

August 14, 2018

Ólöf Einarsdóttir
Chair, Academic Senate

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

Dear Ólöf,

Several members of the Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) met on August 2, 2018 to discuss the draft Strategic Academic Plan (SAP) and Implementation Playbook. CPB has, for several years, pressed for a new campus SAP, and the committee was pleased that CP/EVC Tromp established the development of a SAP as one of her top priorities for this year. The ensuing process of creating a SAP has been inclusive, engaging faculty, staff, and students in an effort to highlight important campus values and innovative directions for research and creative activities. The administrative effort during 2017-18 has laid the groundwork for a strategic academic plan designed to gain broad campus support. The circulation of the draft SAP and Playbook to the campus community, therefore, is an important milestone towards producing an actionable SAP.

CPB believes a strategic academic plan should help guide decisions about resource allocations at UCSC, particularly those associated with faculty hiring. **Members feel strongly that this draft SAP falls well short of achieving that objective.** Rather than building on the campus-wide sense of energy and intellectual excitement that was generated by the Themed Academic Working Group (TAWG) process, the draft SAP has confused design principles, goals, and objectives, failed to articulate the intellectual rationale for the chosen academic priority areas, and presented a long list of initiatives that often seem designed to give the appearance of achieving goals and removing barriers rather than actually doing so.

CPB believes it is not too late to move beyond this draft and produce a final SAP document that builds on faculty expertise, sustains the momentum and intellectual engagement and excitement generated by the process so far, and puts resources closer to core student and faculty activities. Doing so would yield a strategic academic plan for UCSC that recaptures a sense of intellectual coherence, specificity, and excitement while also guiding future resource decisions.

In this letter, we provide examples that illustrate our concerns about the draft SAP and offer six specific recommendations. Each is discussed in detail in the letter, but we list them here to highlight their importance.

Recommendation 1: CPB recommends realignment among the categories of design principles, goals, initiatives, and outcomes. The design principles **are** the campus goals--namely, improving the central intellectual, creative, and educational work of the institution; the goals stated in the draft are superfluous and should be dropped.

Recommendation 2: The rationale for the choice of Earth Futures, Justice in a Changing World, and Digital Interventions as academic priority areas needs to be explained to the campus in the SAP itself. A clear description of what each area will include, together with the case for why these areas were selected, must be articulated in order to help the campus community understand the historic strengths that feed these areas as well as our capacity to continue to generate high-impact research as we move forward.

Recommendation 3: The SAP must articulate how the ten barriers selected to be addressed in the first year are related to promoting progress toward the Design Principle goals and the academic priority areas. While recognizing that the Implementation Working Group (IWG) will further prioritize the ten barriers, the SAP needs to explain why *these* ten barriers are the most important to address initially.

Recommendation 4: Use the opportunity of the SAP to develop a budgetary framework that promotes transparency, facilitates decision making, reduces imbalances between the distributions of students and instructional capacity, and positions the campus to respond to new, emerging areas of intellectual excitement, potentially by allowing some separations to return to the Center.

Recommendation 5: Each Design Principle (goal) should be associated with specific initiatives to be done in year 1, together with an articulation of how results in year 1 will be built upon in years 2 through 5. Initiatives should be actionable and linked directly toward achieving goals. The plan needs to show how the campus will make meaningful progress in achieving its goals (design principles).

Recommendation 6: For each academic priority area, the faculty leaders from the relevant TAWGs should help define and prioritize the menu of initiatives that will form part of the SAP implementation plan to ensure that the campus is clearly informed of the resource and infrastructure needs, as well as the barriers that must be removed, to realize success in each area. This process should also define the accountability measures that will guide assessment and allocation of future resources to the priority areas.

To explain the basis for each of these recommendations, we (1) summarize the components of the SAP already seen by CPB; (2) discuss what we see as misalignment between design principles, goals, and outcomes in the draft SAP; (3) review the draft SAP's assessment of the three academic priority areas; (4) comment on barriers proposed for initial study and elimination; (5) evaluate the implementation plan and menu of initiatives; (6) close with a brief summary.

Background

The draft SAP and Implementation Playbook slide presentation is the culmination of a multistage process that began in fall 2017. During the winter and spring quarters, CPB had the opportunity to comment formally on several components in the current draft/slide deck:

- In CPB's letter of January 5, 2018, the committee responded to AVPAA Martin Berger's request to identify structural barriers and potential strategies for resource generation.
- On April 24, 2018, CPB provided its assessment of the Campus Landscape Analysis.
- On April 30, 2018, CPB responded to AVPAA Berger's request to identify a prioritized list of internal campus barriers based on a larger list of 53 internal campus barriers identified by the campus.
- On May 21, 2018, CPB provided an analysis of the 28 Themed Academic Working Group pre-proposals.
- On June 12, 2018, CPB provided feedback on a number of resource-related questions that AVPAA Martin Berger had posed to the committee.

The current slide deck, submitted for Senate feedback in July, contains several key components that the committee is now seeing for the first time. These include the final version of the five Design Principles with their associated goals, outcomes, and potential initiatives; the ten barriers designated for initial review; the three academic priority areas; and the implementation plan with its 5-year menu of initiatives.

The Design Principles, Goals, and Outcomes - Misalignments

CPB appreciates the useful definitions provided on Slide 17, whose aim is to distinguish among "goals" (aspirations), "initiatives" (concrete steps or programs that help attain goals), and "outcomes" (results of initiatives designed to achieve goals), and especially how these definitions imply different orientations toward planning and action, essential in devising and implementing a comprehensive strategic academic plan. Still, we were puzzled by numerous apparent misalignments between Design Principles and Goals, Goals and Initiatives, and Initiatives and Outcomes, and felt the ideas assigned to these different categories

were, in several cases, miscategorized. For instance, in most cases, we felt the Design Principle was itself the aspirational goal, and in some instances, we felt that the articulated goals actually shifted our stated campus aspirations away from the aims clearly stated by the design principles.

In particular, in Design Principles #1 and 5 the stated goals redirect campus focus away from actually enabling the transformational work that we do and toward developing metrics of our reputation in those areas; outcomes tied to reputation necessarily follow. For instance, Design Principle #1, “Drive research and creative work that transform our world,” is assigned the goal to “Increase recognition of and external support for applied research & creative work.” CPB reads the design principle itself as the true aspirational goal: UCSC should be materially contributing to positive change in the world by supporting faculty. The stated goal, however, does not aim for facilitating, increasing, or improving such work (and could be interpreted by some as limiting it by focusing solely on “applied” research), but for increasing external recognition and reward--a point hammered home by the outcomes tied to number of citations, patents, licenses, etc., granted to the university. We recognize, of course, that such recognition and reward support and even help “drive” the research and creative work that is at the heart of the university. Still, establishing recognition as the main aim affiliated with that design principle shifts the goalposts *away* from the first-order academic needs of providing sufficient resources to faculty in order for them to produce groundbreaking work.

Similarly, Design Principle #5 establishes a clear goal: “Expand excellence and innovation in areas distinctive to UC Santa Cruz, such as social justice, diversity, and sustainability”—yet the aspirational goal assigned to this principle focuses on reputational metrics. We agree that metrics are important for measuring our success in these areas, but a goal to “Establish a commonly accepted baseline metric for measuring and improving our reputation amongst our peers” in these areas of study would diminish our aspirations by redirecting resources from the work itself to a methodology for measuring our standing against that of our peers. This goal is tied to outcomes that measure reputation, appearances in the media, and so on. Again: we recognize the importance of assessment and comparison, and of being known for our expert knowledge. Still, outcomes tied to concrete impact on actual people, institutions, and environments would more meaningfully demonstrate the campus’s commitment to supporting such research and creative work. **We fear that a strategic academic plan whose loftiest stated goals focus on where we stand rather than on what we stand for will undercut the purpose of the plan and the commitment of the faculty supporting it.**

Similar questions about the alignment of principles, goals, and outcomes--and the initiatives identified to lead to those outcomes--emerged out of our discussion of Design Principles #2, 3, and 4 as well. About #3, “Engage and support diverse faculty, staff, and student body,” we are particularly concerned that the goal focuses primarily on best practices (which translates into initiatives stressing training and assessment) rather than on increasing the percentages of underrepresented faculty, staff, and students on campus--arguably the most effective change we can make. Examples of initiatives that might directly contribute to expanding campus diversity at all levels include setting targets for the President’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program and its related hiring incentive; conducting cluster hires in areas particularly likely to yield diverse candidates; and providing ongoing funding for the student-initiated outreach programs (ASF, DHE, ORALE). In this context, we suggest that Design Principle #3 be changed to “Engage, support, and expand diverse faculty, staff and student body.”

Recommendation 1: CPB recommends realignment among the categories of design principles, goals, initiatives, and outcomes. The design principles **are** the campus goals--namely, improving the central intellectual, creative, and educational work of the institution; the goals stated in the draft are superfluous and should be dropped.

Outcomes should not be confused with the way achievements are measured. Metrics measuring our reputation in the areas described by the design principles should be used to ensure accountability. Performance measures are critical to ensure accountability, but developing a performance measure should never be confused with a goal.

Academic Priority Areas

The process of creating and refining Themed Academic Working Groups (TAWGs) engendered an exceptional and gratifying breadth and depth of intellectual engagement by UCSC faculty. The faculty displayed an ability to think beyond narrow specialties, to map out important ways of contributing to the well-being of our society and our planet, and to articulate compelling projects that can bring distinction to the campus.

However, a coherent vision for the priority areas is not articulated in the SAP. As the committee noted in its May 21, 2018 response on the TAWG proposals, “The SAP needs to serve not as a favored list of specific projects to receive financial support but rather as an articulation of priority areas that can then serve to guide choices among specific projects.” CPB offered several themes that emerged from the TAWGs exercise. The Chancellor and CP/EVC have chosen to establish Earth Futures, Justice in a Changing World, and Digital Interventions as the three academic priority areas, with each of these areas evidently emerging out of several related TAWG proposals.

The draft SAP provides a brief “description” of each priority area, although none of the three areas is linked to actual faculty, departments, programs, or specific TAWGs. The draft SAP also provides information on possible funding sources, and on programs in related areas at UCI, UCSB, University of Oregon and SUNY Stony Brook. **CPB members felt that Entangled Solutions must not have been informed as to the relevant intellectual visions articulated in the TAWGs that were the basis for the three themes (or that the section on these priority areas is merely a placeholder until fully developed descriptions of the priority areas are created in conjunction with the relevant lead faculty) because the “overview” given for each area is essentially identical, the funding sources mentioned are either obvious or irrelevant, and the programs at the comparison institutions are at times at odds with the way the priority area is described in the draft SAP.** This is especially the case for the “Digital Interventions” priority area, which is incoherent as presented in the draft SAP: its description in the SAP is so vague as to obscure connections with the original TAWGs we believe gave rise to it, its suggested funding sources skew toward the Humanities, but its comparison institution programs skew toward STEM.

CPB members were particularly disappointed with the use of the same four comparison institutions for each of the three priority areas. **Global leaders in each of the specific priority areas would have provided more useful perspectives.** A comparison with such institutions could help identify a strategy that would allow UCSC to establish itself as one of the world’s leading universities doing research in each of the three priority areas. It is unclear how a comparison to the same four universities is of any useful value toward the campus honing its strategic plan. For example, while UCI seems a good choice for Earth Futures based on their Earth System Science, it does not have as much strength relevant to the “Justice” theme, and its comparison to Digital Interventions highlights Entangled Solutions’ tendency to misunderstand the nuances of that particular academic priority area, simply comparing it to much more conventional computer science disciplines and programs.

The TAWG process generated a wealth of information on the innovative work and ideas being generated at UCSC. Rather than distilling this information to select three priority areas, however, the draft SAP seems as if it could have been written without broad faculty input. It fails to reflect the intellectual excitement and energy generated across campus as part of the TAWG process, and, as a consequence, the draft SAP risks losing that energy rather than building on it.

It is easy to imagine an alternative approach: Faculty leaders of TAWG clusters aligned with the priority areas could be invited to refine and create coherent visions of the academic priority areas and action plans, preserving differences, such as possible complementary foci on qualitative or quantitative approaches to questions of social justice, or variations in time or geographic scale in tackling environmental issues. Other activities envisaged in the implementation plan could grow organically out of such faculty efforts, including public engagement, interdisciplinary research, and so on. Indeed, virtually all of the TAWGs provided this information in their proposals.

Recommendation 2: The rationale for the choice of Earth Futures, Justice in a Changing World, and Digital Interventions as academic priority areas needs to be explained to the campus in the SAP itself. A clear description of what each area will include, together with the case for why these areas were selected, must be articulated in order to help the campus community understand the historic strengths that feed these areas as well as our capacity to continue to generate high-impact research as we move forward.

To implement this recommendation, the key leaders of the academic priority areas need to articulate the intellectual rationale for their areas to provide the broad campus community with a clear understanding of why each theme makes sense as a priority area of focus as UCSC moves forward. **It is clear consultants cannot do this, nor should they. UCSC faculty will want to hear from their colleagues and from the Chancellor and CP/EVC.**

Barriers

The draft SAP includes a list of the ten barriers the Chancellor and CP/EVC have chosen to prioritize for reduction or elimination. This is the first opportunity the committee has had to see this list, and given the arrival of this material in the summer, the committee did not discuss the choice of these particular barriers. Three points are worth noting, however. First, CPB's letter of January 5, 2018 highlighted barriers to graduate growth as a significant concern. While this is not on the CP/EVC's list, her June 28, 2018 letter on the barriers does state that she wishes to wait until the new VPDGS can weigh in on barriers related to graduate growth. Second, in providing feedback at various stages of the SAP process, CPB has emphasized the need to address structural barriers that hinder the campus's ability to employ its resources in ways that align with our academic mission. We provided three examples:

- Barriers that limit the ability to flexibly allocate resources to meet shifting student interests create imbalances between the distribution of students across programs and the distribution of instructional resources. The absence of a campus enrollment management system makes the development of such imbalances more likely.
- The lack of a formal process for returning some fraction of divisionally held faculty FTE to the Center in response to separations hinders the ability of the campus to respond to new, emerging areas of intellectual excitement.
- Current budgetary information often lacks transparency and is frequently not presented in a form that facilitates decision making.

Initiatives to deal with these issues would significantly aid the campus in achieving its strategic goals, yet none are listed among the ten initial barriers to address, nor are they among the 75 initiatives listed in the draft SAP Implementation Plan and which we discuss below.

Third, the CP/EVC has formed an Implementation Working Group (IWG) to study the "feasibility, cost, complexity, and means of reducing or eliminating" the ten barriers. CPB notes that a group that focuses only on the costs and complexity of reducing barriers may fail to evaluate the benefit side of the equation. Thus, the charge to the IWG focuses the group's attention on the lowest-cost, low-hanging fruit rather than on those barriers whose elimination will yield the highest net benefit to the campus. In addition, there may be areas where faculty have particular expertise not represented on the IWG, and in those cases, the Senate should take the lead in collaboration with the relevant administrative officers.

Recommendation 3: The SAP must articulate how the ten barriers selected to be addressed in the first year are related to promoting progress toward the Design Principle goals and the academic priority areas. While recognizing that the IWG will further prioritize the ten barriers, the SAP needs to explain why *these* ten barriers are the most important to address initially.

Recommendation 4: Use the opportunity of the SAP to develop a budgetary framework that promotes transparency, facilitates decision making, reduces imbalances between the distributions of students and instructional capacity, and positions the campus to respond to new, emerging areas of intellectual excitement, potentially by allowing some separations to return to the Center.

The Implementation Plan and the Menu of Initiatives

Senate committees were asked to advise on the menu of initiatives for each design principle and the tentative implementation timeline. Specifically, feedback was requested in prioritizing initiatives and their staging over the five years of the plan. Before discussing the initiatives, we comment on the strategy behind the implementation plan.

Slide 49 states that “Each goal will be linked to one of the campus’s design principles or academic priority areas, and have key outcomes/objectives that are customized for the particular unit” and that “To ensure that unit heads have maximum flexibility, each unit leader will be empowered to implement the relevant elements of the plan as they see fit.” Slide 50 states that a pillar of the implementation plan is to “Execute annual goals by empowering division leaders to **develop their own plans**” (emphasis in original).

Members of CPB failed to see how these annual “goals” (which appear to refer to items on the menu of initiatives) are linked to the academic priority areas. But more fundamentally, the idea that “unit leaders will be empowered to implement the relevant elements of the plan as they see fit” is inconsistent with the University of California system of shared governance. Virtually all of the initiatives will call for consultation with relevant Senate committees, and some proposed initiatives fall directly under the plenary authority of CEP or GC.

Turning to the menu, the implementation plan lists 75 initiatives to be pursued in years one to five of the SAP. Slides 52-56 list initiatives organized by year, indicating for each the associated design principle and the administrative office or offices that would take the lead in developing the actual plans for executing the annual goals.

The menu of initiatives appears to be a hodgepodge of administrative tasks that are only loosely connected to the design principles and are also not clearly connected to the academic priority areas. Some of the initiatives bear on the ten barriers prioritized for study, while others seem like activities the campus expects an administrative officer would carry out as part of normal job responsibilities. No explanation is provided as to why initiatives are placed in a particular year, and one-time and ongoing initiatives are mixed together and not distinguished. The same initiative is listed as addressing one design principle in one year and another design principle in a different year.

To make sense of the menu of initiatives, CPB first eliminated duplicate initiatives. That effort yielded a list of just over 40 unique initiatives. These are listed (in alphabetical order) at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-K6bnrvFEALcaT2DPUQYRUyeHnqCGHeeXrbzx-38NQ/edit?usp=sharing>. Most of these initiatives touch upon issues that fall within the charges of one or more Senate committees, and some fall within the authority of the Senate. On the Google sheet, we have provided a guide to the Senate committees that may need to be consulted by the administrative officer

charged with each initiative. For some initiatives, we have added additional administrative offices that we believe should be involved.

Some of the distinct initiatives are intended to help achieve the goals given by the Design Principles (e.g., “create a course development fund...to redesign courses to be more research or experientially focused”-addresses Design Principle #2). Others focus on reducing barriers (e.g., “support the cross-listing of courses”). However others seem to focus on objectives not clearly linked to any Design Principle or barrier reduction (e.g., “run internal messaging campaign to highlight the importance of innovative research and creative work”).

A concern for graduate education is notably absent from the draft SAP and the implementation plan even though graduate growth, particularly enrollment at the Ph.D. level, has help guide resource allocations and been a campus goal for the past several years. Its absence from a plan that has been in the works for nine months cannot be attributed to turnover in the VPDGS position. **We are stunned that generating graduate student funding and increasing graduate student enrollment are totally missing among the initiatives.**

We believe it is crucial to prioritize initiatives that create momentum for the SAP and allow the campus to achieve its strategic academic goals. Because the CP/EVC has established the IWG to analyze costs (and we hope benefits) to reducing ten specific barriers, it seems appropriate to await that committee’s recommendation before including initiatives in the draft SAP that tackle barriers. (Note that to the extent that the menu already includes initiatives to remove specific barriers, it actually calls into question the usefulness of the IWG.) We are also extremely skeptical of the value of initiatives that emphasize administrative activities that will divert scarce resources away from where they can make a difference – namely, putting resources as close as possible to students and faculty. The draft SAP places too much emphasis on spending money on “awareness” and “internal messaging,” rather than on actual teaching and research or initiatives that would facilitate excellence in teaching and research. Indeed, the implementation plan seems to be mostly about increasing administrative control and resources, to the extent of including activities that ought to be routine and ongoing, irrespective of the specifics of an **academic** plan.

While prioritizing the initiatives is crucial, **we believe the implementation plan needs to go through another round of revisions before it can be productively prioritized.** In addition to a better articulation of how each proposed initiative will advance a specific design principle and/or facilitate the advancement of the academic priority areas, we would also like to see the initiatives more directly aligned with the design principles themselves. CPB discussed a number of concrete initiatives for many of the design principles during a short brainstorming session, and other Senate committees and faculty are also likely to have ideas. As such, we believe it would be especially useful to solicit concrete initiatives from the Senate/faculty prior to any final decisions about the initiatives that will guide the implementation of the SAP. We hope a version that provides a more focused set of initiatives aimed to achieve clear outcomes will allow for a productive discussion over their prioritization and implementation timeline.

Recommendation 5: Each Design Principle (goal) should be associated with specific initiatives to be done in year 1, together with an articulation of how results in year 1 will be built upon in years 2 through 5. Initiatives should be actionable and linked directly toward achieving goals. The plan needs to show how the campus will make meaningful progress in achieving its goals (design principles).

Recommendation 6: For each academic priority area, the faculty leaders from the relevant TAWGs should help define and prioritize the menu of initiatives that will form part of the SAP implementation plan to ensure that the campus is clearly informed of the resource and infrastructure needs, as well as the barriers that must be removed, to realize success in each area. This process should also define the accountability measures that will guide assessment and allocation of future resources to the priority areas.

Summary

A Strategic **Academic** Plan cannot be a laundry list of administrative tasks only tangentially connected to faculty research and creative work. Instead, it must be grounded in an understanding of current UCSC strengths and must articulate a vision of academic priority areas whose promotion will advance our academic mission. It must also offer guidance about how UCSC will allocate its scarce resources in pursuing campus goals. These goals are defined by the academic priority areas and the Design Principles adopted by the Chancellor and CP/EVC. Specific initiatives must directly advance the academic priority areas and/or the Design Principles. Faculty need funds and time to advance their research agendas, together with the infrastructure necessary to support external funding. A quality educational experience for all our students also requires money and time – course relief to design new courses, and graduate and undergraduate fellowships to reduce financial burdens on students and to promote educational access and diversity, etc. An implementation plan must outline the process through which trade-offs will be made in allocating resources as well as identify means of expanding the resource base. The excellence in research, creative work, and education opportunities that result from such a SAP will then drive UCSC’s reputation and its external marketing.

Absent from the current draft plan is a mechanism for addressing how the campus balances investing in improving the quality of our undergraduate programs against investing in graduate programs. This is just one of many resource trade-offs the campus will face in implementing an academic plan. CPB was asked, and responded to, a number of resource allocation questions as part of the SAP process, including how to balance investing in new priority areas versus supporting other campus needs and whether to return a share of FTE separations to the Center. **Yet the draft SAP is completely silent on providing any guidance as to how resource allocation decisions will be made.**

The central weakness of the draft SAP, however, is that it fails to provide any intellectual specificity or coherence that could have been distilled from the efforts of faculty in their TAWGs. This weakness of approach is compounded in the implementation plans, which lack any sense of launching exciting new intellectual endeavors that will “transform the world.” There is an emphasis on adding “formal administrative process” rather than on efficiently allocating resources to where they can make a difference—namely, as close as possible to the classroom, research lab, and studio by facilitating excellence in teaching and research. There is an emphasis on spending money on “awareness” and “internal messaging,” rather than on actual teaching and research. Indeed, the implementation plan needs to be rethought, eliminating activities that ought to be routine and ongoing, irrespective of the specifics of an **academic** plan.

In moving toward a final SAP and implementation plan, we urge the campus administration to consider seriously our recommendations. Briefly summarized, our recommendations are that the SAP:

- (1) Recognize that the design principles are the campus goals, namely, improving the central intellectual, creative, and educational work of the institution, and that metrics to ensure accountability should never be confused with a goal;

- (2) Provide to the campus community the rationale for the choice of the three academic priority areas;

- (3) Articulate how the ten barriers selected to be addressed in the first year are related to promoting progress toward the design principles and the academic priority areas;

- (4) Use the opportunity of the SAP to develop a budgetary framework that promotes transparency, facilitates decision making, reduces imbalances between the distributions of students and instructional capacity, and positions the campus to respond to new, emerging areas of intellectual excitement;

- (5) Associate each design principle (goal) with specific initiatives that are actionable and linked directly towards achieving goals and that will show how the campus will make meaningful progress in achieving its goals (design principles);

(6) Have the faculty leaders from each priority area help define and prioritize the menu of initiatives that will form part of the **final** SAP implementation plan to ensure that the campus is clearly informed of the resource and infrastructure needs, as well as the barriers that must be removed to realize success in each area.

A strategic academic plan that articulates campus goals, identifies priority academic areas for investment, guides resource allocation decisions, and reduces barriers to achieving research and educational objectives would make a significant contribution toward making UCSC an even stronger research university.

Sincerely,



Carl Walsh, Chair

On behalf of Committee on Planning and Budget:

Elizabeth Abrams

Matthew Clapham

Ólöf Einarsdóttir

Kimberly Lau

Nirvikar Singh

cc: Incoming Senate Chair Lau