

Occidental College TPR Proposal

The Urban Liberal Arts Experience

12/13/2019

Executive summary:

Occidental is one of a handful of liberal arts colleges located in a major urban center. Los Angeles is a nexus of immense creativity, diversity, and complexity, a place where the world's opportunities and problems play out on a daily basis—offering our students an education like no other, and unparalleled preparation for the world into which they will graduate.

For the last 10 years, Oxy has made a set of strategic investments intended to enhance the educational experience of our students through a deep engagement with the opportunities inherent in our location. These investments have taken the form of strategic partnerships with cultural and civic institutions, community engagement opportunities, industry relationships, among other initiatives. We are pleased with the progress we have made to date. But we have more work to do. Thus far, our efforts have given Occidental an urban profile that has had a positive impact on our admissions, appealing to students who come to us because they are attracted to this type of programming. It has also had a positive impact on our students from under-represented communities, allowing them an organic way to reach out to communities of color and immigrant diasporas that provide an additional sense of welcome and support--thereby improving retention and graduation rates.

Ultimately, our goal is to take passionate, committed students and introduce them to the elements necessary to produce lasting social change. We do this by exposing them to the complex dynamics of an urban environment composed of social actors that include city government, media, business, community organizations and social movements. By the time our students graduate, we hope we have cultivated effective citizens and change agents familiar with the levers of power available to them. Whether we have done so effectively or not is the subject of the review we are proposing to undertake with your guidance and support. Our Thematic Pathway for Reaccreditation will guide us in the development of more robust assessment strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of our investments in the urban liberal arts educational enterprise, and will help direct our efforts for the next iteration of this institutional priority.

Overview of the institution:

The mission of Occidental College is to provide a gifted and diverse group of students with a total educational experience of the highest quality—one that prepares them for leadership in an increasingly complex, interdependent and pluralistic world. The distinctive interdisciplinary and

multicultural focus of the College's academic program seeks to foster both the fulfillment of individual aspirations and a deeply rooted commitment to the public good.

The mission is anchored by four cornerstones: excellence, equity, community and service. These building blocks, in one form or another, have long been the basis for the College's commitment to providing responsible leaders and citizens for our democratic society. Choosing them to support the future helps to ensure that the College remains true to its mission while adapting to a changing world.

History - Founded in 1887, Occidental was one of the first liberal arts colleges in California and remains one of the small number of colleges nationwide focused strictly on undergraduate education. Its first Rhodes Scholar was named in 1907, and its Phi Beta Kappa chapter was established in 1926 – one of the first at a western liberal arts college. Although established by a group of Presbyterian ministers and laymen, the College has been non-sectarian since 1910. The Eagle Rock campus opened in 1914.

Curriculum - Occidental's brand of the liberal arts produces students who can analyze and synthesize complex materials, develop and communicate new knowledge, take risks, tolerate ambiguity, and embrace difference. Students choose from 44 majors and minors. Each major culminates in a comprehensive examination or project. Course work is integrated with opportunities for independent study, original research, study in dozens of foreign countries, and participation in one of the country's few United Nations programs and the only Campaign Semester program for undergraduates.

Faculty - Occidental's greatest strength is its superb, award-winning faculty. The relationship between teacher and student is at the heart of everything we do. Although Oxy's 188 full-time faculty members regard teaching as their primary responsibility, all are actively engaged in research or creative work that informs their teaching. Occidental is a national leader among liberal arts colleges as measured by federal research awards. Some 31 percent of full-time faculty are people of color.

Students - Since 1990, Occidental students and alumni have won more than 260 major scholarships and fellowships, including Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Fulbright, CORO, and Goldwater scholarships. Occidental is one of the country's top producers of Fulbright scholars and students who go on to receive the Ph.D. Since 1980, more than 800 graduates have attended medical or dental school. Occidental is regularly ranked as one of the most diverse of the country's top liberal arts colleges.

Process for the development of themes:

Beginning in Fall 2018, our Accreditation Liaison Officer, Ester Rogers, tasked the members of our senior leadership team with choosing a theme. Because the President had already charged Oxy's three newest VPs: our VP for Academic Affairs, our VP for Diversity and Inclusion and

Chief Diversity Officer, and our VP for Student Affairs, with developing objectives that could fulfill our Strategic Plan priorities in their respective areas, we initially planned to focus our WSCUC theme on this strategic plan “refresh” focusing on the areas of academic planning, the student experience, and diversity and inclusion. After attending the special TPR session at ARC, our ALO advised our leadership team to rethink our expansive proposed theme and to narrow down our focus to a specific critical issue that could engage the broader campus community.

We decided to focus our TPR theme on a specific element of the academic planning strategic planning effort, as there is widespread buy-in within the academic program around the ideas first articulated in our 2012 strategic plan--that of the “urban liberal arts”. It is our identity as an urban liberal arts college that is the core of our TPR theme, and the specific assessment projects we will undertake during the TPR process will prepare us for a further evolution of our distinctive identity as the premiere urban liberal arts institution in the US.

Listed below are the members involved in the theme planning process along with our current WSCUC working group which will be expanded in the next academic year.

Listed below are the members involved in the theme planning process along with our current WSCUC working group which will be expanded in the next academic year.

TPR Proposal Group:

1. Kristi Allen, Associate Vice President of Institutional Planning
2. Rob Flot, Vice President for Student Affairs & Dean of Students
3. Amos Himmelstein, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
4. Ester Rogers, Assistant Dean for Institutional Assessment and Accreditation;
Accreditation Liaison Officer
5. Marty Sharkey, Vice President of Marketing and Communications
6. Wendy Sternberg, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College
7. Jonathan Veitch, President

Throughout the Summer and Fall 2019, the TPR Proposal Group worked diligently to identify a theme to guide the TPR process. Now that this phase of the project is complete, the group will be reconstituted during the Fall 2019 semester as the “Accreditation Team”. Led by Wendy Sternberg and Ester Rogers, the accreditation team will have students, faculty and staff members who will be tapped to lead the effort, including:

Celestina Castillo, Director of the Center for Community Based Learning
Jacalyn Cameron, Director of Institutional Research
Edmond Johnson, Director of Advising, coordinator of the LA Encounters
John Lang, Faculty Council President
Kevin Mulroy, College Librarian
Monika Moore, Director of the Office of Alumni and Parent Engagement

Marsha Schnirring, Secretary of the Board
Nina Srdic Hadzi-Nesic '21, ASOC President
Cherena Walker, Director of the Hameetman Career Center

(note: these individuals or their designees will comprise the Accreditation Team).

The Accreditation Team (also known as the Outcomes Assessment Team) will consult frequently with the TPR Proposal group members listed above to ensure that all efforts are coordinated and aligned with the theme.

Description of each theme:

The theme grew out of a strategic planning exercise initiated at the college nearly 10 years ago that identified our location as a key differentiator and a fundamental element of our educational approach. The College is surrounded by world-class cultural institutions--The Getty, the L.A. County Museum of Art, the Japanese-American National Museum--as well as internship and employment opportunities that range from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, to the entertainment industry in Burbank, to fashion, law, international trade and financial services in downtown Los Angeles. This focus on our urban context as a strategic priority elicited a broad consensus among our faculty, in part because it proved to be a remarkably expansive umbrella that covered a variety of concerns and aspirations: diversity, civic engagement, urban policy, institutional partnerships, career opportunities, etc.

After our last review by WSCUC, we sat down to figure out how we could take advantage of this unique set of opportunities. We did that through a comprehensive strategic planning effort that included broad participation from the entire community of faculty, administration, trustees, staff, alumni and students. The result was a Strategic Plan, launched in 2012, that was endorsed by all of these major stakeholders. That document has guided our efforts ever since, providing us with coherence in branding, fundraising, and investment that defines much of what we have accomplished over the last ten years. In order to ensure that we got out of the gate as quickly as possible, we trimmed almost two million dollars from our operating budget and set aside those funds to pay for the implementation of our urban vision.

The first step in taking advantage of our location was to get our students out into the city, and encourage them to see Los Angeles as a place where the world's problems and opportunities are being played out on a daily basis. This presents our students and faculty with an unparalleled opportunity to shuttle between the classroom and the field in pursuit of a better understanding of issues like the persistence of poverty, homelessness, density and public transportation, architecture and urban planning, *et al.* By approaching the city in this way, faculty are able to create "signature" courses that provide a range of project-based, immersive experiences for our students. This gives them a deeper appreciation of the social, political,

economic and cultural complexities that shape our most urgent social concerns—better equipping them for their role as citizens of a democracy.

We supplemented this immersive experience in Los Angeles by building up the following areas:

- Developing courses based on major museum exhibitions, theater productions, musical events
- Establishing on-going partnerships with major cultural institutions such as the Autry Museum of the American West, the Huntington Library, Boston Court Theater, et al.
- Enhancing civic engagement opportunities for students that enabled them to work directly with NGOs focused on racial justice, homelessness, college-readiness, etc.
- Mounting an annual public lecture series on the future of Los Angeles
- Hiring faculty with expertise and teaching interests in urban subjects across the curriculum
- Bringing in prominent actors in government, culture and journalism through our “Professors of the Practice” program to share their experience with students
- Growing the faculty in our Urban and Environmental Policy department
- Establishing the LA Encounters program
- Establishing the OxyEngage Program
- Establishing an Institute for the Study of Los Angeles

Evidence for success at the institutional level include the following metrics:

Enrollment trends: While total enrollment is declining at liberal arts colleges around the country, student interest in Oxy and our overall enrollment trends are on the upswing. For the most recent 3-year period for which there are data available for both Occidental and peer institutions (IPEDS data: Fall 2015 to Fall 2017), our number of applicants is up 14.4% (average increase for our peer group is 2.5%), and our total enrollment is up 8.8% (peer group increase is .41%).

Support for a diverse student body: We continue to attract a large number of students from underrepresented groups. We have attracted and supported a far more diverse student body than that of our peer group, with students of color comprising 42.5% of our student body, whereas the average of our peers is 25% (2018 data). In addition, for the most recent year for which comparison data are available (2017), our proportion of Pell-eligible students (20.4%) is higher than the average of our peers (14.6%). In addition, although comparison data are not available, our proportion of first-generation students at Oxy is also quite sizeable, with 13% of our students coming from a family in which neither parent earned a college degree (current year data).

Importantly, there are no discernable differences in the achievement metrics of our students of color, under-represented minority students, Pell-eligible students, or first generation students from those students not in those groups, with respect to 1st year retention and 6-year

graduation rates (if anything, retention and 6-year graduation rates are higher in each of these groups compared to their non-SOC, non-URM, non-Pell, and non-first generation counterparts).

We believe that these data support our position that offering a liberal arts education in a diverse urban center is an attractive option for a wide range of college bound students. We are also, as an institution, deeply committed to providing access to an Oxy education to all students, regardless of their ability to pay (as recently featured in a Wall Street Journal Article highlighting our ethical admissions practices).

As encouraging as these data are, we realize that our assessment measures must go beyond the descriptive and truly probe how our investments in programs that connect our students and our curriculum to Los Angeles influence specific student learning outcomes. At the programmatic level, we are in the process of gathering data to assess the effectiveness and the reach of events sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Los Angeles, and the LA Encounters Program.

But that is just the beginning. We recognize that our engagement in the community is bidirectional--we strive for our partnerships with the community to benefit those community partners and enrich the city of Los Angeles, beyond the benefit that accrues to Oxy and Oxy students.

Therefore, our primary project associated with the TPR is to enhance our assessment efforts to focus on the following outcomes for students that participate in LA-based programming:

1. Students will learn how social change occurs in society
2. Students will have an increased capacity to be social change agents
3. Students that have internship placements will have enhanced job placement success
4. Students will continue to be engaged in the Los Angeles community after graduation

We base these outcomes on the Value rubric description of "civic engagement"--that is, "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." (Excerpted from *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000, Preface, page vi.) In addition, civic engagement encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community.

We are also interested in deepening our relationships with community partners and better evaluating the impact of our work with them. Rather than merely encouraging our students to take advantage of these institutions, we want to structure our relationships with them in a more proactive manner. Those partnerships can take a myriad of forms:

- Developing courses built around major exhibitions, concert series, etc. that will provide students with the context and history of the art form they are participating in
- Partnering with major cultural institutions to bring distinguished speakers, musicians, dance troupes, artists to their campus and ours (defraying costs for both)
- Providing internships for our students in a variety of operational capacities in non-profit institutions which are often understaffed and overburdened
- Providing students with research opportunities in service to curators for upcoming exhibitions; training students to serve as docents
- Developing joint public/academic programs that serve the interests of both institutions

Consistent with the Value rubric described above, our assessment efforts associated with the TPR theme will also include an assessment of how our community partners benefit from our programs in ways that are consistent with their own particular goals.

The evaluation plan for this work includes:

- The review of the existing mission, vision, and goals for community based initiatives. Create new goals and outcomes for expansion work.
- The creation of an assessment plan for community-based initiatives, develop measures with Accreditation Team and community partners, paying close attention to how these community-based initiatives support excellence and achievement for all of our students regardless of identity and background.
- Creation of coordinated and robust student portfolio based on participation in co-curricular activities, arts, research opportunities, internships, and opportunities around Los Angeles
- Conduct a thorough review of curriculum at the Core (general education level), activities of academic departments, and co-curricular offices to identify existing opportunities for connection to specific classes and academic experiences
- Review of existing mission, vision, and goals and assessment plans of the Center for Community Based Learning, Oxy Arts, Undergraduate Research Center, and the Career Center to align and create new assessment methods for this project.

While we envision that the work done in this area may be able to align with all of the standards, we see the work most aligned with Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions, and Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement The specific criteria for review (CFRs) associated with this project are: 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 2.8, 2.10, 2.11, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.6.

Finally, our plans for assessing community-engaged outcomes will be of enormous value as we consider the next phase of our development as an urban liberal arts college. We have been considering the integration of our community-based initiatives under the aegis of a newly established Center for Engagement with Los Angeles, funds for which have recently been designated through a generous endowment gift. Before launching such a project, however, we

need to evaluate the effectiveness of the investments made thus far. We welcome the opportunity inherent in the TPR to guide these efforts.

Why is it important for the institution to conduct this work (the rationale)?

There are a number of reasons why we feel that more thoroughly evaluating our work to date with the City of Los Angeles, and deepening our relationship with community partners makes sense for us. As alluded to above, we are one of the few liberal arts colleges located in a major metropolitan area. Outside our door the world's problems and opportunities are being played out on a daily basis. This presents our students and faculty with an unparalleled opportunity to shuttle between the classroom and the field in pursuit of a better understanding of issues like the persistence of poverty, homelessness, density and public transportation, architecture and urban planning, et al. With the resources of the city available to them, our faculty are able to create "signature" courses that provide a range of project-based, immersive experiences for our students. This gives them a deeper appreciation of the social, political, economic and cultural complexities that shape our most urgent social concerns—better equipping them for their role as citizens of a democracy.

Our location in Los Angeles gives us other advantages as well. As a relatively small institution, it is impossible for us to provide the kind of opportunities that larger universities can, by virtue of their size and budget. Similarly, our location differentiates us from other liberal arts colleges like ours, many of which are located in more rural settings. For a relatively modest investment, our students have access to internships with major corporations and non-profit organizations; access to world-class collections and performances; engagement with journalists, artists, politicians and community leaders that other institutions have to import at great expense.

Finally, the focus on our urban context as a strategic priority elicited a broad consensus among our faculty, students and Board, in part because it has proven to be a remarkably expansive umbrella that covered a variety of concerns and aspirations: diversity, civic engagement, urban policy, institutional partnerships, career opportunities, etc. Los Angeles is ground zero for issues ranging from immigration, to transportation, to globalization. It is also in the midst of a massive restructuring that is changing communities and modes of sociability. We want our students to understand those changes and at the same time, equip them with the skills to intervene in thoughtful ways as citizens and thought-leaders.

We have just scratched the surface of what is possible, and we want to use the TPR process to extend and deepen the range of what we do.

What work, if any, has already been done in this area?

As mentioned above, the College already maintains a healthy relationship with its surrounding neighborhoods, with extensive community partnerships that serve our students, the community

partners, and local residents. Several on-campus programs through the Center for Community Based Learning and the Student Leadership, Involvement & Community Engagement Office already serve to get our students into the community in meaningful ways. And many faculty members' scholarly work is directly connected to the local region. We have laid the groundwork for enhancements across the academic disciplines to more meaningfully incorporate our location into the academic program. We are looking forward to continuing and expanding this effort in the coming years, so it is a natural theme for us to consider as we approach our WSCUC accreditation review.

Timeline for each theme:

One could argue that institutional work related to this theme has been ongoing since the development of the 2012 strategic plan for Oxy. Work done in 2017-18 by the Academic Planning Task Force reaffirmed the institution's commitment to the urban/local theme throughout the academic program. The initiatives described above will be undertaken in 2019-20 and 2020-21, with an analysis of progress on these initiatives in late fall 2020, to inform the TPR report prepared in Spring 2021.

TIMELINE

Semester	Task	Key Personnel
Fall 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize TPR proposal 	TPR working group
Spring 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene Accreditation Team Community discussions to identify and prioritize assessment projects related to the theme Identify student outcome measures related to the theme 	-TPR working group -Accreditation Team -Department Chairs -Directors -Hameetman Career Center -Office of Alumni and Parent Engagement
Fall 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection on assessment projects related to the theme Planning for Urban Engagement 2.0 	-Accreditation Team -Campus Community -Senior Leadership -President
Spring 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesize data collected Write draft of report 	-Accreditation Team -Dean of the College and ALO

Fall 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community response to draft, revision of draft report, finalize report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Campus Community -Dean of the College and ALO -Senior Leadership -President
Spring 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WSCUC team visit 	

Resources: what human and financial capital will be needed?

When considering resources that may be needed to advance these initiatives, Occidental would look towards internal reallocation of positions and existing funds to redirect to the theme. We have recently received a gift of \$1M that will create an endowed line of support for LA initiatives. The work related to the TPR theme will allow us to plan for the allocation of this gift.

Further, the urban theme is integrated into our fundraising priorities and foundational to our comprehensive campaign. Through both the combination of existing funds for reallocation and fundraising opportunities, we are creating the avenue to support resources needed to support the theme.

Institutional Stipulation Agreement

This report is submitted in support of our institution’s accreditation review.

I affirm the accuracy of the information presented and the institution’s intention to comply fully with WSCUC’s Standards and policies.

Signed:



Date:

Jonathan Veitch
President, Occidental College