

San Jose
State University

Executive Summary Consultation Report

Review of Division of Student Affairs

Keeling & Associates, LLC (K&A) has completed a comprehensive review of the Division of Student Affairs of San Jose State University (SJSU), including the Division's mission, vision, direction, organization, structure, administration, management, programs and services, resources, facilities, and infrastructure. The review, conducted between May and August 2008, included a rigorous self-study process that engaged every department and unit in the Division.

The Division is a large, complex organization with broad responsibility for enrollment; retention; and student life, engagement, and learning. The Division's multiple departments and units provide essential programs and services that shape the learning environment, create a sense of true community on campus, remove barriers to learning, and improve students' readiness to learn. As is true in many other divisions of student affairs today, the leaders, directors, and professional staff have stretched their resources -- which are, in many units at SJSU, exceedingly limited -- to provide competent, caring, and effective services. Their diligence in doing so may mislead observers into believing that Student Affairs has what it needs to deliver what is required -- but the Division's ability to manage its resources carefully enough to ensure that students receive the basic services they need should not be confused with sufficiency of those resources. On the contrary, the Division has not only learned to "do more with less," but also to prioritize, focus on the greatest needs of the moment, and cope with extremely limited organizational depth, or "bench."

The cost of those accommodations has been, is, and will continue to be significant; as consultants, we have serious concern about the Division's long-term sustainability absent improvements in its resources. Forced into a tactical modus operandi, the Division has little time for reflection, strategy, and vision. It is oriented toward process and operational effectiveness rather than impact and outcomes; efficiency has high -- and in some departments, the highest -- value. Given this emphasis on process, efficiency, and task completion, management has become more important (and more prevalent) than leadership; direction-setting is subjugated to problem-solving.

But as it faces anticipated further financial cutbacks and the need for retrenchment, it is essential that the Division focus on strategy. While a traditional tactical approach may have to be used in the immediate term, as it has been in the past, the Division can create healthier, better, and more effective processes of reassessing and allocating resources for the longer term by developing evidence-based and data-driven processes of informing major senior leadership decisions. In the immediate term, we recommend that the Division centralize and streamline administrative resources and management of infrastructure and technology in a restructured Office of the Vice President; consolidate certain departments and functions (including advisement, health and counseling, access programs, and many small departments in Enrollment Services); develop new sources of non-tuition and non-fee revenue, while increasing fee revenues and making them more flexible; and complete a theory-based reorganization that will improve collaboration, reduce redundancy, and increase opportunities.

Busy with day-to-day needs and challenges, it has been hard for the Division to come together as a cohesive whole -- to develop a consistent sense of universality -- after the major reorganization that brought enrollment functions back into its portfolio two years ago. There is real hunger among both directors and staff members for greater Divisional coherence, and there is real willingness to reconsider practices, policies, and operations -- and, especially, to focus the Division's efforts ever more sharply on student learning and success.

The extraordinary opportunity to improve student learning -- an increasingly central focus of the work of Student Affairs everywhere -- could slip from the Division's grasp if it cannot solve its problems. There are internal needs -- reorganization, centralization of core infrastructure, refocusing, redirection -- but factors external to the Division may ultimately control its ability to address those needs; the constraints of antique SJSU human resource policies and practices, poor campus technology infrastructure, budget cuts, and

competition among divisions for limited dollars (and other resources) could easily weaken the force and impact of any combination of internal changes implemented. Morale, already a serious concern in many units, will be further undermined by the continuation of existing patterns of human resource management at the institutional level -- and especially by the lack of rigorous accountability. In this time of campus transition, institutional advocacy will be a critical and essential activity for the Division and its leadership.

Assessment, which is essential to a focus on learning and to an emphasis on quality improvement, requires further attention and development in the Division. This is especially true regarding the assessment of student learning, as opposed to operations and processes. In the Division, there has been some good, if somewhat preliminary, work on defining desired student learning outcomes -- but less on assessing and responding to results of the assessment of those outcomes.

Student Affairs at SJSU provides solid core services. It can, and should, do far more to meet the demands of its mission. Whether it will is a complex question -- not because the Division is unaware of its opportunities, or disinterested in its goals, but because it may, or may not, be able to given the institutional and System constraints it faces.