

REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM  
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

To Occidental College

February 8-10, 2012

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Reaffirmation of Accreditation

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The team evaluated the institution under the WASC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities. The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WASC website.

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## **SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

### **A. Description of the Institution and Visit**

Located eight miles north of downtown Los Angeles in the residential community of Eagle Rock, Occidental College is making preparations to celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with activities scheduled to begin on Founders' Day on April 20, 2013. Occidental was one of the first liberal arts colleges in California, with that mission remaining central over the years. The academic rigor of Occidental has long been recognized, with the first Rhodes Scholar named in 1907 and a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa established in 1926. Occidental College's Fact Sheet for 2011-2012 notes that since 1980, more than 200 graduates have attended medical or dental school; since 1990, "Oxy" students have won more than 190 major scholarships and fellowships (e.g., Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Fulbright).

Originally founded by Presbyterians, the College has been nonsectarian since 1910. A consistent mission has guided the institution's educational offerings over the years: "Occidental College, a private, coeducational college of the liberal arts and sciences, seeks to provide its students with a total educational experience of the highest quality – one that prepares them for leadership in an increasingly complex, interdependent, and pluralistic world." Notably, a new vision statement for the College approved by the faculty and administration in January 2012 builds on the institution's commitment to "access and excellence" with the stated goal of being "recognized as the most distinctive urban liberal arts college in the country."

Occidental currently serves approximately 2,130 students, drawn from 43 states and the nation's capital, as well as 25 countries. This year's student body is 43% male and 57% female, with 54% self-identified as Caucasian. The current freshman to sophomore retention rate is 94% and the graduation rate is 85%. The 540 new students representing the class of 2015 were selected from an applicant pool of 6,112 (39% of applicants were admitted), with a median combined SAT score of 1950 and 91% in the top quarter of their high school class. Consistent with Occidental's long-standing commitment to access and diversity, 14% of the incoming class represented first-generation college students, with 78% of students last year receiving some form of financial aid.

Occidental's 187 full-time faculty embody a commitment to the interdisciplinary nature of the liberal arts as well as undergraduate research and creative work. In addition to these full-time faculty, there are 85 part time faculty members (constituting 23.8 FTE) – for a combined faculty FTE of 213, resulting in a student faculty ratio of 9.4. Using classroom FTE the ratio rises to 12.4.

Occidental is recognized nationally as a leader in undergraduate research, as evidenced by the number and size of federal research awards, currently 14 active NSF research grants totaling \$3,613,626 and one active NIH ARRA grant of \$192,048. In addition to such government support, references to work being accomplished through foundation grants received mention during the WASC Visiting Team's days on campus (e.g., Mellon, Kerr, Teagle). In total, 93% of the full-time faculty hold a Ph.D. or terminal professional degree; 29% of the faculty are persons of color.

Occidental's curriculum, which is distinctive in its interdisciplinary approach, is built around the CORE Program, one of four programmatic areas reviewed by the Visiting Team. Student Learning Objectives focus on effective writing, global literacy and intercultural competence, artistic literacy, and scientific literacy and quantitative reasoning. Students may choose from 29

majors and minors, with each major culminating in a comprehensive exam or project. Team-taught courses on topics such as immigration and the environment tap both travel within the state and the rich resources available through Occidental's proximity to Los Angeles.

Originally accredited by WASC in February of 1949, the overview of accreditation history reflects no sanctions and only one progress report requested (due May 15, 1994). A special visit in March 2001 was to focus on governance and other issues raised in the action letter of the June 1999 visit. Following the Special Visit, the Commission acted in June of 2001 to reaffirm accreditation for a ten-year period. Occidental's Proposal to WASC submitted in March of 2008 was revised and resubmitted in August 2008 and proposed using a comprehensive approach. In June of 2010, a supplemental revision to the Institutional Proposal, approved by WASC, shifted the proposed approach to a thematic approach with three foci: CORE Curriculum, Undergraduate Research, and Program Review. The Capacity and Preparatory Review visit was held March 3-5, 2010; the Educational Effectiveness Review was held February 8-10, 2012. The Visiting Team met with 142 administrators, faculty, and staff, in addition to an open meeting with students during the three-day visit; the College has no off-campus sites, regional centers, distance education programs, or correspondence education programs.

## **B. The Institution's Educational Effectiveness Review Report**

Occidental's revised thematic Proposal and the EER Institutional Report were well aligned. The rationale for this change was persuasively articulated as a desire to link the EER visit preparations with a newly-established integrated planning process and a "renewed energy in the accreditation process as a result of the inauguration of President Jonathan Veitch." In short, the College sought to capitalize on strategic planning already underway by trustees, faculty, and staff, embedding the discussion of educational effectiveness within those groups.

The resulting EER Report, submitted to WASC in November 2011, included a two-page introduction covering reflections on the reaffirmation process, followed by extensive reports on each of the three themes (CORE Curriculum, Undergraduate Research, and Program Review), each of 10-15 pages. The concluding two sections focused on responses to the Capacity & Preparatory Review Recommendations and on Pervasive Effectiveness – specifically in the areas of Student Success and Sustainability of Assessment.

The Visiting Team found that the EER Institutional Report adequately reflected the status of the institution and was aligned with its Proposal; thus, the Team felt well-prepared to focus on the key issues and make appropriate preparations for the on-site visit. The EER Report was well-formatted, comprehensive, and well-designed, although a few team members mentioned that a final editing of the entire document would have been helpful. Additionally, some team members expressed that more incorporation of evidence into the EER would have been beneficial to provide an immediate picture of the topics covered; however, an extensive set of appendix materials was readily available both via a designated web portal as well as provided to each member on a flash drive.

The Team found a robust planning process undertaken by the College alongside preparations for this EER phase of the WASC accreditation review process. A wide variety of task forces and planning groups had been heavily invested in this process of developing a strategic plan and ensuring widespread ownership. Among those groups were the Task Force on CORE Curriculum, the Task Force on Undergraduate Research, the EER Steering Committee, the Planning Steering Committee, and the Task Force on the Residential College. The President and the new Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of the College, both of whom arrived at Occident College

within the past 2 ½ years, have provided exemplary and energetic leadership to the planning process in concert with the Board of Trustees. The breadth of campus involvement and the shared enthusiasm for the newly-articulated “Vision for Occidental College” (which had been unanimously approved by the faculty in January 2012) were commended by the Visiting Team in its final presentation to the community. In short, the Team concluded that the College is committed to serious and on-going self-review and improvement.

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

During the Visiting Team’s three days on Occidental’s campus, the Team was able to affirm that the institution has made significant progress and is satisfactorily addressing most areas of concern that had been identified in the CPR visit and the July 8, 2010 WASC Commission action letter. Specifically:

- Mission (CFR 1.1)

The institution has formally reaffirmed its mission as part of the planning process now under way. The CPR team recommended the following relative to CFR 1.1: *The institution keep the mission central to the integrative planning process and continue to seek ways to enhance its application within the context of the changing environment in higher education and society.*

The current planning process involves a widespread effort to seek perspectives on the institution’s mission. This effort has elicited “overwhelming” support for the reaffirmation of the College’s mission clearly a firm part of the planning process.

- Assessment (CFRs 1.2, 2.3 4.6)

The institution has responded to the recommendation of the CPR team (CFR 1.2 [and CFR 2.3] that the *“faculty continue with all due speed to develop institution-wide objectives for student learning outcomes. These outcomes should be linked to the mission of the College.”*

The faculty has developed institution-wide student learning outcomes and they will be formally adopted as part of the planning process. Program Review is on-going across the institution and the CORE is actively undergoing extensive assessment. Widespread ownership of the assessment process across administrative leadership and the faculty as a whole was evident.

Specifically, CFR 1.2 requires that institutions establish a system for measuring student achievement at the institutional, program, and course level. Given the nature of an EER visit, much of the visit focused on this expectation; the Team concluded that a thoughtful system of assessment has been established, with the need remaining to identify Institutional Learning Objectives related to the forthcoming institutional strategic plan.

- Administration (CFR 1.3, 4.1, and 4.2)

The CPR team recommended the institution *reaffirm the centrality of the academic program and the centrality of the Vice President for Academic Affairs in guiding the academic priorities of the college.*(CFR 1.3 {and CFRs 4.1 and 4.2]

A new Vice President for Academic Affairs assumed his duties in the fall of 2010. In partnership with the President, the Vice President has clearly established a more central role in setting academic priorities. The office of the Assessment Director has been physically moved from the Vice President for Planning to the Academic Dean's staff, with the reporting structure following suit.

- Student Life (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, and 2.11)

CFR 1.5 served as the basis for two recommendations by the CPR team. First, the team recommended *continued attention be given regarding concerns of students over residential and co-curricular life at the College focused on the development of the "whole student" and overall student success. In this regard, the team notes the growing percentage of students who are women and the need to ensure that women's leadership is included in the College's efforts to enhance*

*gender equality within a climate that promotes educational success for the “whole student.”* (CFR 1.5) [CFRs 2.10, 2.11]

The College has significantly increased its attention to and support for student services. A Residential College Task Force has been meeting for the past year, resulting in recommendations for SLOs in co-curricular programming. The Visiting Team observed a high degree of respect for the importance of the co-curriculum in achieving the institution’s mission. The institution also noted the significant progress in the number of women holding campus leadership positions.

A second area noted by the CPR Visiting Team was athletics (CFR 1.5). The team recommended the College *continue to explore avenues to enhance the goals of Title IX*. The institution has made considerable progress in this area of athletics. They have added two women’s intercollegiate sports, lacrosse and golf. The number of women participating in athletics is increasing, several women’s coaching positions have been upgraded to full-time, a Senior Woman Administrator/ Assistant Athletic Director position has been added, and greater equity in travel, sports information, and live-streaming has been implemented.

- Administration and Board

The CPR team expressed concern regarding a possible blurring of administrative and Board responsibilities and recommended the institution *monitor the transition of the former Chair of the Board of Trustees to the President’s Cabinet since the potential remains for a blurring of Board and senior administrative/presidential accountability* (CFR 1.6). This situation has been fully addressed as of December 2011, with the individual no longer serving in an administrative capacity for the College.

- Governance and Leadership (1.3, 4.1, 4.2, 1.5, 2.10, 2,11)

The CPR team recommended the institution reaffirm the centrality of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the full engagement of the President and Vice President's EER process.

The Occidental community is clearly celebrating the leadership of a new president after five years of senior-level administrative transitions. The October 2009 inauguration address of President Veitch identified 12 commitments of the College as a "grounded sense of vision," concluding: "Clearly, this is an agenda that requires a great deal of hard work and dedication. It is also an agenda which requires a great degree of longevity. So let me assure you: I plan to be here for a long time."

Similarly, the community has warmly embraced the energetic leadership of the new Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of the College. The strong and trusting working relationship between these two leaders was noted by several people across campus. They have both been deeply involved in the planning process that is underway and involves the entire community. Existing committees and new task forces have been central to the planning process. The optimal enrollment size for the College has been established as a range rather than a specific number. It is clear that the institutional leadership is well aware of the financial and other implications of enrollment figures. Data was presented that indicated an expanded role for women students in leadership positions. Considerable progress had been achieved in regard to Title IX. Clearly, the centrality of academic program in terms of priorities within the College is ably being championed under this new leadership. The team also met with four members of the Board of Trustees, including the Board Chair, and found their level of commitment and personal engagement in the planning process to be very high. Wisely, the Board is taking the lead in researching major issues facing

higher education today. Lines of communication between the Board and the administration seemed to be functioning in an open, trusting, and efficient fashion.

- Planning and Resources (CFRs 3.5, 2.10, 3.6, 1.5, 1.6, 4.1) The CPR team recommended a broad engagement of the entire community in the planning process, the careful monitoring of fiscal issues, the renovation of Swan Hall, and improvement of data-driven fund-raising efforts. Team members met with various cabinet members and with the president to assess the degree of alignment between the strategic plan and all other planning efforts. As noted later in this report, the Team has found the caliber of administrative leaders to be very high in key areas that will ensure sound fiscal planning. Various five-year scenarios have been developed relative to enrollment projections, fund-raising goals, discount rates, and other matters that affect the institution's financial health. Discount rates and financial aid packaging are being monitored carefully, with discussions underway about how best to preserve Occidental's commitment to "excellence in equity." Careful ongoing monitoring and planning of this type will be important to ensure financial stability.

A newly-hired Vice President for Advancement will bring significant professional and data-based experience, and recent results and projections for fund-raising were encouraging to the team. At the same time, a reduction of 5% in non-academic budgets was required during the current year in order to provide ready access to funds as the new strategic plan identifies future priorities later this spring. Institutional leaders are well aware of the need to allocate resources based on the priorities to be established in the new plan.

As evidenced in the Institutional Report (p. 53), Occidental's endowment has recovered to its pre-2007 level and the self-study reports that 2010 was one of its most successful fund raising years in its history. The College reports that the process of integrated strategic planning is aimed at aligning Occidental's resources with its educational purposes (CFR 3.5). Recent hiring includes

not only the new Director of Advancement Services but a new Director of Prospect Management and a new Executive Director of Alumni Relations. As noted in the Institutional Report (pp. 48-49), a Parents' Council has been created along with a Director of Parent Relations (CFR 3.5). The discount rate is being carefully monitored and for entering students has been reduced for the current year.

As noted in the Institutional Report, the College has undertaken organizational restructuring to clarify its decision-making processes and has engaged the entire campus in a strategic planning process (CFR 3.8). The Board of Trustees has been involved in the strategic planning process and, as evidenced by their participation in the SWOT and Environment scan, the Trustees are well aware of the challenges facing higher education and the liberal arts sector in particular (CFR 3.9). Occidental now is benefitting from far greater stability in its leadership, with the President and Vice President for Academic Affairs working together in a highly synergistic manner. Both have been fully engaged in the strategic planning process and the WASC review (CFR 3.10). The Institutional Report and the Visit Team's observations during three days on campus confirms the faculty's leadership of the academic program (CFR 3.11).

As indicated by the Occidental College Integrated Planning Organization Structure, a broad array of constituents is a part of the strategic planning process, at the center of which is the Planning Steering Committee. The planning process, therefore, at least in terms of the representation of leadership at the table, appears to align academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technology (CFR 4.2). However, given that the plan had not been finalized at the time of the EER visit, there is no way to know if this alignment will be reflected in the plan. The Team suggests that this alignment be clearly articulated in the document.

The College's Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning Office (IRAP) provides an increased capacity for data collection as well as support for the institution-wide assessment processes and has undergone an internal review (CFR 4.5). The Vice President for Academic Affairs is committed to improvement, and is leading faculty in assessing student learning. There is participation on the department level in the assessment process as a part of the Program Review process. Most academic departments report that their assessment processes have resulted in program improvement. (CFR 4.7) An area for improvement would be the "regular involvement of the appropriate stakeholders, such as alumni, employers, practitioners, and others..." in the assessment process (CFR 4.8)

## **SECTION II. EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS UNDER THE STANDARDS**

### **Theme A: CORE Curriculum**

Approximately one third of an Occidental student's program is devoted to completing the requirements of the CORE program. Thus, the decision to focus on the CORE as a central component of Occidental's self-study was a logical institutional choice (CFR 2.7). In addition, the CORE has undergone substantial change since the initial adoption in 1978. According to the Institutional Report (pp. 6-8), the CORE was most recently revised in 2006 to include four primary components: (1) the Cultural Studies Program (CSP) -- a two semester first-year seminar program, emphasizing college level writing; (2) discipline specific courses intended to expose students to at least three different human cultures, including cultures prior to 1800, and applied and theoretical approaches to the fine arts; (3) a minimum of three science and mathematics courses; and (4) proficiency in a language other than English, defined as two semester courses of a foreign

language. Learning goals and student learning outcomes are defined as a series of “literacies” (i.e., Global Literacy and Intercultural Competence, Artistic Literacy, Scientific Literacy and Quantitative Reasoning); effective writing is a primary overarching goal (CFR 2.2a).

The most recent review of the CORE began in 2009 and included an external review team visit and report. The findings of the Occidental review and the external review revealed major areas of overlap and similar concerns and conclusions, including the need for a systematic review of the CORE (Institutional Report, see Appendix IIa., pp. 2-3). This review was undertaken in 2010-2011 by a research team that included the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the President, and faculty members from each division (CFR 3.11).

The assessment of student writing in the 2009 CORE self-study was extensive and led to findings that suggested the need for changes in the second semester “research-writing” in addition to the need for continued emphasis on writing in the academic disciplines (majors). Student achievement of the various “literacies” was assessed through an examination of the courses elected by students to fulfill the requirements in each of the “literacy” areas. This assessment revealed a number of concerns about the current system for approving courses for achieving “literacy.” In particular, the limited geographical and cultural exposure of student selections was identified as a concern. As part of the review process, the self-study team also collected and reviewed syllabi and instructor narratives of learning goals from a selection of courses in the CORE (CFR 2.7).

As a result of its ongoing assessment, the College is now considering important changes in the CORE. The current research team (review committee 2010-2011) utilized the earlier reports from the CORE self-study and external reviews and added several additional components to their consideration. They read widely in the literature on liberal education (from Hutchins and Dewey to Nussbaum). They held focus groups with the faculty to gain their perspectives on the CORE, and they reviewed the General Education programs at comparable and aspirational colleges. They

also linked their discussion of the CORE to the integrated planning committees (CFR 2.2a, 2.4, 2.7).

As a result of the research team's work, faculty were invited to present proposals for a new first year program. This solicitation elicited several innovative proposals – for examples, see Appendix II. a of the Institutional Report on pp. 5-6). During the Spring of 2011, two special meetings with the faculty were held; the first to consider “a New Approach to the CORE First-Year Curriculum” and the second to discuss the revision of requirements for quantitative reason, fine arts, diversity/equity, global studies, and foreign language (CFR 2.4,2.5).

The changes contemplated in the report from the 2010-2011 research committee directly address the concerns identified in the 2009-2010 CORE self-study. The proposed changes include an incentive program for faculty who participate in the new first year program (LEAD), as well as additional support for those faculty members from the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Center for Digital Learning and Research (CFR3.4). The proposal attempts to align closely the first-year LEAD courses with CORE learning outcomes (CFR 2.4). It also expands links to the cultural events in Los Angeles and adds plenary sessions on topics of overarching interest. The proposal also adds requirements for courses in quantitative reasoning and the fine arts, proposes an additional diversity/equity requirement, a revision of geographical requirements, and an increase in the foreign language requirement (CFR 2.5).

One acute issue identified for the Cultural Studies Program (CSP) was staffing (CFR 2.1). The extensive use of adjunct faculty in the first-year writing seminars was a notable concern; in recent years, adjuncts have constituted as much as 41% of the instructors in these courses. In addition, the self-study and external reports suggested that many departments failed to participate in staffing the CSP despite the official requirement that they do so. The new proposal no longer “demands” that every department participate in the first-year program, but rather provides incentives and

support for those that do (CFR 3.3). Addressing the balance between adjunct and regular faculty participation in the LEAD program will be an area of concern, especially if the College continues to increase the size of the first year class (CFR 3.1). It should be noted that both the Director of the CORE program and the Vice President for Academic Affairs offered compelling reasons that trusted long-term adjuncts typically tapped by Occidental for these roles contribute to educational quality (e.g., highly-talented professionals within Greater Los Angeles who would not consider a full-time faculty position).

The process of systematic review, attention to student learning and achievement, and the use of the results of these reviews for attention to pedagogy, resource allocation, faculty development, and planning are all evidence of ongoing assessment and a culture of assessment expected by the WASC standards (CFR 2.1, 2.2a, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 2.8, 2.10). In the case of the CORE, Occidental has shown clear evidence of meeting the WASC standards. Integrating the innovative and creative revision of the CORE with the ongoing discussion of ideal enrollment size at the College and the allocation of resources will be important goals for the strategic planning process (CFR 3.1, 3.8).

### **Theme B: Undergraduate Research**

Occidental aims to introduce students to the importance and pleasure of asking fundamental questions about the world, about specific subjects, and about themselves. The College seeks to instill in students an appreciation for how such questions can be asked from multiple perspectives reflecting differing perceptions and values. The undergraduate research program furthers these aims by helping students learn how to define questions precisely, to outline investigative steps clearly, to understand what constitutes evidence for a given question, to pay scrupulous attention to negative evidence, and to present their findings persuasively in appropriate venues (see [http://departments.oxy.edu/urc/research\\_support/asp\\_fund\\_links/asp\\_spring11.htm#ConferenceTravel](http://departments.oxy.edu/urc/research_support/asp_fund_links/asp_spring11.htm#ConferenceTravel)). (CFRs 2.4, 2.5, 3.11)

Undergraduate research mainly takes place in three overlapping areas: the summer program organized by the Undergraduate Research Center (URC), the academic year program also organized by the URC, and projects organized by the individual academic units. The summer program is the most prominent component of the Occidental undergraduate research program. This is an intense ten-week program organized by the Undergraduate Research Center (URC). Each summer approximately 100 students participate and are expected to devote themselves full time to their research. The institution expended \$514,150 on the research program in the summer of 2010. With close faculty supervision, they design their projects and identify the steps they must take to gather and assess salient information. Students participate in plenary sessions where distinguished speakers address topics of general concern. They hear from faculty about how and why they do their own research. They learn about the ethical norms governing research in their disciplines. They interact informally with each other and with faculty at social events. At the end of the summer, they report on the outcomes of their research projects at campus, regional, and national forums. During the academic year program, approximately 250 students take part in projects overseen by the URC. The URC also sometimes provides funding to help students defray research expenses (see: [http://departments.oxy.edu/urc/Research\\_Support/asp\\_fund.htm](http://departments.oxy.edu/urc/Research_Support/asp_fund.htm) as well as funding for students who wish to present their research at regional and national conferences (see: [http://departments.oxy.edu/urc/research\\_support/asp\\_fund\\_links/asp\\_spring11.htm#Conference\\_Travel](http://departments.oxy.edu/urc/research_support/asp_fund_links/asp_spring11.htm#Conference_Travel)).

Many of the individual disciplines consider undergraduate research to be an integral part of their programs. The 2010 “Curricular Planning Reports” summarized discussions that have been taking place among departmental faculty regarding the role undergraduate research plays in their disciplines. In some areas, most notably the sciences, undergraduate research is firmly established

and the main questions center on how research opportunities might be enhanced. In other areas, for example, English and Comparative Literary Studies (ECLS), faculty reported that concern for undergraduate research has directly affected the structure of the curriculum. In yet other areas (e.g., Music and Art History and Visual Art), faculty interest in expanding undergraduate research opportunities is prompting discussion about how curricular structures and pedagogic strategies might be changed to engage students more fully in the processes of investigation and discovery.

One important issue that is emerging in these discussions is the question of how to talk about undergraduate research across disciplines. Some faculty members have noted that the concept of “undergraduate research” has reflected principally the approaches of the physical and biological sciences; they believe that the concept must be expanded to be more reflective of the processes of discovery of the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts.

It is also clear that all three components share characteristics that reflect Occidental’s commitment to liberal education. Individual students work with individual faculty members in close collaboration. Students learn to rely on themselves to move their projects forward. Students and faculty create an intellectual community in which everyone pursues individual aims but share common values and aspirations. (CFR 1.5, 2.3)

Research and Diversity. Occidental has made diversity, broadly considered, central to its mission. As a result, Occidental seeks to attract students who are the first in their families and among the first in their communities to go to college. Some of these students’ intellectual confidence may not be commensurate with their intellectual ability and potential. For students who lack self-confidence, undergraduate research may have a special contribution to make. By working closely with a faculty member, the student can take the small steps necessary to develop confidence in

his/her ability to frame questions, assemble and assess evidence, structure an argument and present, and defend/amend findings. At the end of the project, the student can take justifiable pride in what s/he accomplished, and, more important, know that s/he has what it takes to undertake and accomplish more. (CFR 1.5)

Assessment. Occidental looks at its undergraduate research programs in several ways. The most formal assessments are undertaken by the URC. Each year the College surveys students before and after they participate in the summer program (CFR 2.4). These surveys reveal that student satisfaction with the summer program is uniformly high and nearly all participants believe that the program helped them develop their intellectual abilities in ways that will serve them well in the future. They also report widespread satisfaction with the way the program is organized and run. In addition to these surveys, the URC periodically reviews how its students fare as compared to the student body as a whole and according to the Office of Institutional Research has consistently found that participants in the summer program have higher retention and graduation rates. (CFR 2.6, 2.7, 2.8. 2.9)

In addition to these in-house, on-going assessment activities, the URC has published articles in academic journals describing its program and discussing its effectiveness. The URC recently invited an outside expert to review the program. This reviewer found that the program was very strong in key areas and currently serves Occidental students very well. With respect to the future, he noted that faculty members would like to see the participation of non-science disciplines increase, and the incentives and rewards for faculty who oversee undergraduate research be clarified. Additionally, more support needs to be provided should undergraduate research be expanded. (UCR Site Visit Report, January 2011)

Challenges. Occidental has identified three main questions that it must address: (1) central support for undergraduate research, (2) differences among disciplines in involvement in undergraduate research, and, (3) faculty incentives for work in undergraduate research. (See Occidental College Undergraduate Research Center: Program Review Self-Study Report, April Mazzeo and Phoebe Dea, December 22, 2010.)

Central Administrative Support. The URC has achieved impressive accomplishments with modest resources. Part of its success can be attributed to using technology to extend the reach of its program, to assist students to take full advantage of the program, and to support faculty in their efforts to supervise and collaborate with their student researchers. However, the bulk of the URC's success must be attributed to the commitment and creativity of the Center's faculty and staff who have aggressively, skillfully, and successfully pursued outside funding, supported a wide variety of projects that adopted the different investigative approaches of different disciplines, and found ways to engage students with different levels of preparation. Occidental is well aware that if it decides to expand its undergraduate research efforts, it will have to secure additional funding.

Disciplinary Involvement. Occidental students and faculty in the sciences are more heavily involved in undergraduate research than students and faculty from the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. Annual participation by regular rank faculty varies by discipline: 63% for the sciences, 41% for social sciences, and 22% for arts and humanities. There are many reasons for this pattern (e.g., the central role chemistry and biology played in establishing the program, the availability of extramural funding, and, the differences in the structures of inquiry among the disciplines). Nevertheless, Occidental would like to increase the proportion of students from the social sciences, fine arts, and humanities involved in undergraduate research. To this end, the College was recently awarded a \$250,000 grant from the W. M. Keck Foundation to promote

undergraduate research in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The program will support faculty with research mentorship stipends, course development stipends, student facilitator positions, workshops, and roundtables. This is a visionary, well-designed program that promises to make a very strong undergraduate research program even stronger.

Support for Faculty. The Task Force on Undergraduate Research has outlined a number of steps that Occidental might take to support faculty who sponsor undergraduate research. Some steps (e.g., establishment of a Center for Scholarship and increases in faculty travel and enrichment grants) will require substantial increases in funding. Other steps (e.g., more systematic attention to faculty engagement in undergraduate research in tenure and promotion decisions) do not require additional funds but do require careful policy review and possible revision. (See Occidental College Undergraduate Research Center: Program Review Self-Study Report, April Mazzeo and Phoebe Dea, December 22, 2010.)

### **Theme C: Program Review**

Occidental College has made considerable progress in its effort to develop a comprehensive system of program review. That program reviews are in place college-wide was clearly evident. At the time of the EER visit, the College had recently developed comprehensive guidelines that ensure the consistency of the review process, embed the assessment of student learning and the student experience as essential components, and provide a mechanism to link resource allocation to the resulting evidence.

The College has employed a systematic program review process since 2001. As part of their Educational Effectiveness Review they undertook a meta-review of this program review process in order to gain substantial insights into its effectiveness. No formal review of the process had been

undertaken prior to this effort. The meta review was extensive and included review of all documentation for five selected programs as well as a series of focus group interviews with selected faculty, and a faculty-wide survey. The College has an *Assessment Handbook* that contains extensive guidelines for program reviews that incorporate the WASC best practices for such reviews. The guidelines were revised in 2006 and 2009 in order to bring them more into line with assessment plans and expectations. Each program review is meant to include considerations of mission, goals, student learning outcomes, and curriculum maps. As part of this process, each academic program is expected to send an annual assessment report to the Dean of the College for his review. (At least two cycles of annual reports have been completed.) The Team reviewed these reports and confirmed that they provided information on every academic program's assessment for the year. The current program review cycle projects reviews out to 2017.

The meta-review established that the current program review process needed improvement in several areas. Follow-up on the reviews was determined to be spotty. Only 35% of faculty surveyed felt that the program was meeting their needs. A slight majority of faculty surveyed found that assessment was valuable to them. However, 80% of those surveyed found that student learning outcomes were useful. Looking ahead the meta-review has informed several changes for the future of the program review process. First, it is important to enhance the direct assessment of programs. Further, it is important to enhance the follow-up process to ensure that program reviews are used to improve programs. Third, it will be important to enhance the assessment expertise of faculty.

The Visiting Team selected at random four programs considered representative – CORE, Economics, Biochemistry, and the International Programs Office – in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the College's efforts in program review and adherence to the College's program review guidelines and as directed by WASC (CFR 2.7, 4.4). Documents related to the program review process were available in the team room and a two-hour block on the Team's schedule

allowed two WASC visitors to interact with administrators, faculty, and in some cases students, from each of the four programs. Utilizing rubrics developed by WASC for assessing the integration of student learning assessment into program reviews, the Team determined that the College's program reviews fulfill the intent of the WASC rubrics at a developed or, in some cases, highly developed level across the full range of criteria. Some differentiation across programs reviews was identified, and the Visiting Team thus believes that further evaluation and development is warranted. In particular, it appears that in some instances the academic departments did not clearly identify linkages between data collected over several years and its relationship to the assessment process. For example, for some programs available direct summative evidence was not regularly reviewed. When reviewed, evidence was analyzed based on a set of arbitrary benchmarks rather than ones chosen with intentional consideration of a meaningful level of learning. In other program reviews, SLO-based evidence in support of decision making for programmatic change was not evident. In stark contrast, programs utilized a thorough and thoughtful external review process to obtain significant feedback from external reviewers that informed a dialogue for making changes and garnering needed resources. This aspect of the program review process is very effective and highly regarded among program faculty. Overall, monitoring the student experience is consistently evident, providing a rich resource to use in conjunction with the direct evidence of student learning.

In general, the faculty interviewed recognized the importance of program reviews and indicated these reviews are used by the College to support the initiatives of their departments. As the College continues developing its strategic plan and related budgeting process, it is important that evidence of learning gathered as a part of the program reviews be integrated into institutional planning efforts.

Periodic feedback on an annual basis regarding assessment practices has been thoroughly established, based on criteria and a cycle of review finalized in 2009. The previous program

review and the program assessment plans were not integrated as currently is the case. A standard of practice for providing feedback on the integrated system is now only taking shape. The College should continue these efforts with the intent to include substantive conclusions as feedback on the quality of the assessment plan, the benchmarking of results, and the impact of assessments on program decision-making. Further, and most importantly, the feedback should be in a form that contributes to improved student learning with consequent institutional support.

Program Review: CORE. As discussed under Section II - Theme “A” above, Occidental’s program review of the CORE has been exemplary. The key learning outcomes for students have been identified and there is a schedule for continuing review in four areas of the CORE. In addition, past reviews of SLOs have led to major changes in the CORE program, the most recent of which was 2009-2010. That review of the CORE included an external visiting team and the College’s own review and assessment. The CORE faculty utilize multiple means of assessment including assessments of classroom assignments, student surveys, transcript analysis, focus group discussions, and course evaluations to evaluate their success in meeting the learning outcomes established for the program. The revisions which were agreed upon by faculty in the spring of 2011 were based on solid evidence collected and analyzed during that program review process. The review established that the College needed to hire additional faculty committed to teaching within the program, that pre-med students had difficulty meeting the 16 unit CORE requirement, that the global literacy goal was not being met by the current program, that the gap between theory and practice in the fine arts needed to be reduced, and that there was a need for a hands-on laboratory science requirement. There was less agreement between the Occidental faculty and the external reviewers over the whether the program was meeting the writing goals established for it.

Still, program review in the area of writing is especially well advanced; CORE learning outcomes are integrated and coordinated with the efforts of the Center for Writing Excellence. Members of the Visiting Team found ample evidence that academic departments pursued the

evaluation of student writing through direct assessment of senior theses and junior level research papers. The Team also found evidence that departments adjusted their requirements in light of their findings from the systematic and direct assessment of student writing.

During our meetings on campus with the CORE leadership, there was ample evidence of student appreciation of the CORE requirements. These expressions were often spontaneous in our meetings with students in conversations not focused on the CORE. Students were aware of the learning goals of the CORE and noted that they had often pursued topics they initially avoided—only to find themselves fascinated and engaged in the materials. In our official meetings with CORE faculty and leaders, students were effusive in their praise for their experience with the program. Among the learning outcomes students cited were improvement in their speaking ability, their self-confidence in developing a critical perspectives, their ability to listen and respond to others with civility and respect. There was high praise for instructors in the program and for the pleasure students took in undertaking the research involved in pursuing their topics.

The teaching staff was equally positive about the CORE program. Significantly, concerns regarding the use of adjunct faculty appear to have diminished in part because of the high quality and long-term involvement of most adjuncts teaching in the CORE. In particular, the staff noted that the number of adjuncts teaching in the CORE now mirrors the numbers in the College as a whole. In short, the program has been able to hire and retain a group of experienced adjuncts (with basically non-tenure track full time positions) whose energy and involvement with the program are valued highly.

As a result of the program reviews of the CORE, a number of changes and innovations are now in place that closely position the program's learning goals with the mission of the College. These

include closer attention to the fine arts, stronger emphasis on global coverage in the curriculum, stronger quantitative requirements, and greater use of the opportunities available in Los Angeles. Many of these elements are likely to re-enforce the directions which will emerge from the strategic planning process. Members of the Strategic Planning Task Force have overlapped with the membership of the CORE review teams; consequently, there is a potential for good coordination between the learning goals identified in both. Similarly, the budgetary issues in mounting the revitalized CORE are familiar to those involved in the strategic planning group.

More recently, CORE faculty have focused on the fine arts requirement. Juniors and seniors were surveyed regarding satisfaction with the program and goal attainment. Results were positive in regard to program learning goals, but there was concern about how students were fulfilling the requirement. The assessment report was shared with the Fine Arts Task Force and will be the subject of review by the CORE Curriculum Task Force.

All considered, Occidental has achieved a highly developed level of assessment and in the case of the CORE, and particularly in regard to student writing, has closed the assessment loop in an impressive fashion.

Using the WASC Program Review Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Reviews results in the following determinations: Required Elements (Developed) - SLOs, methods of assessment, and evaluation of results have all occurred. Process of Review (Emerging) - The addition of enhanced means of direct assessment of student learning would benefit the program outside of writing. Planning and Budgeting (Developed) - The Institution has made efforts to integrate the results of the review into budget planning. Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts (Developed) - The assessment reports are very thorough and

provide excellent support for program improvement. Student Experience (Developed) -

Considerable effort has been expended to ascertain the student experience.

Program Review: Biochemistry. The Bachelor of Arts in Biochemistry is an interdisciplinary department which relies on the collaboration of the Biology and Chemistry departments. It is currently co-chaired by a faculty member from each department. This department's graduates represent approximately 3% of the total degrees at Occidental. The program review of Biochemistry was conducted in 2010-2011 and included data on graduates, an average of 13 students over the last six years evenly divided between men and women (CFR 2.7). The review consisted of the elements described in Occidental's "Assessment Handbook 2011" under "Program Review Guidelines." That is, the department prepared a "Program Assessment Plan," wrote a "Self-Study," and conducted an external review, resulting in a "Summary of Findings." An "Action Plan" defined as a "documented plan written by the Dean of the College in consultation with members of the program that outlines the focal points to be addressed . . . , and sets a timeline for implementing changes and review," culminates the Program Review Process (Assessment Handbook 2011, p. 20.). In the case of Biochemistry, there is a document entitled "Biochemistry Faculty Meeting with Dean Gonzalez."

Both the Biochemistry self-study and external review are very comprehensive and reflective documents covering the mission of the department, its students, its curriculum and courses, faculty, facilities and equipment, program oversight, as well as issues regarding its sustainability. The program's curriculum goals and "means for students to achieve these goals" are also included. In addition, characteristics of the graduates from the program are described, including numbers of scholarships and awards, their career paths, and results of a survey of alumni and current majors "regarding their opinions on the Biochemistry Program." According to the self-study, nearly all

biochemistry majors “demonstrate their competency in the broad topics of biochemistry as judged by scores above the 50% rank on a comprehensive exam” (Biochemistry Program Review, pp. 7-9).

An area of concern raised in both the program review self-study and the external review documents is the fact that its success in terms of attracting students has presented an increasingly difficult staffing challenge, and, in particular, an underlying tension as the departments contributing to the program compete for the resources to support it. Added to this is the struggle for a sense of identity both among faculty and students in the program. Students report feeling “like second-class citizens” and faculty, whose offices and classrooms are not in the same building, have “no formal mechanism ... to meet and exchange information and ideas” (Review of Biochemistry Program, p. 9). Another major concern is the growing number of majors and the resulting strain on faculty time and resources, for which a solution has been to hire ever increasing numbers of adjuncts. Given the high value placed on mentoring the Biochemistry majors through their undergraduate research based on the knowledge that encouragement and consistent interactions outside the classroom are important factors in their students’ success, this solution is considered to be particularly ineffective (Biochemistry Program Review, p. 6). Additional issues arising from the external review are the need to revise two courses to eliminate overlap and the need to revise senior comprehensives to reduce faculty workload.

The culmination of the review process was a conversation with the faculty members and Dean Gonzalez. This appears to be the opportunity for the College to align its resources with the needs of the department. Issues of concern raised in both the self-study and external review are addressed in the “Biochemistry Faculty Meeting with Dean Gonzalez” document. The minutes reflect that consideration is being given to such things as “hiring at least one additional faculty member in each department,” and “ways to reconfigure research labs, offices and teaching spaces

in the two buildings so as to increase interaction between faculty, staff and students from the two departments.” The decisions in the document are expressed as “Action needed by the Dean” and do align with the needs as expressed in the program review self-study and external review; however, there is no indication of a firm commitment to allocating the resources needed, nor is there a timeline for implementing the decisions or for further review of the issues.

A meeting with the co-chairs of the Biochemistry Program revealed that the program review process is an opportunity for them to thoughtfully and intensely engage with the issues and concerns of the program. Certainly, the documents themselves are extremely thorough. However, formal assessment of the learning outcomes of the program was something in which they felt they lacked expertise and motivation, and, reflective of this, assessment was touched on in the reports, but not in a formal or cohesive way. In fact, the Biochemistry Mission Statement, Goals, and Outcomes Assessment document concludes with an article which argues against the necessity of assessing student outcomes. However, the faculty have agreed upon the use of a nationally normed examination intended for biochemistry seniors. They have determined that a score of 50% is a reasonable standard of expectation for determining satisfactory student learning outcomes. Following the evaluation of student scores on this test the program faculty have adjusted both courses and teaching methodology.

The WASC Program Review Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Reviews provides an objective means to evaluate the Biochemistry Program Review process:

Required Elements (Emerging): The Biochemistry Department provides the program’s learning outcomes, and summarizes their assessment findings. The assessments include transcript evaluation and a comprehensive examination (either the GRE-Biochemistry exam or the American Chemical Society exam), the latter providing direct evidence of student’s learning of the key

concepts of the major. However, when asked, the co-chairs of the department were unable to explain why the 50% benchmark was chosen to determine if students will “pass” their senior comprehensive. Thus, it appears to be randomly selected, rather than based on any national norms, or any internal evaluation. In addition, there is no indication that the results of the exam are analyzed other than holistically, which provides no depth of information on students’ learning. Finally, there is no indication of what changes will be implemented based on the information gathered, and, given this, no indication of “closing the loop” by gathering “evidence concerning the impact of these changes” (WASC Program Review Rubric).

Process of Review (Emerging): The Biochemistry internal review addresses evidence of student learning, but only in a descriptive and not evaluative way. The questions that the department requested that the external reviewers cover did not include any reference to the assessment of student learning; therefore, there was no mention of student learning in the external review document.

Planning and Budgeting (Developed): The Biochemistry Program Review culminated with a discussion with the Dean about the issues raised in the internal and external reviews. This is a formal part of the program review process, and indicates that the program reviews are systematically integrated into the College’s planning and budgeting process; however, in the case of this review, there were no commitments made to the department, and no timeline for further review.

Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts (Initial): In speaking with the Biochemistry faculty, it was apparent that some faculty perceive the support available to departments for assessment purposes is limited. While there is an “Assessment Handbook 2011,” it is obviously a very new document, and so not yet a familiar reference. The Biochemistry faculty reported that they did not

feel supported in their assessment efforts, and did not receive any feedback on their assessment plans, studies, etc.

The Student Experience (Highly Developed): Students are “respected partners in the program review process.” They are solicited for and provide evaluative feedback for the Biochemistry department in the form of a “Majors and Alumni Assessment of the Program’s Learning Goals” survey. In addition, majors are involved in research projects through the Undergraduate Research Center in which they offer poster sessions on their work.

Program Review: Economics. In the spring of 2011 the Economics Department at Occidental College underwent a Self-Study Program Review that also included an external review (conducted in April 2011). The program review as presented is fairly comprehensive with coverage of departmental activities, student feedback, assessment planning, faculty vitae, class learning tools, and other required documents necessary to the program review process. (CFR 2.4)

The Economics program faculty have updated their assessment plan several times since the last Program Review in 2004. The current 2010 revision (reviewed below) of the assessment plan has become more specific in terms of the learning goals and learning outcomes deemed important for Occidental students majoring in Economics. Measurement rubrics describe varying levels of success for each learning outcome. However, these assessment planning activities do not appear to extend down to the course level. Utilizing the “WASC Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes,” the outcomes listed are assessable and appear to be “highly developed” -- rubrics depict levels of mastery for all outcomes. However, the alignment of learning outcomes would be considered “initial” because curriculum mapping reflects only learning goals and not the learning outcomes associated with those goals. A refined curriculum mapping process for each specified outcome would clarify and address this criterion. More detailed planning for each program outcome is necessary, along with details on when and how

each outcome will be assessed and how improvements based on findings will be implemented. Finally, the student experience would be considered “initial” based on the lack of any course-level learning goals and outcomes and the lack of direct evidence. Further, as evidenced by course syllabi in Appendix 7, there appears to be no indication of any course-level goals or outcomes informing the program goals and outcomes in most, if not all, syllabi. (CFR 2.3, 2.6)

The program faculty has gone to great lengths to identify a variety of class learning tools, which may provide example for other programs in the institution. While these tools are carefully identified and indicate courses for which they are applicable, there is no comprehensive mapping of the measures to specific outcomes at the program or course level. Further, there appears to be no direct evidence within the program review that these measures are being utilized for evaluating student learning. Reports presented in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 indicates some measures of student learning but they are not linked to any learning outcomes at the program or course level. The scores for the MFT and GPA scores are not tied back to the learning outcomes at any level. A list of honors projects reveals no direct evidence of learning and the senior survey results, while valuable evidence of the student experience is only an indirect measure. Greater emphasis on systematically collected direct evidence tied to specific program and course learning outcomes is needed. Further, such evidence should give indications of lessons learned through the evaluation process, reflections made by faculty in the program, and a reporting of both course and program changes that resulted from the assessment planning process (CFR 2.7).

The external reviewers noted in their April 2011 report that understaffing “remains a chronic problem.” They also concurred with program faculty on the need to develop the current two-course introduction to the major into a single course; additional curricular changes were recommended.

The “WASC Program Review Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment in Program Reviews” provides an objective means to evaluate the Economics Program Review process:

*Required Elements [Initial - Program faculty may be required to provide a list of program-level student learning outcomes.]:* The Economics Department provides adequate indication of program-level student learning outcomes but their summary findings are not linked to each outcome. Findings also lack any comprehensive reflection or recommendations for change based on benchmarking with peer programs. The plan reflects only the goals that will be assessed and not when outcomes are to be assessed, findings, and resulting changes. (CFR 2.7)

*Process of Review [Emerging - Internal and external reviewers address indirect and possibly direct evidence of student learning in the program; they do so at the descriptive level, rather than providing an evaluation.]* The Economics Department internal review addresses evidence of student learning, but only in a descriptive and not evaluative way. Further, it is not entirely clear as to the questions the department requested the external reviewers cover for the 2011 review. It appears that the 2011 review was an examination of what has transpired since the 2004 review with little reflection on the educational effectiveness of the program. Specifically, the external reviewers state they believe the department is doing more than enough in the way of assessment but does not touch upon any extant evidence of improvements made as a result of the extensive ongoing assessment. It seems, therefore, that because of the many exigencies the department has to deal with as described in the external review, little to no attention was afforded the department’s assessment activities. (CFR 2.7)

*Planning and Budgeting [Developed - The campus generally integrates program reviews into planning and budgeting processes, but not through a formal process.]* The Economics Program Review culminated with a discussion with the Dean about the issues raised in the internal and external reviews. This is a formal part of the program review process, and indicates that the program reviews are systematically integrated into the College's planning and budgeting process; however, in the case of this review, there were no commitments made to the department, and no timeline for further action regarding the concerns raised by the external review, especially as related to educational effectiveness. (CFR 2.7)

*Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts [Initial - No individual or committee on campus provides feedback to departments on the quality of their outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, impact, etc.]* In speaking with the Economics faculty, it was apparent that there are many limiting factors at the College level to move forward with comprehensive support to departments for the assessment process. While much of the College's assessment efforts have been ongoing for several years these efforts seem only in the beginning stages of being inculcated as a College-wide culture of assessment, feedback, reflection, and subsequent program improvement. The Economics faculty by their own admission is uncomfortable with assessment and lacks any confidence in their ability to conduct a thorough and comprehensive assessment program. Only in conjunction with recent reaffirmation activities has the faculty felt any support in their assessment efforts, and have not received any feedback on their assessment plans, studies, etc. (CFR 2.7)

*The Student Experience [Initial - Students are unaware of and uninvolved in program review.]* With the possible exception of the senior survey conducted as an indirect measure of student involvement, the program review indicates no attempt to gain student feedback beyond course level evaluations of faculty. There appears to be no additional evidence of a fully integrated

process of involving the students in the “process” of program review. Evidence that some level of presentations is occurring in the Honors program lacks any connection with the program outcomes, rubrics, or process as a whole. Also, there is no evidence that external reviewers have examined the work accomplished by students and how it relates to student learning. (CFR 2.7)

A meeting with the faculty of the Economics Program revealed that the program review process is an opportunity for them to thoughtfully and intensely engage with the issues and concerns of the program relative to their capacity. The documentation provided by the department is extremely thorough. However, formal assessment of the learning outcomes of the program was something in which they felt they lacked expertise, motivation, and confidence in executing. Moreover, as they noted in their annual Assessment Report, they feel they do not have enough of a history of data “to make extensive use of the findings so far.”

Program Review: International Programs Office (IPO). Occidental College states that an important priority of its mission is producing global citizens who can embrace diversity and cultural pluralism on an international level. As evidence of a commitment to this goal, the International Programs Office at Occidental is very well established and growing in importance in regard to campus culture. (CFR 1.5, 2.2a)

The junior year abroad program has been attracting increasing numbers of students each year (increasing from 121 in 2005-2006 to 192 in 2009-2010). Occidental also offers other options for international experience and exchange such as faculty-led research sections that involve international travel during the inter-session, or summer, as part of a course that is offered in the fall or spring semester of a given academic year.

Occidental also has a well-established program for student interns at the United Nations as well as faculty who teach courses to these students while they are in residence in NYC.

In addition to sending students to a wide range of countries throughout the world, Occidental is welcoming international students from a wide range of countries. As international students who were interviewed by members of the WASC committee attest, Occidental provides a warm, welcoming nurturing environment for international students including an elaborate series of orientation meetings and events, extensive guidance and advice ranging from visa requirements and immigration rights to coping with culture shock. International students praised the fact that Occidental provides grants for travel in the United States as well as California, in particular, a series of coordinated series of courses in Environmental Studies that involve travel in California. (CFR 2.13)

There are plans to create more courses that involve international travel in conjunction with Occidental's strategic themes which include global/local (urban) experiences, intellectual and cultural diversity and being part of an engaged community.

Occidental has received external funding for international exchange and diversity. For example, an Irvine grant was awarded to support diversity goals.

In general, conversations with Occidental faculty, administrators, and students indicate there is broad campus support for increasing diversity in regard to students on campus as well as expanding opportunities for international experience both in regard to courses that involve international travel as well as international student enrollment and international student exchange. (CFR 1.5, 2.2a)

The IPO is committed to expanding courses that include an international travel component whether through travel or involving the internet (e.g., Occidental has received a Luce grant to develop on-line courses in Environment and Society to be offered on an international scale). In addition, IPO is committed to creating courses that involve cultural diversity and cross-cultural exchange such as the Summer Richter Program, Project for Peace. (CFR 2.2a)

The IPO also recognizes the important opportunity to become more closely aligned -- indeed more central -- to Occidental's core mission. With this in mind, IPO is working on developing rigorous standards and methods for measuring Student Learning Outcomes including determining methods of assessing the ways in which knowledge and experience gained through international and cultural exchange benefits students throughout their careers and lives. The IPO describes itself as being "on the cusp" of forming an action plan for defining and assessing Student Learning Outcomes. (CFR 2.3, 2.10)

A faculty committee is involved in creating and reviewing courses and programs offered by IPO; in addition to broad faculty support and involvement, the administration (i.e., President, Dean and Associate Deans) assured the team of their deep commitment to the development and expansion of IPO as well. (CFR 2.7) As the IPO annual assessment report indicates, the institution needs to adopt a "long-range plan for study abroad participation and funding." IPO staff recognize that this plan will also need to address opportunities for students regardless of their financial status to participate in overseas programs and opportunities.

Applying the WASC Program Review Rubric indicates that the IPO is at the Initial Level in terms of Required Elements, at the Emerging Level in terms of the Process of Review, at the

Emerging Level in terms of Planning and budgeting, at the Initial Level in terms of Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts, and at the Emerging Level in terms of Student Experience.

*Required Elements [Initial - Program faculty may be required to provide a list of program-level student learning outcomes.]:* The IPO provided the team with a document that states the education abroad learning goals and outcomes that adequately provide for program-level student learning outcomes. At the end of the document there are findings presented from what appears to be an indirect survey of study abroad students. However, there is no linkage with specific program learning outcomes, how they are to be assessed, or any systematic and substantive summation of reflection on what these results mean. Findings also lack any recommendations for change based on benchmarking with peer programs.

Additionally, courses that are integrated specifically with a study abroad experience are not listed nor is there any indication that the courses' learning outcomes complement the program outcomes. There should also be a mapping of these courses onto the program learning outcomes to indicate where program outcomes are being met. Essentially, while there exists the listing of goals and outcomes, there is no formal learning outcomes assessment plan in evidence. (CFR 2.7)

*Process of Review [Emerging - Internal and external reviewers do not address evidence concerning the quality of student learning in the program...]* The IPO internal review addresses only the need to execute student learning outcome assessment. Utilizing the QUIP as the external review it also emphasized the need to implement a systematic and comprehensive assessment planning process. However, neither the program review nor the QUIP review reflects any substantive assessment planning results, findings or indications of improvements tied specifically to their stated learning outcomes. (CFR 2.7)

*Planning and Budgeting [Emerging - The campus generally integrates program reviews into planning and budgeting processes, but not through a formal process.]* The IPO Review is a formal part of the program review process, and indicates that the program reviews have become more systematically integrated into the College's planning and budgeting process; however, in the case of the IPO review, outside the action plan mention in the QUIP document, there have been no commitments made to the department, and no timeline for further action regarding the concerns raised by the external review, especially as related to educational effectiveness. (CFR 2.7)

*Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts [Initial - No individual or committee on campus provides feedback to departments on the quality of their outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, impact, etc.]* While it is stated that the IPO's assessment efforts have been ongoing for several years these efforts seem only in the beginning stages with no systematic plan in evidence. Nor, is there evidence that there exist a culture of assessment, feedback, reflection, and subsequent program improvement within the IPO. It would appear that only in conjunction with recent reaffirmation activities has the IPO felt any support in their assessment efforts, and have not received any feedback on their assessment plans, studies, etc. (CFR 2.7)

*The Student Experience [Initial - Students are unaware of and uninvolved in program review.]* With the possible exception of the survey results at the end of the QUIP document, conducted as an indirect measure of student involvement, the program review indicates no attempt to gain feedback about the student experiences concerning their study abroad activities. There appears to be no additional evidence of a fully integrated process of involving the students in the "process" of program review. The program review lacks any connection with the program outcomes, rubrics, or process as a whole. Also, there is no evidence that external reviewers have examined the work accomplished by students and how it relates to student learning. (CFR 2.7)

## **Other Considerations**

The team also reviewed relevant WASC CFRs not discussed elsewhere in this report, student success, Occidental's response to the financial downturn, and accuracy in marketing.

Pertinent Criteria for Review relating to the Educational Effectiveness visit, but not discussed elsewhere in the report. The sections above covering the three institutional selected themes in the Institutional Report adequately address all of the CFRs under Standard 1 and Standard 2 apart from 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, and 2.14. The collection and analysis of disaggregated student data; achievement, satisfaction, and climate tracking; and student needs/identified and supported is now being addressed by the College (CFR 2.10). Regarding timely, useful information and advising (CFR 2.12) and appropriate use of student services, significant resources are being allocated to career planning and the Institutional Report (p. 47) describes the development of an Advising Center and a Student Early Alert system. An Enrollment Management and Retention Committee is now functioning, which would oversee the needs of transfer students (CFR 2.14).

Because most of the CFRs related to Standard 3 relate to capacity issues rather than being the focus of an EER visit, only two of the CFRs were addressed in the theme narratives. Overall, the Visiting Team has confidence that the College has addressed, and will continue to address the areas identified by this Standard.

While the combination of full-time and part-time faculty give Occidental a faculty of 213, resulting in a student faculty ratio of 9.4—a very admirable ratio, the ratio is not reflective of the pressure expressed to the Team by tenured faculty experiencing ever rising numbers of majors. Using classroom FTE the ratio rises to 12.4, still more than adequate staffing to provide the

academic program, in general, as required by CFR 3.1, but not reflective of the distribution of students relative to the level of individual mentoring required, such as the senior comprehensive courses. In addition, there are some questions about the distribution of the faculty as noted in the limited number of courses in the geographic areas of Africa, Latin America and Asia. The faculty retirements anticipated in the next few years should allow the College the opportunity to address these lacunae as well as the need for additional resources in the curricular areas the College chooses to emphasize (or that emerge from the strategic planning exercise).

The faculty is well qualified to mount the academic program: 88% hold a doctorate and 93% hold a terminal degree (CFR 3.1, 3.2). There is evidence of a faculty development program and a sabbatical policy. In addition, there are academic support units focused on academic and technological support. There is an ongoing faculty conversation about the desirability of a Center for Scholarship, as a complement to the Center for Teaching Excellence. At the time of the EER visit, the Center for Scholarship had not been formed, but was still a part of the overall discussion.

All relevant CFRs under Standard 4 were addressed in the thematic sections of the Institutional Report (4.2, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8). Overall, the Team affirms Occidental for the systems and structures it has put into place to support its commitment to learning and improvement. The College clearly has the capacity for appropriate planning and assessment, with involvement by multiple constituencies.

### Student Success

Occidental provided data regarding retention (over 90% of freshmen), 6-year graduation rates (84%), and time to completion, which are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. Data from

the College's 18-school comparison group of peer institutions is also part of the ongoing analysis, and are used to ensure that the institution's commitment to "equity and excellence" is honored. However, the data do not include an analysis of student success by areas of study (CFR 2.10). Judging by its retention and graduation rates, the College appears to be doing an excellent job of supporting student learning and success (CFRs 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14). Occidental's Institutional Report (p. 57) reflects data that indicate the College's tracking of demographic groups need more focus and attention; giving these students the support they need is clearly an institutional priority.

The Student Satisfaction and Success Committee, which was formed in Fall 2011, is charged with monitoring student success and appears to be committed to that task. Already several programs and initiatives have been established to serve this purpose. Occidental College's Academic Support Assessment Project (ASAP), a four-year initiative funded by the Teagle Foundation, allows the College to systematically assess "the services that are integrally linked to the academic program and total student education experience" and can be accessed at (<https://oxypedia.oxy.edu/display/ASAP/ASAP>).

### Financial Response to the Downturn

Occidental appears to have achieved a level of financial stability that was lacking in prior years. In making this determination, the WASC Visiting Team reviewed the two most recent financial audits and management letters. The College's endowment is nearing the \$360 million achieved prior to the economic downturn which played havoc with many institutions' endowment funds. Occidental budgeted for an operating surplus this year (2012) of \$117,768 on an operating budget of more than \$90,000,000. However, the surplus is actually anticipated to be substantially larger. This operating surplus would be the second year in a row after two operating deficits in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 occasioned by the financial downturn of the global economy.

The primary reason the institution has been able to avoid continuing operating deficits is that enrollment has risen each of the last three years, increasing by 6.1% from 2008 to 2009, by 5.6% from 2009 to 2010, and by a smaller 1.2% for 2010-2011. This has produced additional revenue over and above the costs associated with enrollment growth and has clearly cushioned the most pronounced effects of the decline in endowment.

Even with the reduction in endowment value, the institution's 2010 endowment represented a very healthy \$150,000 or more per student. Still, because the institution draws down on its endowment on a five year average basis, it projects future reductions in its endowment payout to support college operations. The payout is anticipated to be \$14.8 million in the current year, \$14.3 million in 2012-2013, and \$13.5 million in 2013-2014. It is hoped that the recent increases in gifts and pledges can help to bridge this earnings drawdown decline.

An additional area that requires regular attention is the discount rate on tuition. It had risen to 39% for fiscal 2009-2010, but the institution has made a commitment to holding it steady for the near future and reports that it dropped by 3% for the entering students from Fall 2010 to Fall 2012 by means of careful management of admissions. The College intends to manage this issue with considerable care going forward in order to ensure that target rates are met. It is clear from conversations with Trustees, the President, and the Vice President for Finance and Planning that the College is unable to maintain further increases in the tuition discount rate and must raise additional endowment resources for financial aid purposes. Indeed, given the institution's intention to maintain or even strengthen the diversity of its student body, this finite limitation on financial aid discounting presents a significant dilemma. Does the institution have the requisite resources, or prospects of such resources, to sustain its diversity intentions? In any case, it seems

likely that the administration, through the planning process currently underway, or through other means, will need to make determined efforts to communicate to the faculty the challenges that financial aid realities present to the College and its financial resources.

Enrollment, financial aid expenditures, and tuition discount rates are heavily intertwined and the CPR Team had recommended that the institution carefully monitor the discount rate and the pressure on the financial aid budget occasioned by enrollment growth. Clearly, this is being done. The CPR Team also recommended that the institution determine the appropriate enrollment size for the College. The institution has worked actively on this issue, having created a task force to study the matter. It appears that the strategic planning process will culminate in agreement on a range rather than a specific figure when the planning is completed this spring.

In addition to enrollment issues, the College has responded to a recommendation of the CPR Team and enhanced its advancement operations with new personnel and organizational responsibilities in order to enhance revenue. A new Vice President for Advancement has been appointed and will assume her duties in March. She brings considerable experience in the use of data systems for advancement purposes. A new Director of Advancement Services has been hired and an internal appointment has been made to direct prospect management. Thus, the College has moved to enhance its data –driven fundraising capacity in response to a recommendation from the CPR Team.

The College reports excellent results from these efforts with gifts and pledges in 2011 totaling \$28 million, a significant increase over prior years. Two major gifts, one of \$5 million for the Global Studies Center, and the other of \$3 million for unrestricted scholarships, significantly influenced this success. According to comparative figures published by the investment banking

firm, Prager and Co. LLC, for 2011, depreciation expenses are in line with most financially healthy institutions. The Prager ratios indicate the institution has a good ratio of expendable financial resources to operations, and institutional debt is not excessive.

While the current institutional financial situation has stabilized, the global economic situation has not. There remains considerable uncertainty about future financial conditions that could, once again, adversely affect endowment values. The Vice President for Finances and Planning is currently developing a plan of action that would prepare the institution for such a situation. As noted earlier, the President ordered a five percent reduction in most non-academic budgets in order to build a contingency fund, with the goal of providing seed money for the initial stages of the forthcoming strategic plan. This fund will grow each year. The institution indicated that these funds could serve as a useful reserve in the event of another financial downturn. Additionally, the institution intends that annual operating surplus funds can be partially set aside for contingency purposes as needed. Finally, operational expense reductions might also be needed.

#### Accurate Marketing

Occidental College presents itself to prospective students with honesty and integrity. It represents its costs accurately with a level of detail that allows students and their families to make informed decisions. It does not promise more than it delivers in terms of the curricular and co-curricular opportunities students will enjoy. Nor does it intimate that students, upon graduation, can count on well-paid positions in particular professions. (CFR 1.7, 2.12)

As is appropriate to a liberal arts college, Occidental does not tell prospective students what they might do if they attend Occidental. Instead, Occidental encourages students to ask themselves who they wish to become. Occidental then suggests how it might help them in their efforts toward

that goal. The College communicates this approach in a variety of ways using conventional brochures, student presentations available via YouTube and other social media sites, and a sequence of messages aimed at students who express interest in Occidental.

Occidental is succeeding in attracting a highly qualified and racially/ethnically diverse pool of applicants. At the same time, the College has maintained its high degree of selectivity. (CFR 1.7)

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

#### **Findings**

The WASC Visiting Team found the quality of Occidental leadership to be very high at all levels. The Board of Trustees is actively engaged in providing wise guidance to the president, who has assembled a talented and dedicated team that has strengthened all aspects of the College and has prepared it well to meet both internal and external challenges. The faculty, as it has throughout Occidental's history, has provided leadership as to how Occidental can fulfill its commitment to academic excellence and social diversity. Staff devises creative ways to support Occidental's mission. Students, by leading examined and engaged lives, are living proof of the value of a liberal arts education in the twenty-first century.

#### **Commendations**

1. The Team commends the College for the significant progress made since the March 2010 CPR visit in terms of broad-based campus involvement in institutional planning, stabilizing the College's finances, and strengthening the processes used for program reviews.

2. The Team commends the College for drawing together a highly-energetic and competent leadership team combined with a dedicated faculty that has fully invested itself in pursuing educational quality.
  
3. The Team commends the College for evidencing clear unity around its institutional mission and the recently approved “Vision for Occidental College,” and for the robust process used to develop the forthcoming strategic plan.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Team recommends that as the College finalizes the five-year strategic planning priorities and related budget considerations, those priorities include attention to clearly-articulated Institutional Learning Outcomes. (CFR 1.2, 4.1)
  
2. The College should continue its work to develop an appropriate combination of direct and indirect assessment for courses, programs, and overall institutional student learning, ensuring that assessment is used to improve educational effectiveness. (CFR 1.2, 2.3, 2.7, and 4.6)
  
3. The Team recommends that the program review process be closely linked to the allocation of resources in alignment with the institution’s strategic plan and mission and that it include assessment of student learning outcomes. (CFR 1.2, 2.7)

4. The Team recommends the institution complete the work needed to meet the requirements of the Credit Hour Policy as indicated in the Team's comments on the Credit Hour Policy and Procedures form including proper hours for four and five unit courses as well as formulating a monitoring system.

#### **SECTION IV: SUSTAINABILITY TO NEXT VISIT**

Occidental College has established all of the necessary components to continue its educational effectiveness progress into the future. It has informed and engaged Trustees who are supportive of the institution's mission, devoted to educational quality, and pleased with the institution's leadership team. The President and the Dean of the College have the confidence of the faculty and are providing excellent leadership as they lead the College through the internal and external challenges facing the institution. The soon to be completed strategic plan will establish institutional goals to inform priorities for future decision making. The Dean of the College is committed to leading an extensive and deep program of assessment and evaluation. He has moved the Office of Institutional Research and Planning into his area of direct responsibility; that Office has a knowledgeable and committed staff well versed in assessment and committed to providing the institution with extensive data and analysis.

The team was impressed with the wide range of assessment activity underway and the extent to which all aspects of the institution are under regular review with a firm determination to continue strengthening the College's academic and co-curricular programs wherever possible. The faculty continues its traditional strong commitment to academic excellence and social diversity. Faculty, administration, and staff are active participants in the on-going efforts to enhance institutional excellence.

The assessment and evaluation program of the academic departments is well established and the annual reports to the Dean of the College provide good evidence of student learning and of improvements in the programs. Efforts need to be redoubled, however, to ensure timely adoption of institution-wide student learning outcomes, direct means of assessment for the outcomes, and methods to ensure the results of the evaluation are used to improve the overall learning of students. The program review process is well established and the guidelines are readily available to faculty and staff. However, it is important for the institution to ensure that the guidelines are followed and that assessment of student learning is an integral part of the program review process.

CREDIT HOUR POLICY

Team Report Appendix

CREDIT HOUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Institution: Occidental College

Kind of Visit: EER

Date: February 8-10, 2012

A completed copy of this form should be appended to the team report for all CPR, EER and Initial Accreditation Visits. Teams are not required to include a narrative about this matter in the team report but may include recommendations, as appropriate, in the Findings and Recommendations section of the team report.

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)	Verified Yes/No
Policy on credit hour	Does this policy adhere to WASC policy and federal regulations?	NO
	Comments: <i>While the length of the academic terms adhere to WASC policy and federal regulations, the policy regarding credit hours appears to include only traditional courses, and gives only the "hours of involvement" with no indication of seat time versus outside study time. In addition, the total is a range and the lower end of the range does not meet WASC policy and federal regulations. There is no statement regarding hours of expected involvement in independent study courses; however, there is a statement under internships that indicates a sufficient time expectation for student involvement for internship credit. However, a student interview revealed that at least for a sophomore English course, approximately 6 to 8 hours a week was spent on work outside of class. The institution would be advised to revise their policy on credit hours to be more comprehensive in terms of the types of courses, and to disengage the specification of outside work from seat time. The institution would also be advised to include in the policy statement the means by which the policy is monitored to ensure compliance. In addition, consideration might be given to including in the College's syllabus guidelines a suggestion that faculty include their expectation of outside time required for the course.</i>	
Process(es)/ periodic review	Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)?	NO
	Does the institution adhere to this procedure?	N/A
	Comments: <i>To date we have not received information regarding the course approval process, periodic audits, or any other procedure for the periodic review of credit hour assignments.</i>	
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours?	NO
	Comments: <i>In general, the 4 and 5-unit courses do not meet for the prescribed amount of seat-time, even when calculating based on a 50-minute hour. For example, language courses that are worth 5 units meet for approximately 4.5 hours per week instead of the 5 hours per week required. More importantly, the bulk of courses that carry 4 units meet for only 3 hours per week. For the most part, however, 1-unit courses, such as labs, and two credit senior comprehensives meet for, and in some cases exceed, the required amount of time.</i>	
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid courses	What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)? How many syllabi were reviewed? What degree level(s)? What discipline(s)?	N/A
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded?	
	Comments:	
Sample syllabi or equivalent	What kinds of courses? Labs, comprehensives, practicums, research How many syllabi were reviewed? 12	

for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated)	What degree level(s)? undergraduate What discipline(s)? biology, geology, psychology, art, music performance, theater, history	
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded?	YES
	Comments: <i>Syllabi for courses that are among those not scheduled within the general frame of the course schedule were made available for review. While it was not readily evident from the syllabi how many hours of work were expected, given the apparent rigor of the courses, particularly the senior comprehensives, practicums and independent studies, it might be concluded that the time spent was adequate or in excess of the requirement. This was reinforced by an interview with a student who indicated that he spent 60-80 hours outside of class time on his senior comprehensives. The College might consider including more information in their policy statement on non-traditional courses vis-à-vis how they meet the minimum requirements. Also, as stated above, the College's syllabus guidelines might suggest to faculty that they include an indication of the amount of time they estimate a student will spend outside of class time on the course.</i>	