramped up assessment efforts in the last two years. Besides the continuing and exemplary efforts of the IRPAA Department, the team hopes that the Assessment Committee will continue to assist in directing assessment efforts at the College (CFR's 3.3, 4.6).

Co-Curricular Assessment at Mills

Supporting the teaching, learning, and assessment work at Mills College, is the Division of Student Life. Again, Appendix D provides ample evidence of extensive work accomplished since the visit of the CPR team in March of 2009. The DSL focused their efforts on developing and implementing a plan to assess the following college and division goals:

- Transformative learning
- Sense of Belonging
- Social Justice
- Wellness
- Leadership

Each department in DSL (Athletics, Residence Life, Student Activities, Student Diversity Programs, Student Services) and the M Center used a template to set forth its major objectives, how they related to one or more of the above goals, what activities they are undertaking to meet these goals, and the results. Findings included that Mills Athletics plays a strong positive role in student retention; that over a third of the faculty who sent Early Academic Warning notices in a given semester did so after the mid-point of the term; that efforts to improve communication about Residence Life policies seem to have improved student compliance with these policies, as measured by the decreasing number of incident reports; that transfer students are less prepared to navigate Mills than new first-year students after orientation; and that the Summer Academic Workshop seems

to have significant effects in increasing students' sense of connection and confidence in relationships with peers, in academic settings, and with faculty and staff. In general, the DSL has found many strengths to build upon in these assessments, as well as clear areas to address. The M Center also provided a detailed description of how they are meeting one of the recommendations from the CPR visit: minimizing the advising and registration confusion of some transfer students. (CFR's 2.11, 2.13)

Theme II: Assessment of Mission, General Education, and Academic Programs

Mills College has chosen to split its original assessment theme into two parts, with Theme II focusing on the assessment of the educational effectiveness of 1) the six institutional student learning outcomes described in the College Mission; 2) the ten competencies listed in its general education program; and 3) the academic majors. Mills has chosen to narrow its focus further by looking at the curriculum only (not the co-curriculum), and by assessing sub-areas as follows: 1) the first two institutional student learning outcomes (critical thinking and leadership); 2) three of the ten competencies (written communication, informational literacy, and quantitative reasoning); and 3) four academic majors (Public Policy, Ethnic Studies, Dance, and Pre-Nursing). It should be noted that there is a five-year plan to assess all the institutional student learning outcomes and all ten of the competencies, with 2010-11 being year one of these plans. Further, all academic majors are assessed as part of the five-year program review cycle.

The intended outcomes of Theme II are to answer the following questions: 1) "Of the curricular goals we have assessed thus far, what do we know about the extent to which the desired kind and level of student learning is being achieved?", and 2) "What programmatic changes have we put into place as a result of this knowledge?" For each of the assessed outcomes, considerable evidence—both direct and indirect—was collected and reviewed (in some cases in a very close-grained analysis). National instruments include the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), the

CIRP freshman survey, the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) senior and alumnae surveys, and several others. Direct evidence of educational effectiveness in general education came from a variety of embedded assessments, pre-and post-testing, and a Research Practices Survey developed by the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education. Program-level student learning outcomes are assessed as part of the program review and annual reporting processes, and are based on a variety of direct and indirect data, much of it gathered in capstone courses.

The visiting team had access to the results of the surveys and tests, the assessment plans and reports for all academic departments and programs, syllabi for 2009 and fall 2010, student artifacts of learning in several areas, and many program reviews. The analysis by Mills of the collected data was nuanced and appropriate. The following conclusions were reached in answer to the two questions they pose themselves.

Assessment of the Mission

The college's highly effective IRPAA provides data to administration and faculty for use in assessing the mission over a five-year period. Meaningful conversations about college goals have been facilitated by this process. (CFR's 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

- *Critical thinking:* The College is meeting its benchmark, but is concerned about students' abilities to analyze complex scenarios. In response, a pilot project in the History Department will experiment with adding components to an upper division class.
- *Leadership:* The college plans to develop a new co-curricular course on leadership, and a focus on leadership has been enhanced in one of the Living/Learning Communities. A program emphasizing public speaking is under development as well. The campus will continue to give thought to what it means by "leadership."

Assessment of General Education

The college has a five-year plan for evaluating the ten general education section goals. Typically, sections are assessed by faculty who teach classes in the area, through the use of rubrics, tests, or other data. Selected student work from all courses in the section is evaluated. After all sections have been assessed the college expects to use the accumulated data to conduct a comprehensive review of general education. (CFR's 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7)

- *Written communication:* Assessments of the first part of the college writing requirement have resulted in several meaningful changes, most notably teacher training and stability for adjunct faculty. These changes have resulted in improvements in student writing at this level. However, the college found in assessing the second level of the writing requirements that it is not meeting its own goals in this area. It plans to revise the writing requirement, with possible focus on adding sophomore courses supporting writing, offering workshops to faculty, and creating writing courses in the majors. A two-year review and revision cycle is planned.
- *Information literacy:* The College is pleased with student results in this area. Still, some enhancements are planned.
- *Quantitative and computational reasoning:* The college's assessment efforts in this area were problematic (not sufficient numbers of students taking both pre- and post-tests, poor timing and lack of motivation on the post-test) and need to be improved and repeated. Assessment in this area is a "work in progress." The college plans to redefine and rethink its purposes for this requirement.

Assessment of Academic Program

Meaningful assessment of academic program goals has become part of the culture at Mills. Faculty have seen the results of “closing the loop” in terms of improved curricula, clarified requirements, and enhanced student learning. The creation and use of rubrics by the departments has engaged faculty in significant discussions about program design and teaching practice. The CARP (Course Approval and Revision Process) procedures, while sometimes experienced as cumbersome, have created a campus-wide awareness of institutional goals at all levels (mission, general education, and program). (CFR’s 1.2, 2.4, 2.6)

- *Public Policy:* This department used a rubric to assess student theses, both graduate and undergraduate. While it found many areas of strength, it also concluded that students need more instruction in conducting and writing research. It requested and was granted a third full-time faculty member in order to provide more instructor support to students.
- *Ethnic Studies:* The department assessed all program goals through its capstone requirement (written thesis and oral presentation). Students fell short of the mark in several areas, and curriculum changes were made in response. The department also requested another tenure-track faculty member, but was granted a half-time, non-tenure-track faculty member.
- *Dance:* The department assessed the capstone performance of Bachelor’s degree students, using a variety of measures, and found that all students met the goals, with greatest strength in creativity. Even with these positive results, the department is making curricular changes and clarifications to further improve student performance.
- *Pre-nursing:* The program looked at a wide variety of embedded assessments, including several types of student work, as well as the results of the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS), on which students exceeded the benchmark. Mixed results in one area has led faculty to do some re-sequencing of courses and restructuring of some labs.

Theme III: Retaining and Graduating Undergraduate Students

The reflective essay on Theme III focuses on the following questions: “What ways has the College developed to understand the nature and extent of the attrition challenges of undergraduate students?” and “How effectively has the College used the data it has gathered to develop initiatives to support retention and graduation?”

In the past three years, Mills has added significant institutional resources and organizational structures to improve its understanding of the factors underlying undergraduate retention and graduation rates and to begin to address these factors. Additional staff in IRPAA and the DSL and improved training and assessment practices have been put in place. A Retention Task Force bringing together multiple branches of administration and faculty did a comprehensive survey in 2009-10, and a Retention Action Committee has now been tasked with carrying out the recommendations of the task force. Mills is still in the early stages of building and implementing evidence-based programs based on its analyses, but the careful preparatory work and upward trend lines in retention rates (from 71% to 81% in five years) suggests that these are likely to be effective. Assessment of earlier interventions has been used to take stock and improve these programs, which have clearly been a large factor in the improved retention figures to date.

Retention efforts from 2002-2007 focused largely on enhancing the first-year experience through a set of practices found to be effective elsewhere or where the institution had some evidence that reforms might assist with student retention. The College added living and learning communities (LLCs), worked to improve academic advising and advisor training, revised orientation programs for incoming students, and increased academic support resources. (The LLCs place incoming groups of students with common interests in a residence together where they share some

coursework and an advisor.) Initiatives undertaken in this phase to improve student support services include:

- An expansion of the LLC program to cover all first-year incoming students in response to statistics showed substantially higher retention for students in LLCs versus students who did not participate. The LLCs are also evaluated through surveys and focus groups.
- As student surveys (HEDS) and faculty surveys showed ongoing dissatisfaction with first-year advising, advisor preparation was enhanced, including special information about the needs of first year and transfer students. Conversations with faculty and DSL staff during the visit showed broad agreement that these changes have increased advisors' understanding of resources available to support students. Incorporating advising into the LLCs also helped to build relationships between students and advisors.
- Administrative procedures supporting advising and registration, some specifically for transfer students such as the Transfer Preview Day, have improved student satisfaction, as seen in NSSE and HEDS data.
- Orientations for first year students and transfers have also been improved with the addition of a full-time orientation coordinator who set goals, assessed outcomes, and instituted reforms such as better recruitment and orientation for orientation leaders.
- A Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) was launched in 2007, comprised of the Peer Tutoring Program (PTP), Writing Center (WC), and new Test Administration Center (TAC). The CAE brought together key new academic support services in a single central location. Although these services are still somewhat new, faculty and student awareness of them appears widespread, and especially in the case of the TAC, the partnership between faculty and DSL staff has had clear benefits in standardizing and improving support for students with special needs.

(CFRs 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 3.1)

Taken together, these reforms are an impressive set of interventions, and they have been carefully implemented and assessed. Nonetheless, as noted by the EER report, they were piecemeal remedies rather than carefully staged as part of a comprehensive understanding of the problem and strategy to attack it (p. 25, EER report).

The 2009-10 Retention Task Force (RTF) “charge was to review institutional and national data on retention and to create a comprehensive plan that built on the successes of recent years” (p. 28, EER report). It focused on three main causes of exit: academic performance, social integration, and administrative impediments to success. The RTF found strong links between poor academic performance and lack of persistence, an even stronger link than financial need. While research into this question is ongoing, Mills has identified first generation college students and transfers as groups of special concern with regard to poor academic performance. To address the needs of these students and others, the college has made plans to work in four areas in the coming year.

- *Improving Institutional Responsiveness to Struggling Students.* Reforms to the Academic Early Warning System will be instituted to better identify at risk students early and to bring them into a support network of advising and other resources. Coupled with advances in advisor training described above, the team expects this to be a helpful intervention.
- *Improving Pedagogy in Core Areas.* After a 2005 assessment showed some problems with the first level of the writing requirement, new curricular guidelines were put in place that resulted in higher levels of student writing. A 2010 assessment of the second writing requirement, using both student work artifacts and self-assessments, showed less than hoped for gains. This requirement, unlike the first level requirement, is taught by instructors from many departments and thus is more difficult to shape than one based in a single program. The institution now plans to put additional resources into training teachers of writing and

providing faculty and TAs throughout the college with oversight and curriculum development support.

A proposal to develop a teaching and learning center is mentioned in the EER report, as well as adding a few other faculty development efforts such as workshops and monthly teaching seminars. Such a center was also part of the CPR report, but has not yet been created because the provost's office would like to see a center emerge from grass-roots faculty interest rather than be imposed from the top down. While there is strong administrative support for the idea, there did not seem to be an equally pressing sense of need among the faculty. The team is somewhat concerned that support for student learning is taken by many faculty to mean support for students with learning difficulties, but not support for instructors in developing the necessary teaching skills to reach these students.

- *Improving Academic Support.* Mills recently won a grant for an initiative designed to support multilingual speakers through a targeted course in academic presentation and training for advisors and faculty. This grant responds to the needs identified in first generation students for whom English is a second language. Plans are also in place to expand the activities and resources of the CAE.
- *Creating Transition Experience Beyond Orientation.* Faculty committees are working to develop pilot courses in skills for college success to assist students for whom the level and pace of college requirements are difficult to adjust to. The pilot for transfer students is to be offered in the spring of 2011, and for first year students in the fall of 2011.

Overall, Mills' analysis and planned interventions for academic performance problems seem well thought out and realistic, although a more concrete plan to move forward on faculty development support (i.e. a teaching and learning center) would be prudent. (CFR's 3.2, 3.4, 4.6, 4.7)

Social integration is another of the factors explored by the RTF as a factor in retention. In seeking to assess more subtle nuances of student experiences through the Narrative Project, Mills found that many students are more connected to specific affinity groups than to other groups or to Mills as a whole: “The College seems to put so much energy into cultivating identity and standing up for one’s own category that it creates a study body that is frequently at odds with itself” (p. 32, EER report). This research is also borne out in NSSE student data that shows a relative lack of social connection and support at Mills compared to its peer groups. The team found that faculty are aware of these potential fault lines and show an admirable sensitivity in considering how best to respond, for example, to the use of an inflammatory racial term in an English literature text or gender-related tensions in a graduate music composition class. In response to the survey data, the DSL launched a series of initiatives to build a broad undergraduate student identity as Mills Women and to strengthen the sense of the overall campus community. Examples of such activities are the “Belonging Initiative,” short films featuring a variety of Mills Women shown at orientation, and increased residential programming, all of which were referenced by students on the campus visit as evidence of Mills’ caring environment. Another excellent practice is the communication to students from the Dean of Student Life regarding retention and assessment results. The students whom the team met were articulate about their reasons for choosing and staying at Mills and how they have been engaged with the institution and its assessment efforts. They do not take their education for granted and showed an impressive degree of thoughtfulness, commitment, and enthusiasm. (CFR’s 1.5, 4.6)

Lastly, the RTF examined administrative impediments to student retention. These included lack of communication and in consequence disconnection with students who take time away from Mills for personal or academic probation reasons, and who rarely return after withdrawing. The college will establish a new “Leave of Absence” status with easier pathways for return and will create

a new communication strategy with specific personnel designated to maintain outreach. Reforms to the training of M-Center staff and outreach have already improved student evaluations on the Transfer Survey. The increasing standardization and professionalization of administrative practices throughout the institution noted at the CPR visit have evidently continued. The institution's website and course catalogues clearly convey critical policies, requirements, and information about resources. (CFR's 1.7, 2.2, 2.12)

In addition to the RTF, an Undergraduate Tuition Task Force is looking into financial issues related to attrition, although results from this task force are not complete and were not included in the EER report. In meetings with the RTF, however, it was apparent that preliminary findings from this group are already informing Mills practices around financial aid and support for students. For instance, the UTTF found a group of students for whom a few thousand dollars would make the difference between their being able to stay at Mills versus having to leave. Discounted housing for these students helped them and had the additional benefit of filling some open housing spots and drawing the students more into a residential housing community. Similarly, Mills has revisited aid packages for students who enter with lower academic records so that they might not be disadvantaged for the rest of their college careers by early academic struggles. (CFR 2.13)

The team reviewed retention statistics, DSL assessment reports for each division, studies of student performance and surveys (including CIRP, NSSE, HEDS, the Narrative Project and others). On campus, it interviewed the RTF, CAE personnel, key college officers and staff in the DSL, and spoke with students, faculty and other staff. Overall, the team found the evidence used in Mills' planning around retention to be varied and appropriate. The College has set ambitious but reasonable goals and benchmarks, and plans ongoing measures to assess progress toward these goals. In retention efforts, the College is both disaggregating student data in useful ways, and aggregating sufficiently to structure useful interventions. For example, first-generation multiple

language speakers now have some support targeting them specifically, but will also benefit from efforts to implement general support structures and pedagogical improvements such as peer tutoring or universal course design practices. Ongoing close attention to analysis of internal and comparative data on graduation and retention rates, year-to-year attrition, campus climate surveys, and other measures are now a regular part of campus planning. Whereas before there seemed to be more experimental approaches to innovation and excellence (e.g. the addition of living and learning communities), Mills is now more systematic and strategic in seeing these efforts as part of a unified whole. This can be attributed to better communication, use of the strategic plan, and the assessment process. Mills shows a strong commitment across the institution to improving retention, and is to be commended on its multi-faceted approach to exploring and addressing the complex and often inter-related factors underlying student persistence among different populations and at different stages of their academic careers. (CFR's 2.10, 2.11, 2.13, 4.6)

Theme IV: Graduate Education in a Liberal Arts College

The team found evidence of clear educational objectives for all graduate programs throughout the institution in the *Graduate Catalog (2010 -11)*, Annual Reports, Assessment Plans, and Program Reviews. The College has public data on achievement readily available in *Graduate Catalogs* and on the Mills web page with institutional data and accreditation documents related to academic achievement indicators. (EER CD Appendices C, D, E G, H and the *Assessment of Mills College Campus View, 2009*, Mills, Data Exhibits 1.1- 4.4 web page) (CFR 1.2) Clearly defined criteria for graduate program admission and completion of degree requirements can be found in the admissions information in the *Graduate Catalogs*, as well as on the Mills web page. (CFR 2.2)

The commitment to the development and analysis of institutional indicators of achievement for graduate programs was impressive. Examples include increases in graduate student admission,

enrollment, diversity, degree completion, and institutional financial support for academic and non-academic programs. At the institutional and program level, there was evidence of a positive trajectory for the development and implementation of specific graduate student achievement indicators that capture the developmental difference in the graduate students' academic performance levels.

Mills College faculty and administration demonstrated a clear shared commitment to offering graduate education and professional programs. The faculty and administrators expressed consensus that offering graduate programs enhanced the experience for undergraduates, the teaching experience, and the diversity of the academic community. Many of the courses offerings are available to both undergraduate and graduate students. This combined approach to teaching and student learning has presented challenges to some programs as they noted, the challenges of delivering graduate level program content, standards, and assessment of outcomes with classes including all levels of students (graduates, undergraduates, transfers, and resumers). An example can be found in the Program Review Assessment Report for the Child Development Program (BA) and the Academic Assessment Plan for Early Education (MA), where the Benchmarks and Target Standards, respectively, are identical. Additionally, the Assessment Data and Analyses are the same with the exception of the Senior Capstone. Of the 15 graduate programs, 13 have identified learning outcomes. However, only 4 of those graduate programs have learning outcomes that are different in kind from the undergraduate learning outcomes. The lack of difference between learning outcomes at the undergraduate and graduate levels is in part due to a strategic approach to the assessment and program review process and the fact that many of the programs are relatively new to the institution (e.g., MBA). (CFR 2.1)

Despite the lack of graduate-specific learning outcomes in most graduate programs, the faculty interviewed during the EER visit firmly asserted that their expectations and assessments

differ qualitatively for graduate students. It will be important for the faculty to operationalize the qualitative difference in content, level, and assessment to assist with the demonstration and communication of the value of a graduate education at Mills. An exceptional example of how to make such a differentiation and communicate the value of the graduate program at Mills is found in the Academic Assessment Plan for Public Policy Bachelor level versus Master's level Program Goals. The program has its third Program review cycle this academic year. (CFR 2.1)

During the EER visit, the faculty ratio was reported as sufficient for the graduate programs since the majority of the faculty teach both undergraduate and graduate courses. Given Mills' commitment to utilizing Program Reviews and Annual Assessments combined with institutional research to inform decisions, it seems likely that there will need to be growth in the number of tenure track and tenured professors for the graduate programs, particularly those targeted for growth (e.g., Schools of Business and Education). See Data Exhibit 4.2. (CFR 2.1)

In concert with academic units, the Division of Student Life has taken significant strides in the creation of a culture of evidence and its application to graduate student initiatives. In the Co-Curricular Assessment Report, there is clear evidence of the DSL mission, vision, and guiding principles or goals. An integrated model of assessment is presented as their roadmap for assessing the student experience. There is a specific goal directed to graduate student life for the 2010-2011 academic year; it generally states that the DSL will expand efforts to address their needs. The DSL plans to continue to use data to inform how they meet the students' co-curricular needs and will make appropriate modifications to their service delivery, housing, orientation and retention programming. The DSL assessment centered on climate, community engagement and a sense of belonging to the Mills community. There were intentional programmatic and service support efforts aimed at collaborative experiences between undergraduate and graduate students. (CFR 2.11)

In conjunction with IRPAA, the DSL administered a Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey and the Narrative Project, both of which helped inform the decision to hire an Associate Dean of Students as a liaison for graduate student services and initiatives. A Graduate Student Lounge Manager was also hired to address the developmentally different needs of the graduate student for social and co-curricular engagement. (CFR 2.11)

The DSL has articulated learning outcomes for all five of its Guiding Principles, which are designed as targets for staff and students to assess their programs and student life events. Once the new data set (Graduate Student Experience Inquiry and Narrative Project) regarding graduate students is analyzed, the team recommends that Mills re-visit these learning outcomes to develop graduate student specific versions for the DSL Guiding Principles. (CFR 2.11)

The College is in the process of remedying complaints and issues that were identified by graduate students in the spring 2010 Graduate Student Academic Experiences and Services Satisfaction Survey, the Narrative Project, and CPR report. Based on the EER report and feedback from the EER visit interviews, the institutional commitment to enhancing the graduate student experience is clear. According to the EER report, the College launched a “comprehensive plan to improve its service” during the last academic year. The results of a follow up satisfaction evaluation show significant gains in the student experience. Some of the improvements identified include availability of information about services, customer service, and timeliness of response regarding service delivery (e.g., financial support, registration and academic notifications). (CFR 4.1)

Significant infrastructure changes have also improved service to graduate students. For example, changes to the M Center “organizational and training structures” now address customer service complaints, and “Beyond Orientation” workshops provide information about financial aid and financial literacy. It was unclear, however, whether there were any separate graduate student sessions within the workshop series. If not, it may be useful to consider specific sessions related to

the different financial resources and needs available to graduate students based on their respective programs. Staffing changes included new hires charged with identification and support of graduate student service needs within the DSL (e.g., new Associate Dean of Student Life). It is worthy of note that as the College programs have been more intentional with the graduate students, the undergraduate students have initiated partnerships with graduate student programs and organizations. This seems to be working well for both populations. A few excellent examples of such collaboration are the creation of graduate student representation within student governance, the inclusion of graduate student Resident Advisors in student life programming, and extending the public transportation AC Transit program to graduate students. (CFR 4.1)

During these times of economic challenges, financial aid is critical to graduate student recruitment and retention. Upon review of the EER, DSL Assessment Plans, and Program Review reports, the College has made a few infrastructure changes that should assist in building on the current gains. For example, the Graduate Tuition Task Force (GTTF) “recalibrated tuition and financial aid for each graduate program” thus assisting both the students and the sustainability of the programs. (CFR 4.1)

The need to continuously assess quality improvement is evidenced by the Assessment Plans for Academic Programs and Co-Curricular Programs and DSL’s continued work with the IRPAA to further examine the needs of graduate students at Mills College. Going forward, greater information regarding disability student services, advising, and possible gender related non-academic needs, given the possible increased male graduate student enrollment (e.g., fall 2005 to fall 2009 increase of 11% for the MFA degree program) may be helpful for recruitment, retention and advancement efforts. (see EER report, Appendix D and F, Data Exhibit 2.2 and 2.3, , EER visit; Appendix D, F, DSL Learning Outcome Project Exhibit, DSL and Student Interviews, EER Visit)

The College responded to the CPR report with great vigor. The senior leadership has provided infrastructure modifications and resources based on data driven decisions in alignment with core institutional and financial goals for growth in graduate education. There is involvement in the assessment and planning processes regarding graduate education from the Board of Trustees and President to the students and alumnae of the Mills College. One can truly say that they have established a culture of evidence which is assisting them with strategic planning and identification of priorities, as well as resources needed and actions to be taken. Mechanisms for continuous review of planning and effectiveness can be found at all levels of the academic and non-academic units. For example, the establishment of the IRPAA has been of paramount importance to the College's ability to make data informed decisions regarding graduates student recruitment/marketing, enrollment, retention, academic and non-academic program goals. The re-framing of the College Assessment Committee and the establishment of the Committee on Post-Mills Data with key campus wide membership will also be extremely helpful to the strategic planning processes. (CFR 4.1)

An example of the College effectively utilizing consultants for strategic planning is found in the Marketing Department Report to the Board of Trustees (Student Life Report, October, 2009). The Marketing Department retained an independent market research firm, Q & A Research, to administer an online survey and conduct focus groups with MBA alumnae in northern California. One of the more interesting findings is that respondents who were also Mills undergraduate alumnae were significantly more likely to recommend the School of Business to others than the non-Mills undergraduate alumnae. Needless to say, this finding has implications for enhancing the connectedness of the non-undergraduate alumnae to the Mills graduate program. However, with the increased undergraduate student awareness of the graduate programs (e.g., new School of Business building), the rise of the 4+1 programs and graduate courses, and studio and practicum offerings

allowing mixed student populations to participate, the College may find itself with a significant cache of alumni ambassadors to help recruitment and advancement goals. (CFR 4.1)

In conclusion, the evidence found in the EER report documents, the exhibits, and interviews with key constituents regarding graduate education indicates the successful attainment of a culture of evidence that will inform strategic planning, priorities and decisions related to the growth of graduate education at Mills. (See the EER Executive Summary, 2007-8, 2012-13 Strategic Plan, related Implementation and Assessment Plans for the Strategic Plan, October 2009 Student Life Report to the Board of Trustees, EER Interviews with Senior Leadership, Graduate Council, Open Faculty Session and the Committee on Post-Mills Data.) (CFR 4.1)

B and C. Systems for Enhancing and Sustaining Educational Effectiveness and Student Learning

The evidence provided the visiting team in the EER Report and its appendices demonstrates that Mills College is well on its way to developing a culture of evidence that will help it determine its educational effectiveness in a continuous improvement mode. The program reviews and annual assessment reports indicate that many faculty and departments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels understand how to review their program learning outcomes and validate that students are indeed learning what there are expected to learn. That said, only 12 programs have been reviewed to date, though clear plans have been set out to review all programs on a regular basis. Similarly, 22 annual assessment reports have been submitted. These, too, demonstrate that many faculty have developed the capacity to assess their degree's learning outcomes and identify ways to improve student learning, closing the loop between results and plans for improvement. Many skeptics on the faculty and staff appear to have been won over by seeing first-hand the utility of the data gained through assessments.

Mills College has also put in place a robust course review process (CARP) that will support and enhance the assessment component of new and revised courses. Their re-engaged Assessment Committee should also provide on-going leadership as the College moves to a stronger program review and evaluation cycle. The College also allocates substantial resources to its Institutional Research, Planning, and Academic Assessment Office, aligning its budget to the needs of program review, assessment, and evaluation needs.

At the general education and institutional levels, the College surveys faculty and students in manifold ways (ex. NSSE, HERI, YFCY, CSS), demonstrating its ongoing institutional commitment to determining student success. Its Division of Student Life has also committed itself to partnering in the assessment of EE and has developed a comprehensive evaluation process. (CFR's 2.10, 2.11, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7)

Finally, though only in its first stages, the College has put together a Post-Mills Data Committee composed of staff and faculty from the advancement, alumni relations, and IRPAA that should help them follow their alums as they take up their careers and life responsibilities, determining the impact of the Mills experience. (CFR 4.8)

Though the team is sanguine about the sustainability of EE at Mills College it does have some reservations based on the survey (FSSE) given to faculty and interviews during the CPR visit. As indicated in Theme 1 of the essay portion of the EE report from Mills, many faculty do not see regular assessment of student learning at the course or program levels as worth the effort. For example, as cited earlier, 33% of the faculty survey "don't believe in it but are doing it", 23% are skeptics, and 20% are going through the motions." Yet in our interviews with faculty we found that the initial assessment efforts have provoked an enthusiasm not seen at the last visit and many faculty seeing the utility of the data, especially when they design the assessments and review results. As one faculty member commented: "The (assessment) train is on its track and moving along. Most of us

are on board, and we are far enough along that we even have time to sit in the dining car to reflect and improve the initial assessment processes.” As they stated in their EE essay, they see themselves as needing to move from Assessment 1.0 to 2.0.

Mills, as reported in earlier sections of this review, has worked to improve its retention and graduation rates at the undergraduate and graduate levels, focusing especially on resumers and transfer students. Mills’ first to second year persistence rate for first time, full time students who began in 2009 was 81%. This represents an increase over the last two years which also had increases and is slightly above their 10 year retention rate average. Graduation rates have stayed fairly stable. The six-year rate for first-year full time students entering in 2003 was 62%. Over the last ten years graduation rates have stayed in a range from a low of 57% to a high of 69%. Based on the findings of a comprehensive review by a Retention Task Force in 2009-10, and an ongoing review by an Undergraduate Tuition Task Force, a new Retention Action Committee will implement changes aimed at remedying problems identified by these two task forces.

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW AND THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

In its 2007 proposal Mills proposes three goals for its accreditation review process, to have:

- 1) Implemented a complete “cycle” of assessment in at least 60% of its academic programs;
- 2) Developed and adopted a vision for graduate education that is mission-driven and has an appropriate role in financial planning; and
- 3) Developed, implemented and assessed a comprehensive retention plan that has begun to increase retention in Mills undergraduate student population.

The team found that Mills has met these goals. The team was impressed to find significant progress in developing a culture of evidence on campus, which was one of the recommendations from the CPR visit. It found changes in the structure and design of program reviews and annual assessment reports, the new Course Approval and Revision Process, and a shift in overall campus culture. Faculty skepticism evident in the assessment survey and the CPR visit seems largely to have dissipated, with skeptics having been won over by seeing first-hand the utility of the data. Addressing another of the CPR recommendations, Mills has improved the alignment of resource allocations based on the results of assessment. For example, additional faculty FTE were given to departments based on program review results; the way part-time faculty are used in English 1 courses was revised based on assessments of student learning; COL 60 (the sophomore seminars) were eliminated when found not to be achieving desired outcomes; and staff were added to support graduate students and transfer experiences when this need was identified through campus climate surveys and other mechanisms. The entire community is involved with assessment, including to a laudable extent the students. For example peer tutor training in the Center for Academic Excellence includes assessment of their training, and the Dean for Student Life regularly communicates with students about results of studies such as the NSSE. Whereas before there seemed to be pockets of

innovation and excellence in a variety of domains, there is now a more systematic and strategic effort to see these efforts as part of a unified whole. This can be attributed to better communication, use of the strategic plan, and the assessment process.

Another area targeted in the CPR report was leadership, in particular concerns about communication between higher level administration and the rest of the campus community and the stability of key college officer positions. The EER team found that a strong and stable leadership team over the past two years has led to better communication between faculty and administration on important issues. In particular, there has been unanimous acclaim for the director of IRPAA as key to advances in the culture of assessment. The Provost's Office is now widely perceived as a partner by faculty. The Dean of Students has successfully restructured her division by leveraging the assessment process. The College should also be commended for the transparency of its engagement with the Board of Trustees, who are exceptionally well-informed about the assessment process and results.

Finally, although building infrastructure would fall more into the purview of the Capacity and Preparatory Review report, the team wishes to commend Mills on its beautiful new gold LEED-certified building for the School of Business, which was completed and opened in the time since the CPR visit. Having the team meeting room located here gave us a clear sense of the institution's commitment to sustainability of many kinds. We also wish to thank the Mills community for their gracious welcome and assistance, and in particular Marianne Sheldon, the ALO, for her assistance with all of the arrangements for our visit.

Recommendations

1. We recommend continued attention and energy around the program review and assessment processes Mills has begun. While there is considerable momentum and widespread

participation, it is imperative that the model of continuous self-study, reflection, and improvement be maintained if Mills is to achieve its educational goals for all of its students.

2. The program review process has already identified needed changes in the curriculum, but we also recommend additional support for faculty that will help them improve their teaching practices. For example, with the advent of more graduate programs and students, we recommend more resources be provided for developing graduate pedagogy. To support these, we recommend that there be a center that would institutionalize opportunities and support for faculty in development of teaching practices, sharing of best practices across disciplines, giving curriculum development grants, and other forms of pedagogical support.
3. The institution needs to pay attention to technology and equipment infrastructures and integrated systems. For example, technologies that would allow faculty to capture the artifacts of a student's work would benefit the assessment process.
4. The team was impressed with the breadth of offerings of majors, tracks, and programs (e.g. a new religious studies initiative), but recommends that Mills study the appropriate balance of number of programs and faculty and staff levels. The faculty and staff displayed a great deal of entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to Mills. This spirit risks spending itself in less effective endeavors or spreading itself too thin, however, if a strong central planning function does not continually balance priorities in the multiple demands for staff and faculty time.