

August 31, 2018

Ólöf Einarsdóttir  
Chair, Academic Senate

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

Dear Ólöf,

In response to your request dated July 23, 2018, I asked the members of the Committee on Privilege and Tenure to comment on the "Full Draft of the Strategic Academic Plan and Implementation Playbook". I received responses from three members (Bruce Schumm, Scott Oliver, and Roberto Manduchi). This letter reflects their comments and my own observations.

We must first say that we found the assigned task rather difficult. We are asked to "review" a document that is not like anything else we have ever been asked to review (barring earlier stages in the present exercise). It has no narrative, no arguments, no conclusions; it is basically a list of bullet points (presented, in fact, in the form of a powerpoint slide deck). We don't exactly know what it means to review such a thing.

We are specifically asked to comment on the "key outcomes and initiatives" listed with each "design principle" and the tentative implementation timeline. One of the several objections that we have to the language in the document is that these are not principles, and most of the "initiatives" are not initiatives either. The "design principles" are really something like "things UCSC as an institution might choose to do". One might wonder why these things to do are chosen rather than others, but there is no discussion of that.

For example, there is a pervading theme that interdisciplinarity is good. A whole "design principle" is devoted to it, and it crops up in "initiatives" associated with other design principles: twice, for example, under "transformative research". But nowhere is there an argument that interdisciplinarity is a thing to strive for. We are not saying that it's not. We are asking why we should think it is. Without a good answer to that, we can't be very enthusiastic about endorsing the expenditure of resources to increase it.

A similar question could be asked about diversity. There are probably good reasons for a university to seek to engage a diverse faculty, student body, and staff, but what are they? If we are being challenged to think about future directions for the university, should we not also be challenged to think about *why* we should emphasize the factors we decide to emphasize?

We are going to ignore the "key outcomes" attached to each design principle. As expressed, these are nothing more than labels for ways of measuring success. Assigning particular values to the percentages referenced in these "outcomes" would be fairly meaningless.

We counted 41 bullets under "potential initiatives", far too many to review carefully. We will select a few.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### Design Principle One

Under Design Principle #1 (DP1): two of the potential initiatives start with the words "create a formal administrative process ...":

- **Create a formal administrative process for seeding research and gateways for university growth**
- **Create a formal administrative process to assess proposed collaborations between specific divisions and programs**

But it is not at all clear what these "formal administrative processes" would accomplish. We guess we know what "seeding" research is, but what is "seeding" "gateways for university growth"? And what is the point of "assessing" proposed collaborations between specific divisions and programs? None of this appears to have been thought through.

Another proposed initiative is: "grow number of doctoral degrees granted". That, of course, is not an initiative. It might be an aspiration. Three questions arise, of different natures. Why is it in the list of potential initiatives? And why is it desirable? If it is desirable, how is it to be done?

Here's another one. "Address identified campus barrier: lack of incentives and support for faculty to generate resources." That's not an initiative. Nothing specific is proposed. It might be true that faculty need more incentives and support to generate external resources to support research. But saying we should address that is not an initiative.

Setting aside those four, seven potential initiatives remain under DP1.

- **Systematically connect researchers across the divisions via a series of networking and collaboration events.**

**Comment:** It is not clear what this would accomplish. A bit of argument about why it would be a good thing would not be out of place.

- **Create new Masters programs aligned with our distinctive research.**

**Comment:** Again, it would be good to hear some arguments about why that would be a good idea.

- **Launch an annual Breakthrough award for faculty, students, and alumni whose ideas/research has had the greatest impact.**

**Comment:** Maybe some donor would want to fund this. It is not clear that the existence of such an award would generate more research, or more research of the desired kind.

- **Run internal messaging campaign to highlight the importance of innovative research and creative work.**

**Comment:** Don't we already have this? It's that slick thing that comes in our mailboxes.

- **Create and support research clusters around specific challenges where there are known research funding opportunities.**

**Comment:** This might be a good thing to do, but only if we have a good way of identifying the funding opportunities, and only if the projects are aligned with our academic plan

- **Launch project management affiliate non-profits that are tasked with partnering with the private sector R+D.**

**Comment:** Some of us have no idea what this means.

- **Provide support to faculty to discover and secure new resources of support for their work.**

**Comment:** If this means make the Office of Research more responsible for faculty success in this area, we're all for it.

To summarize, of these eleven potential initiatives under DP1 we find none that are both explicitly formulated and worth actually pursuing, except for the implicit directive to improve the contribution of the Office of Research to individual faculty's search for research support.

## **Design Principle Two: Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning is probably good. It might be good to hear some argument about why it is good. It would be even better to hear some intelligent discussion about integrating experiential learning into the existing curriculum. None of that is provided here.

None of the experiential learning initiatives are listed in the proposed initiatives for year 1. That may be because none of them are considered eminently implementable. That would be a shame, if Experiential Learning is really a prime Design Principle.

Under this DP, a couple of proposed initiatives caught our eye.

- **Create research experiences for undergraduate students in the form of research quarters as part of all curricula across divisions.**

**Comment:** The plan should be more specific about what a “research quarter” for an undergraduate is. We already have a mechanism whereby undergraduate students sign up for a research project under faculty supervision, for which they get course credit, but generally the entire quarter is not devoted to research. Is this to be something different?

- **Create study away applied experiences in research and create work, focused on responsible innovation and commercial venture impact.**

**Comment:** We need to know more specifically what this means.

- **Create a student-run consultancy to manage applied challenges/projects for govt/NGO/corporate sponsors.**

**Comment:** We also need to know more specifically what this means. How would such a consultancy function? Are there models?

We do understand the next bullet: develop some internships. That would be good. And the next three we understand: provide course releases to faculty to encourage development of more hands-on courses, build incentives into the merit and promotion process to include students in research, and include independent study and research in the teaching-load calculation. These are all about goosing faculty to support hands-on learning. That might be good, if some arguments had been presented that experiential learning is a good thing. Don't get us wrong. We believe experiential learning is a good thing. We just want to see the arguments. It certainly would not be a good idea to mess with the tenure and promotion process on the basis of some vague feeling that something was good.

### **Design Principle Three: Diversity**

This DP is so full of jargon and hype that it is nearly impossible to review it. For example:

- **Redevelop diversity training with experiential learning.**

**Comment:** What does that mean?

- **Map the full student lifecycle experience for all students to identify key pitfalls and challenges for diversity and inclusion.**

**Comment:** It would be nice to know what would "mapping" the full student lifecycle experience amount to. This might be a good thing, but we would need to know exactly what it is before deciding whether it is a good thing. One of our members is sure it is a good thing, but another is unconvinced.

- **Map the full onboarding experience for all employees to identify key pitfalls and challenges for diversity and inclusion.**

**Comment:** Again, it is not clear what "mapping" means. If we knew what it meant, maybe we could judge what good it could do.

- **Optimize first year experience to deploy best practices for diversity and inclusion and educate incoming students on key diversity and inclusion issues.**

**Comment:** What actions, specifically, are suggested here?

## Design Principle Four: Interdisciplinarity

- **Create Academic Priority Areas, Centers of Excellence, and Institutes beyond department structures.**

**Comment:** This would be consistent with promoting interdisciplinarity, which might be a good thing. We are just disappointed that there is no argument that it is.

- **Optimize application of research management analysis software.**

**Comment:** At least some of us don't know what that is.

- **Drive interdisciplinarity by facilitating more joint appointments, course offerings, or cross-unit research initiatives.**

**Comment:** At least one of us believes that joint appointments are almost always a bad idea.

- **Support the cross-listing of courses.**

**Comment:** That sounds unobjectionable. But is it really that difficult to cross-list courses?

- **Incentivize team-teaching through course development fund and/or course releases.**

**Comment:** It is true that team teaching can be instrumental in creating outstanding courses. The obstacle to team teaching is that the calculus of teaching load, in all or almost all departments, assumes that every faculty member will teach a certain number of courses per year, and chairs have to mount curricula that fit in the envelope of the total number of courses taught by the faculty. If everybody team-taught (say as a team of two), then either the number of courses offered would have to shrink by half, or everybody would have to teach twice as many courses. In the first case, average course size would have to double; in the second, faculty courseload would have to double. Of course neither of these extremes will happen, but the point is that team teaching, while undoubtedly often good, is inherently expensive. If we want to enable team teaching, what is needed is a bank of funds to compensate departments for the courses lost when their faculty team-teach. Plus, of course, a mechanism by which departments could apply for and be awarded the funds. It must be noted, however, that buyout funds of this sort almost never replace the missing course in kind, because we have lost a course that would have been taught by a member of the regular faculty, meticulously hired and nurtured as a teacher, and replaced it with a course taught by a temporary lecturer. If we have done a good job in our faculty recruitment, this is usually going to be a somewhat degraded replacement.

## Design Principle Five: Distinctive Areas

This is one DP that makes obvious sense. It is generally wise to build to strength, once some kind of strength is established. The selective mention of social justice, diversity, and sustainability, however, seems odd. Is there something wrong with Astronomy and Astrophysics? Or bioinformatics?

- **Create flexible implementation structure such as innovation management structure to source, evaluate, pilot, and advance new initiatives that maintain or advance UCSC's strength areas.**

**Comment:** At least one of us doesn't know what that means.

- **Launch project management affiliate non-profits (e.g., MITRE@MIT) that are tasked with partnering with the private sector R&D on areas distinctive to UCSC.**

**Comment:** It might be good if we could launch something like MITRE, but it probably won't be in the areas of social justice or diversity. Here's another place where a more specific proposal might make some sense.

## MENU OF INITIATIVES

### Year One Initiatives

For year 1, there are 12 items. None of them seem all that transformational, either because they're unlikely to really foster change, or are more or less already underway, or both. Nonetheless, within this limited envelope of actions, we can weigh and prioritize them.

Two of them (Inclusivity in hiring practices and Mapping the full student experience; 1 and 6) are, in our understanding, already very much in the focus of the campus and so these should move ahead simply by not being impeded.

Facilitating joint appointments (11) is something on which we disagree. One of our members thinks that there is perhaps good work to be done here and that member supports giving this high priority among the choices. Another of us thinks that joint appointments are almost always a bad idea.

One of our members thinks that introducing some sort of diversity training (4) is also important as we expand our under-represented populations, and would recommend giving this a relatively high priority, but also thinks that such training should be introduced in the UC system as a whole. This member would bundle initiatives 4, 5 and 8 and rate them highly.

We don't understand the issue with cross-listing of courses (10), but if it's just a matter of giving some thought to administrative/staff practices, then it seems fairly resource-limited, so it can be prioritized.

Consideration of (9), Optimize application of research management analysis software, might be delegated to the Academic Senate's Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) this upcoming year. CPB is often asked to rank a number of software needs competing for a limited pot of cash. In that context, the tradeoffs of directing resources towards this could be better evaluated.

Number (2), (3) and (12) fall in a category of programming to promote interdisciplinary activity. We have little confidence that the sort of things being proposed will foster much development unless they are thought through much more carefully, and connect more directly to campus activity rather than just being thrown out in the abstract. We would award their implementation a lower priority, but instead note that this

conversation should be in the forefront of the EVC's and Chancellor's standard meetings with academic leadership.

That leaves (7), Mapping the employee "onboarding experience". We think this is less likely to impact the campus than other initiatives discussed above.

## **Year Two Initiatives**

There are 17 initiatives listed. A number of them are carry-overs from Year 1, or tie very directly to Year 1 initiatives.

Number (1) and (2) have to do with "formal administrative structures". Again, we don't see why the academic leadership, in its current form, can't address this by making this a focus of its meetings. Perhaps out of that will come some more focused activity with broader participation (such as the call for School proposals that we went through several years ago), but the general structure seems fine to us. So lower priority for new administrative structures, but highest priority for the focus of our academic leadership, with the standard Senate review and collaboration.

Numbers (5) and (16) have to do with academic initiatives and again, we could perhaps just encourage our academic leaders to make this a priority in their work.

Number (3), identify resources for research, should always be a top priority for the campus, but isn't this a central part of the mandate of the Office of Research and University Relations? From the report, it appears that some likely target foundations have been identified. Certainly, we should do what we can to connect faculty to these resources and even expand the list, but again, this is always the case. There is no great wisdom in recommending that we do so.

We get to some interesting initiatives. Growing support for undergraduate research (17) gets very good bang for the buck if there are research groups that are structured accordingly. It both frees up and focuses the students and a lot of them do quite notable work as a result. Number (15) relates to this, and for some fields would provide the context and support needed to provide a meaningful research experience. We would give these higher priority.

Number (14), Launching 15 new research partnerships, is one of the few truly new and potentially very helpful proposals. We're not sure what opportunities are out there that haven't been noted or aren't already being aggressively pursued, but we think this is something that can indeed be explored in Year 1 and then possibly prioritized in Year 2.

## **Year Three Initiatives**

Six new initiatives are listed for year three (five old ones are repeated). The first one ("Systematically assess the root of students' challenges to succeed. Methodically remove those barriers to success.") looks like it should be a high priority, and the assessment part should be fairly low-cost. This should be a priority for year one. The second ("Create study away applied experiences ...") starts out sounding good, but then continues ("... focused on responsible innovation and commercial venture impact.") which somewhat spoils it. None of the other new initiatives suggested for year three look like they deserve any priority.

## **Year Four Initiatives**

There are five new initiatives listed for year four. Four of them are proposals to improve the student experience. The first, to create a course development fund (or offer course release, which ultimately will cost the same or more) to encourage faculty to re-design courses to be more research/experientially focused, would be fairly benign, but should not get a high priority. The problem is not that faculty are unwilling or don't know how to make research-focused courses, it is that overseeing student research is very time-consuming, and there are too many students and not enough faculty. The second ("Build into tenure/promotion, incentives to include students in research programs") is already done. The third ("Create research experiences for undergraduates in the form of research quarters as part of curricula across division") might be interesting if we knew what it meant. Is the idea that the student would be free of courses for a quarter and devote that quarter to research? Would the quarter of research generate three courses worth of academic credit? What would the research be about, and who would supervise it? This might be an interesting idea to pursue, but without some specific proposal we cannot evaluate it. The fourth ("Create student-run consultancy to manage applied challenges/projects for government/NGO/corporate sponsors") just looks like nonsense. Who is going to create this student-run consultancy?

The one initiative for year four that was not about improving the student experience was the one about "Launch[ing] project management affiliate nonprofits ...". We discussed that above.

## **Year Five Initiatives**

For year five, there are five new initiatives. The rest are repeats.

One ("Include independent study and student research in teaching load calculation") is really already done, since every faculty member gets course equivalencies for exactly these kinds of activities. Another ("Create team-teaching course development fund or course release") has been discussed above. Two of the remaining three are not worth mentioning, but one of them did attract our attention ("Require computational skills as part of the curriculum across all majors"). The responsible agency listed was the Division of Undergraduate Education. Campuswide educational requirements are the preserve of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), a committee of the Academic Senate.

## **CONCLUSION**

We will close with a general observation about the lists of initiatives. We find it notable, and surprising, that there is basically nothing about developing the faculty. Three academic priority areas have been identified. However, we could not find information on what exactly the campus will do with those. On page 19 it is said that "The three areas selected will help the campus prioritize funding and development", while on page 49 it says "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." But what does this mean in practice? That more FTEs will be directed for those areas? That the faculty will be asked to show how their research/teaching support these areas? For a thing that is supposed to be a strategic academic plan, this thing says remarkably little about academic planning.



It is also notable that the "departments" listed next to each initiative as responsible for their implementation are all, without exception, administrative units.

Sincerely,

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Jorge Hankamer, Chair

On behalf of the Committee on Privilege and Tenure

*Roberto Manduchi*

*Scott Oliver*

*Bruce Schumm*

Cc: Incoming Senate Chair Lau