

August 31, 2018

Ólöf Einarsdóttir  
Chair, Academic Senate

**RE: Review of Draft of Strategic Academic Plan and Implementation Playbook**

Dear Ólöf,

The Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity (CAAD) has reviewed the draft Strategic Academic Plan (SAP) that has been sent to the Academic Senate for consultation. We present here CAAD's response to the SAP, following its July release and to meet the end of August deadline. Because of the extent of the changes proposed and the impacts implied by the current SAP draft, the short window of response given to Senate Committees during summer research time, and serious concerns that CAAD has with the current plan, we request a re-drafting of the SAP. We outline five main concerns below.

**1. Reliance on Quantitative Metrics**

The plan relies almost entirely on quantitative metrics to evaluate progress towards SAP goals. We believe that tying resources and recognition to these metrics will likely result in privileging applied approaches to research and teaching, which have more quantifiably measurable outcomes. While such work is certainly valuable, privileging it would be to the detriment of so much else of value that faculty and students do on our campus, yet that is harder to quantify, including basic research in the sciences, interpretive methods in social sciences, and much of the work of those in arts and humanistic fields. This over-reliance signals a reductive understanding of the diverse forms and impacts of academic research and creative work, and of varying modalities of student learning and success. And thus it is troubling to CAAD, which values all forms of diversity on our campus—cultural, intellectual, demographic— and has long argued that we recognize their interrelationship.

For instance, the plan articulates outcomes and initiatives related to the broad Design Principles, and identifies challenges and research directions relevant to the three Academic Priorities, in surprisingly reductive ways. For example: Design Principle #1 is “Drive research and creative work that transform the world” but the single goal under this principle is “increase recognition of and external support for applied research and creative work.” The addition of “applied” creates a significant shift in meaning by inserting a filter that recognizes only certain forms of research and creative work. This filter is then confirmed by the list of outcomes under this goal, which are: increase annual number of citations, patents, IP licenses, and public faculty appearances.

**2. Dependence on Outside Sources with Limited Relevance to UCSC**

In the specifications for “grand challenges” under each of the prioritized academic areas, directives are limited to two main organizations: the National Academy of Engineering, followed by USAID. The dependence on these two sources suggests either a lack of meaningful research or experience in academic contexts on the part of the consulting firm (Entangled Solutions), or a decided bias towards

certain kinds of research. Either way, such dependence contradicts the capacious rhetoric of the three categories. For example, under Academic Priority Areas: Justice in a Changing World, the one and only “challenge” listed by the National Academy of Engineering is “Advance personalized learning.” We are not sure what this means, for one, but the main question is, why is the National Academy of Engineering even listed in this section, when there could be many other more relevant organizations in addition to USAID referenced for challenges in this area? We are concerned that this section of the SAP in particular reveals serious shortcomings in research due to the short time-frame allotted for the preparation of the plan.

### **3. Instrumentalist Emphasis on Teaching to the Job Market**

The plan emphasizes teaching to the job market, as reflected throughout in the reliance on industry and occupational statistics as directors for academic priorities. This emphasis strikes us as short-sighted at the very least, as well as a gross underestimation of our students. While we certainly want our students to find employment, we also want them to be rigorously prepared to think “outside the box,” critically and inventively. In spite of the rhetoric of “innovation” throughout the document we do not find any emphasis on the importance of developing critical skills which can equip students to reimagine and reinvent the world rather than conforming to an existing world that we all know is in a continuous process of change.

### **4. Potential Erosion of Faculty Governance**

We see the potential for significant erosion of faculty governance in the existing SAP as departments are de-emphasized and transdisciplinary “units” created, with the latter headed by administrative staff. While we recognize that there is strong consensus on campus for, and important benefits of, transdisciplinary research and teaching, we also argue that such transdisciplinarity needs to emerge out of and be shaped by faculty participants representing their respective disciplines. For this to work, we need to maintain structures that support faculty governance as an institutional strength. Such structures should build on the existing strength of departments, and have faculty in key decision-making positions. The plan as it is written suggests instead a top-down, corporate model in which faculty need incentives to generate and direct research, reflected in such elements of the plan as “annual idea campaigns (for faculty) to encourage innovation on 1 - 3 topics.”

### **5. Lack of Attention to Pitfalls of Growth**

The plan lacks any discussion of the problem of growth, or of decreasing faculty/student ratios. This is a glaring absence throughout, given that both have been identified as serious challenges for the campus, and barriers to learning that need to be addressed. Under the section Design Principle #3: Engage and Support Diverse Faculty, Staff and Student Body, we see the lack of attention to the problem of growth, and the need to hire more faculty and staff, and improve student / teacher, student/staff ratios as particularly pronounced, given the limiting effects on a diverse academic community of housing shortages and rising costs of living, as well as decreasing opportunities for meaningful mentorship.

We are concerned that the only means for faculty to respond to the plan at this critical stage is via Senate Committee feedback, yet that committees do not generally convene during summer research time, making this response itself difficult. Once again, given our concerns and this truncated timeline, we request a re-drafting of the SAP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Miriam Greenberg".

Miriam Greenberg, *Chair*

On behalf of

Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity

*Laurie Palmer*

*Erika Zavoleta*

Cc: Incoming Senate Chair Lau