

# PACIFIC UNION COLLEGE

## *Seeking to Articulate a Collective Vision*

FALL 2005

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### INTRODUCTION

As a part of the first stage of self-review, the PUC WASC Planning Committee chose to initiate a campus-wide process of inquiry and conversation about our current self-identity and our vision for the future. This process had two parts: first, we sought a collective vision of our current state; then, we pondered our vision for the future, and the problems that need to be addressed as we move toward that vision. The purpose of this process—beyond the desire to engage many segments of our community in the WASC dialogue—was both to articulate a collective vision and to identify possible themes and problems to address in the self-study.

### I. SEEKING A COLLECTIVE VISION

#### *A. The Question and the Process*

On a variety of occasions throughout the fall of 2005<sup>1</sup>, various stakeholders, who identified themselves as faculty, staff, administration, board member, or student,<sup>2</sup> were asked to answer one question, in writing, without thinking too much about it. We wanted a “gut,” automatic reaction to this question:

*A prospective student is visiting PUC. He/she assumes that all Adventist colleges offer a good, basic Christian education. BEYOND THAT, what would you say to that student to let him/her know what makes PUC, PUC? In other words, what is the essential characteristic of a PUC education?*

### *B. The Results*

The resulting answers<sup>3</sup> were typed and then read by the WASC PC members, who counted the number of times particular ideas were mentioned. The most commonly cited ideas were:

1. Spirituality
2. Quality/caring faculty
3. Beautiful rural location
4. Quality academics
5. Warm, caring community
6. Diversity
7. Challenging students to think for self
8. Small class size
9. Holistic focus
10. Science and pre-professional education
11. Service/mission emphasis

In summary, the top six categories listed above were included in the top 5 rankings of all four of our respondent groups (Faculty, Board/Administrators, Staff, Students). Complete results appear in the attached graph.

## **II. MEETING WITH DEPARTMENTS: WHAT SHOULD WE BE, AND WHAT PROBLEMS DO WE FACE?**

### *A. The Questions and the Process*

The second phase of the process involved visits by each of the four faculty members on the WASC PC to all academic departments (4-5 each), during their regular staff meetings. Discussion took about an hour. All departments were asked to discuss the following questions:

1. *What should PUC be known for?*
2. *How would your department relate to each of the following if it were chosen as a special commitment for PUC? (Areas were Service, Environment, Family/community, and Conversation.)*
3. *What does it mean for your department to be a part of a Christian college?*
4. *What problems limit the ability of your department to fulfill its goals?*

### *B. The Results*

The WASC PC members submitted reports for each department, summing up the general tenor of each conversation; the committee discussed each report at some length. The result was an overview of faculty opinions on the topics. The committee got enough information to get a good feel for current campus climate. While the information we gathered by way of department meetings was similar to that obtained through the broader vision process, there was both far more detail (naturally) and a somewhat different emphasis.

For example, the faculty are more interested in the notion of “asking hard questions” and “challenging students to think for themselves” than other segments of the campus. Our discussion of the reports from the department meetings informs the conclusions which follow. (For details, please see the Departmental Reports in the Appendix.)

In sum, the committee found that the academic departments are strongly invested in PUC’s ability to offer high-quality academic programs. We believe that we are doing so, and that we would like to continue to make teaching<sup>4</sup> our highest priority. There is also wide-spread campus support for the importance of service to our sense of mission. The other area which generated enthusiasm among faculty was the idea of “conversation,” between and among everyone in our community. Finally, a number of problems were brought to light (noted in C, below).

### III. CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

#### A. *What We Learned*

As a result of this two-part process, the committee finds that we do indeed have a collective vision of ourselves:

**Pacific Union College is a Seventh-day Adventist Christian residential college in a rich natural environment; we are a diverse and caring community committed to liberal arts values, the development of the whole person, quality teaching, and service to others.**

We also find that current self-descriptions look very much like past statements of PUC’s mission and strategic planning. As early as 1945 we find references to the “whole being” and the “joy of service”; a statement from the 1980’s notes our “richly diverse” campus, “dynamic teachers,” and “beautiful location.” Current students and alumni from the distant past do share a similar vision of what PUC is, or strives to be.

#### B. *Potential Themes for the Self-Study*

- **A CULTURE OF SERVICE:** This theme would include service now, but also preparation for a life of service. In the words of our catalog: “a disposition to do the good we see.” Many emphasized a need for voluntary service, intrinsically motivated (not by credits or money), especially service to the needs of our local (Howell Mountain and Napa Valley) communities.
- **CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAITH AND LEARNING:** A safe, but not overprotective community where academic freedom and Christian commitment are complementary, not oxymoronic; where challenging questions are welcomed as part of a vital and diverse learning community—in the dormitories, the dining commons, the athletic fields, and the church; in hallways as well as classrooms, workplaces as well as faculty and staff homes.

### *C. Problems Noted*

1. A need to deal with student perceptions that they are being infantilized by student life requirements;
2. A need to deal with the inadequate buildings/facilities for some departments;
3. A need to coordinate future strategic planning with the on-going WASC process, including a link between planning and budgeting;
4. A need to develop a “quality-control” mechanism where evidence of student learning is consistently sought;
5. A need to improve the preparation of our incoming students, perhaps by adding high school prerequisites or by basing admission decisions on minimum CPI rather than GPA;
6. A need to increase levels of academic support, in the form of regular and increased equipment, faculty development, and sabbatical budgets;
7. A need to revise the teacher evaluations so that they become learning evaluations;
8. A need to improve the advising process;
9. A need to monitor teacher loads and make sure that anomalous situations (such as that of religion teachers, who are constantly in demand for speaking engagements, counseling, etc.) are fairly accounted for;
10. A need to ensure that non-teaching staff (from gardener to administrator to “the sandwich guy”) feel that they are genuinely part of our learning community.

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### **(Footnotes)**

1 Colloquium September 22; Board meeting October 2; Campus Colloquy October 13.

2 Many of our faculty, staff, administrators, and board members are also alumni, a category we did not provide.

3 Responses were gathered from 17 salaried staff members, 84 faculty, 17 board members, 2 administrators, and 610 students (not all questions were marked).

4 We believe that high-quality teaching necessarily implies student learning. No matter how interesting, entertaining, cutting-edge, or charming—if the students are not learning, the teaching cannot be given highest marks.