August 31, 2018

ÓLÖF EINARSDÓTTIR
Academic Senate Chair

RE: Committee on Academic Freedom response to Strategic Academic Plan and Implementation

Dear Ólöf:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Strategic Academic Plan and Implementation Playbook. As we have said in discussions and email correspondence, the time frame for this review is far from ideal for faculty members and (in our case) a graduate student who are scattered to research and conference sites this summer. Nevertheless, because we understand the importance of this effort and we believe deeply in shared governance and Senate review, we have done our best to review the materials and craft a response.

Our concern about timing is not just a matter of convenience but of substance: in combination with the short turnaround time for developing proposals and for Senate feedback on every earlier stage of this process, it raises serious questions about the biases of a short-time interval survey (discussed in our earlier feedback). The accelerated implementation timetable—designed, we were told, to allow the provision of centrally funded FTE in support of priority areas this coming academic year—replicates these problems.

Framing Principle for CAF evaluation: "Academic Freedom To"

A word about the connection of this complaint to the process to academic freedom. As we emphasized in our previous comments on the TAWG and other aspects of the SAP process, most of our attention to academic freedom in our committee work falls into the category of **"academic freedom from"**—interference, suppression, threats, distortions in the national funding apparatus because of a priori political exclusions, and so forth. We spend very little time on **"academic freedom to"**—the creation of a supportive environment for the hatching and growth of the widest possible range of significant research and inquiry. At a moment of serious secular decline in public university funding, it is more important than ever that we continue to ask, "What kind of university do we want?" and to do everything we can to bring that university into being.

That seems to us to be the point of a strategic academic plan, and our concern here is that the speed of the process to date (Slide 8), and its emphasis on new proposals rather than a thorough assessment of how we might support the many initiatives already underway on campus, makes the process less germane to campus needs and less supportive of "academic freedom to" than it was intended to be, in spite of the "community driven process" of interviews, surveys, and forums (Slides 10-13, 31).

Specific Comments

1. We appreciate that the three academic priority areas (Slides 32-45) are quite broadly defined. This addresses our earlier concerns that the SAP process would result in most development work being concentrated on several specific high-profile projects, to the neglect of others and the detriment of building a broad-gauge "academic freedom to" environment. At the same time, the very broadness of the three identified areas (Earth Futures, Justice in a Changing World, and Digital Interventions) leaves it unclear what exactly will be done with them. Without this information, it is hard for us to assess if there are any potential effects on academic freedom. How are they related to the variety of areas identified in the TAWG process?

A related concern is that all three appear to focus on the contemporary moment and the future as their topics of inquiry (Slide 33), which raises questions about how fields that address the past (history, art history, aspects of sociology, anthropology, geology, history of science and technology, etc.) fit into this vision of the university.

Finally, each of these areas is described in a cursory fashion, followed by a list of potential funding sources (generally known to those of us who work in these areas), and a list of comparator institutions (giving, to be frank, very little useful information). It seems reasonable to expect that there should be more to show for a year of interviewing and investigating.

2. **Principles, Goals, Outcomes, and Initiatives.** The connections between Design Principle #1 (Slide 22, "drive research and creative work that transform our world") and its associated goal, key outcomes, and menu of potential initiatives seem to us particularly problematic. The principle is laudable, but the goal reads "increase recognition of and external support for applied research and creative work." Why "applied"? This term is more applicable to some fields more than others; other terms that might be added to be more inclusive of other fields would include engaged scholarship, public scholarship, etc. We also note that across the disciplines, today's basic research lays the groundwork for applications that may not be immediately obvious. To single out "applied" research and not the full range of research our university is or should be conducting cedes a large part of our mission right at the outset.

Related to this is a problem with the key outcomes: increase citations, patents, IP and licenses, and public faculty appearances. At least two of these—citations and public faculty appearances—happen at the initiative of others, often in other institutions. They may be desirable outcomes, but they are not under our institutional control. What *is* under our control is improving the environment for research and creative work on our campus. Key outcomes should measure how well we do that, but this report does not address that issue. Furthermore, these outcomes don't necessarily reflect the goal of "transforming our world." What about public or community influence? The underlying problem is that the kinds of research being valued here are narrowly understood. Patents and citations are not the only possible measures for impactful/transformative work. There are other measures that might be used to capture a wider array of transformative impacts in a wider array of fields.

The initiatives suggested at the bottom of Slide 22, while worthy in themselves, do not really get at the design principle or the goal.

Slide 30, addressing Design Principle #5, has similar problems. We have concerns about academic freedom if the specific lists of outcomes on Slides 22 and 30 become part of how individual faculty research is assessed for internal funding support and/or how it is evaluated in merit reviews. We recommend that these outcomes be explicitly understood as being used only to assess the university's collective movement toward these strategic goals. If this is the case, then there are fewer implications for academic freedom.

Finally, with respect to Design Principle #3 (Slide 28), "Support generative interdisciplinary connections in research and teaching," it is puzzling that existing interdisciplinary departments (e.g. LALS, Feminist Studies, DANM) are not mentioned. How does the campus plan to support more fully those already-existing interdisciplinary departments and research centers?

3. Barrier Discovery (Slides 46-47). We remain impressed with the number of barriers identified by faculty students, and staff, and recommend that addressing them in a rapid manner should remain a campus priority.

4. Implementation (Slide 48-56). In a document entitled "Strategic Academic Plan and Implementation Playbook," it is surprising to find only 9 of 193 slides (including the section title slide) devoted to an implementation plan. The content of those slides is somewhat confusing. In Slide 50, "division leaders" develop their own plans. In Slide 51, "unit leaders" design and present an annual strategy, and submit progress reports every quarter. Slides 52-56 lay out five years of initiatives, with departments that are supposed to take those initiatives, but how? On what basis are the initiatives assigned to a particular year? The spreadsheet format gives an impression of great specificity, but the "how to" question remains unaddressed, as does the question of how units that are already seriously overloaded are meant to take on additional tasks. And some of the initiatives (e.g. "map the full employee onboarding experience for all students to identify key pitfalls and challenges for diversity and inclusion") are difficult to understand.

Two more observations about the "Menu of Initiatives." First, among a long list of general goals (e.g. "Systematically assess the root of our student body's challenges to succeed at UC Santa Cruz. Methodically remove those barriers to success"), there is one on Slides 53-55 with unusual specificity: "launch fifteen new research partnerships with industry/non-profit partners in Silicon Valley." Why fifteen? Or is it fifteen in year 2, a second fifteen in year 3, and another fifteen in year 4? Why Silicon Valley? What is the relationship of this goal to ongoing partnerships? Why is this alone assigned a numerical quota?

Second—and this is a serious omission—graduate students and their training and needs seem to have disappeared completely from the implementation playbook. (There are numerous mentions of undergraduate research and fellowships, which is good.) Graduate students perform key roles on this campus as researchers, teachers, and mentors to undergraduate students. They are also instrumental to the cutting-edge interdisciplinary research the campus performs, and a key component of the academic labor force that delivers our curriculum. Funding for graduate students will be key to ensuring that interdisciplinary research and teaching are tenable, robust, and sustainable. The neglect of concrete goals

in this area, especially considering the ongoing push to admit more graduate students, suggests that something has not worked properly in the strategic planning process.

Sincerely,

Gail Hershatter, Chair
On behalf of Committee on Academic Freedom
Gabriel Elkaim
Robin King, NSTF
Tanya Merchant
Jessica Taft
Veronika Zablotsky, Graduate Representative
Jonathan Zehr

cc: Incoming Senate Chair Lau