

# CHAPTER 1

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## Introduction

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluates the potential environmental effects that could result from the implementation of the proposed Occidental College Specific Plan (proposed project or Specific Plan), and associated Development Agreement. The Specific Plan (attached as **Appendix A**) describes a detailed approach to the renovation of existing facilities, the construction of new facilities, and infrastructure improvements. The Specific Plan would result in the net addition of up to 550,250 square feet of new development for a total maximum Specific Plan floor area of 1,698,294 square feet. In conjunction with the Specific Plan, Occidental College (project applicant) is not proposing to substantially increase the student body; the existing (mid 2006 for purposes of this EIR) student body is approximately 1,750 students.<sup>1</sup> The current cap on students at the College is 2,000. For purposes of analysis, 2000 students, an increase of just over 10 percent of the existing -- mid-2006 -- student body, is analyzed in this EIR as the future student population; no increase above 2000 students is proposed.

This Draft EIR has been prepared in conformance with state and City of Los Angeles environmental policy guidelines for the implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

### 1.1 Background and Project Overview

Since 2004, Occidental College has engaged in a broadly inclusive planning effort to document a future for its facilities that first and foremost furthers its academic mission, is responsible to the communities that it serves, and will guide the College's response to civic planning and related regulatory requirements. The process of framing such a plan places a premium on measuring the needs of various kinds: the assessment of existing facilities, the demand for new ones and the response to experienced growth and the anticipation of future changes.

Over the years, Occidental College has prepared a number of Master Plans to guide the educational and development plan for the campus. These Master Plans (the most recent version was prepared in 2007) do not require approval by the City of Los Angeles (City), and are internal planning documents. The Occidental Specific Plan is based on the most recent Master Plan,

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<sup>1</sup> This is a conservative approximation of the student population at the time the Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report was published; the actual number was 1,825 in Fall 2006. This student population has been used for the traffic impact analysis, as well as all other sections of this EIR. Student population varies, the 2008 student population is 1,877; in accordance with current permits Occidental is allowed up to 2,000 students. The project would not increase this number, however this EIR analyzes the increase in students from 1,750 to 2,000.

which describes the physical plan for development of Occidental College over the next 20 years and beyond. The entitlement of the proposed Occidental College Specific Plan with the City of Los Angeles will allow the College to meet the space planning challenges of its future needs through 2028 and possibly beyond.

The College's development during the last 25 years reflects a search for new building sites on the perimeter of existing development. The main impetus of the proposed project is to remodel, reconfigure, remove or replace dysfunctional buildings or buildings with limited horizons which do not support the character, scale, quality, function or safety of the College campus.

## 1.2 Purpose and Legal Authority

In accordance with *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15121(a), the purpose of an EIR is to serve as an informational document that will generally inform public agency decision makers and the public of the potentially significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project. *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15151 contains the following standards for EIR adequacy:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decisionmakers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

An EIR is an informational document for use by decision makers and the public in their review of the potential impacts of a proposed project, as well as in the evaluation of alternatives and mitigation measures which may minimize, avoid, or eliminate those impacts. As such, this document includes a full discussion of the project description, the existing environmental setting, environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and residual impacts that may exist after mitigation has been implemented, and project alternatives that could alleviate potential impacts.

To gain the most value from this report certain key points recommended in the *CEQA Guidelines* should be kept in mind:

- This report should be used as a tool to give the reader an overview of the possible ramifications of the proposed project. It is designed as an "early warning system" with regard to potential environmental impacts and subsequent effects on the local community's natural resources; and
- A specific environmental impact is not necessarily irreversible or permanent. Incorporating changes recommended in this report during the design and construction phases of project development can wholly or partially mitigate most impacts, particularly in more developed urban areas.

As the public agency with the authority to approve or deny the proposed project, the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, which is the Lead Agency, will consider the information in the EIR along with other information before taking any action on the proposed project. The conclusions of the EIR regarding environmental impacts do not control the City of Los Angeles' discretion to approve, deny or modify the proposed project, but instead are presented as information intended to aid the decision-making process.

As noted above, the Occidental College Specific Plan EIR is intended to address the potential impacts of development proposed by the Specific Plan. No additional environmental review would be required if proposed development conforms to the Specific Plan. If, however, circumstances changes substantially or if development proposed by Occidental College did not conform to the Specific Plan, additional environmental review could be required.

It is anticipated that as additional new projects are proposed within the Specific Plan area that they will be reviewed for consistency with the Specific Plan and with the assumptions contained in this EIR.

## 1.3 Draft EIR Organization

As illustrated in **Table 1-1**, this Draft EIR is organized into eight chapters each dealing with a separate aspect of the required content of an EIR as described in the *CEQA Guidelines*. To help the reader locate information of particular interest, a brief summary of the contents of each chapter of the EIR is provided. The following chapters are contained within the EIR:

**TABLE 1-1  
REQUIRED DRAFT EIR CONTENTS**

<b>Requirement/CEQA Guidelines Section</b>	<b>Location in Draft EIR</b>
Table of contents (Section 15122)	Table of Contents
Summary (Section 15123)	Executive Summary
Project description (Section 15124)	Chapter 2 and Chapters 3A-3J
Environmental Setting (Section 15125)	Chapters 3A-3J
Significant environmental impacts (Section 15126.2 (a))	Chapters 3A-3J
Unavoidable significant environmental impacts (Section 15126.2 (b))	Chapter 5
Mitigation measures (Section 15126.4)	Chapters 3A-3J
Cumulative impacts (Section 15130)	Chapters 3A-3J
Alternatives to the proposed project (Section 15126.6)	Chapter 4
Growth-inducing impacts (Section 15126.2 (d))	Chapter 5
Effects found not to be significant (Section 15128)	Chapter 5
References (Section 15129)	Chapter 6
List of preparers; organizations and persons consulted (Section 15129)	Chapter 7
Acronyms and abbreviations	Chapter 8

**Executive Summary:** This section contains an overview of the scope of the EIR, as well as a summary of the proposed project, environmental impacts, proposed mitigation, level of significance after mitigation, and unavoidable impacts. Also contained within this section is a summary description of project alternatives.

**Chapter 1. Introduction:** This chapter provides an overview of the purpose and use of the EIR, the scope of this EIR, the environmental review process for the EIR and the proposed project, and the general format of the document.

**Chapter 2. Project Description:** This chapter defines the project location, summarizes the proposed project, and outlines the project objectives and the need for the project.

**Chapter 3. Environmental Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures:** This chapter describes and evaluates environmental issue areas, including the existing environmental setting and background, applicable environmental thresholds, environmental impacts (both short-term and long-term), policy considerations related to the particular environmental issue area under analysis, mitigation measures capable of minimizing environmental harm, and a discussion of cumulative impacts. Where additional actions must be taken to ensure consistency with environmental policies, recommendations are made, as appropriate. By consolidating environmental impact assessment and site-specific policy directives within each impact area, clear linkages between impact assessment and related policy consistency can be established.

**Chapter 4. Alternatives Analysis:** This chapter analyzes feasible alternatives to the proposed project and identifies the Environmentally Superior Alternative. The two alternatives analyzed in this EIR consist of the No Project Alternative and the Less Dense Development Alternative.

**Chapter 5. Other CEQA Considerations:** This chapter provides a summary of the proposed project's potential growth-inducing impacts; provides a list of proposed project impacts that are significant and unavoidable by issue area; discusses the environmental effects of the proposed project found not to be significant; and identifies any irreversible changes to the natural environment resulting from the proposed project.

**Chapter 6. References:** This chapter identifies all references used and cited in the preparation of this report, including persons and organizations.

**Chapter 7. Report Preparation:** This chapter identifies the public and private agencies and individuals contacted during the preparation of this report, and all individuals responsible for the preparation of this report.

**Chapter 8. Acronyms and Abbreviations:** This chapter provides a description of abbreviations and acronyms used throughout the document.

**Appendices:** Data supporting the analysis or content of the EIR are provided in the appendices to the document. These include the Notice of Preparation / Initial Study (NOP/IS) and responses received, traffic report, air quality calculations and other reports prepared for the project.

## 1.4 EIR Process

As described in Section 15143 of the *CEQA Guidelines*:

*The EIR shall focus on the significant effects on the environment. The significant effects should be discussed with emphasis in proportion to their severity and probability of occurrence. Effects dismissed in an Initial Study as clearly insignificant and unlikely to occur need not be discussed further in the EIR unless the Lead Agency subsequently receives information inconsistent with the finding in the Initial Study.*

As a first step in complying with the procedural requirements of CEQA, the City of Los Angeles prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) and Initial Study to determine whether any aspect of the project, either individually or cumulatively, could cause a significant effect on the environment and, if so, to narrow the focus (or scope) of the environmental analysis.

In compliance with CEQA, the City of Los Angeles completed a multi-step process to determine the appropriate scope of issues to be examined in this Draft EIR. The City filed the NOP with the State Clearinghouse (SCH No. 2006081153) in the Office of Planning and Research as an indication that an EIR would be prepared. A copy of the NOP and an Initial Study Checklist are included in **Appendix B** of this EIR. The NOP was distributed to involved public agencies and interested parties for a 30-day public review period, which began on August 29, 2006, and ended on September 27, 2006. The purpose of the public review period was to solicit comments on the scope and content of the environmental analysis to be included in the EIR. The City of Los Angeles received comments in response to the NOP, and these comments are also included in Appendix B of this EIR. As announced in the NOP, a public scoping meeting was held on September 12, 2006. Sign-in sheets, notes from the meeting, and a series of comment cards are included in Appendix B.

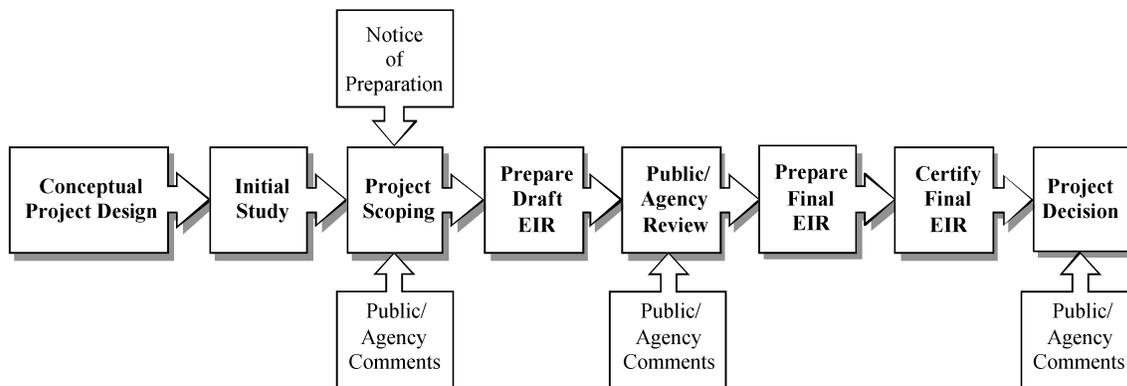
The Initial Study concluded that the project could have a significant impact on the following issue areas, which are addressed in this EIR: aesthetics, air quality, cultural resources, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, recreation and transportation. The Initial Study also determined that the following environmental issues would not be significantly impacted by the proposed project and would not be addressed in the EIR: agricultural resources, hazards and hazardous materials, mineral resources, population and housing, public services and utilities.

During the preparation of the EIR, agencies, organizations, and persons whom the City believed might have an interest in this proposed project were specifically contacted. Information, data, and observations from these contacts are included in the EIR. Agencies or interested persons who did not respond during the public review period of the NOP will have an opportunity to comment during the public review period of the Draft EIR, as well as at subsequent hearings on the proposed project.

This EIR has been prepared to meet all of the substantive and procedural requirements of CEQA (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.), the *CEQA Guidelines* (California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.). Accordingly, the City of Los Angeles is the Lead Agency for this proposed project, taking primary responsibility for conducting the environmental review and approving or denying the project.

Any environmental impacts that cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level are considered to be significant and unavoidable. If a public agency approves a project that has significant and unavoidable impacts, the agency must state in writing the specific reasons for approving the project, based on the Final EIR and any other information in the public record for the project. This is termed a “statement of overriding considerations,” which is used to explain the specific reasons why the benefits of a proposed project make its unavoidable environmental effects acceptable. The statement is prepared, if required, after the Final EIR has been completed, yet before action to approve the project has been taken.

A graphic description of the EIR preparation process is provided in the following flow chart:



## 1.5 Availability of the Draft EIR

This Draft EIR has been distributed to affected agencies, surrounding cities, counties, and interested parties for a 45-day review period in accordance with Section 15087 of the *CEQA Guidelines*. During the 45-day review period, which commences on October 9, 2008 and ends on November 24, 2008, the Draft EIR is available for general public review at the following locations:

Diana Kitching  
 Los Angeles City Planning Department  
 200 Spring Street, Room 750  
 Los Angeles, CA 90012  
 Telephone: (213) 978-1351

Eagle Rock Branch Library  
5027 Caspar Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90041  
Telephone: (323) 248-8078

Arroyo Seco Regional Branch Library  
6145 N. Figueroa Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90042  
Telephone: (323) 255-0537

Eagle Rock City Hall  
2035 Colorado Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90041-1238

Additionally, the Draft EIR can be downloaded or reviewed via the Internet at the Department of City Planning's website [[www.lacity.org/PLN](http://www.lacity.org/PLN) (click on "Environmental" and then "Draft Environmental Impact Reports")]. The DEIRs can be purchased on cd-rom for \$7.50 per copy. Contact **Diana Kitching** of the City of Los Angeles at **(213) 978-1351** to purchase one.

Interested parties may provide written comments on the Draft EIR. Written comments on the Draft EIR must be postmarked by November 24, 2008 and should be addressed to:

Diana Kitching  
Los Angeles City Planning Department  
200 Spring Street, Room 750  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Comments may also be submitted electronically to Diana Kitching at [Diana.Kitching@lacity.org](mailto:Diana.Kitching@lacity.org).

Upon completion of the 45-day public review period, written responses to all comments on environmental issues discussed in the Draft EIR will be prepared and incorporated into the Final EIR. These comments, and their responses, will be included in the Final EIR for consideration by the City of Los Angeles Planning Commission and City Council, as well as other public decision makers.