



EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

March 21, 2022

To: Elizabeth Watkins
Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor

From: Jason Stajich
Chair, Executive Council

RE: Comments on *Provost's White Paper on Strategic Planning at UCR*

Dear Liz,

Thank you for meeting with Executive Council during our March 14, 2022 meeting to discuss the subject white paper and strategic planning at UC Riverside in general.

Included below are comments from Executive Council's discussion. We trust that these comments, organized in themes, will effectively impact the direction campus takes in strategically planning for the future.

1. The Structure/Organization of Strategic Planning

As a university community, it is critical for campus administrative leadership (Provost) to lead in the discussions and decision of strategic directions—i.e., how we move forward collectively. Campus members benefit from hearing from leadership. Hence, it is important for the Provost to do more to articulate her role in this strategic planning process.

We appreciate the agency that this plan offers to units by planning from the bottom up. However, the strategic planning process does not address campus-wide areas of concern which we believe require strategic direction. Most importantly, this plan subsumes the strategic plan under the current budget model. We understand the need for a realistic plan that recognizes the real budgetary constraints our campus faces. At the same time, there needs to be space for a campus-wide discussion about how to allocate resources. Specifically, there needs to be space to grapple together with the shifting financial balance of our public university, and how we respond collectively to the long-term state divestment from higher education. How will revenue generating units coexist with cost inefficient units, and how will strategic priorities articulate with budgetary realities? Conversations about enrollment growth must begin at the department

level and move through the schools and colleges to the whole campus. College-level plans can help to clarify priorities for growth within schools and colleges; the final step is to do so at a university level.

Relatedly, the draft assigns the central campus administration the responsibility to “deploy accurate and transparent financial models to ensure that enrollment growth is accompanied by investments in staff, faculty, and physical space.” We applaud this initiative! Ideally, financial transparency and some modicum of stability would be a prerequisite for strategic planning. It is difficult to plan within one’s means if those means are neither transparent nor predictable. Some members recalled previous campus leadership promising to make the budget more transparent and somewhat accessible to the public. The Senate strongly encourages such efforts.

2. The Need for Strategic Funding for Central Planning

Several members of the Executive Council voiced the need for a return of strategic funding to campus central administration. Historically, funds held centrally are essential for such functions as hiring Faculty Targets of Excellence, recruiting UC President's Postdoctoral Fellows into faculty positions, advancing campus strategic initiatives, and, indeed, allowing for leadership (while respecting shared governance). We believe that the faculty as a whole will understand the trade-offs this entails (i.e., less money allocated directly to units) and will be supportive. The Senate’s role in the process could include empowering the Provost to shift the current budget model toward some centralization.

3. The Plan should include a process to resolve other problems with the current budget model that ultimately undermine campus-wide strategic goals.

Several concerns were raised with the plan in light of the problems promoted by the current budget model. We suggest that strategic planning include a process to deal with the campus-wide impact the budget model has on how planning decisions are made.

- a. With respect to growth, UCR’s strategic plan must emphasize the research mission and investment in faculty.
- b. The planning process must take a holistic approach to equitable resource allocations, which allow for start-up growth in areas of campus-wide investment, including the newer and smaller schools, and promote the functioning of the large colleges.
- c. The strategic plan must counterbalance the competitive culture propagated by the current budget model. The current budget model generates collective action problems that promote inter-unit competition versus collaboration, notably unit-specific “land grabs” from other units (e.g., challenges in establishing and supporting intercollege majors or graduate programs). These incentivize establishment of isolated fiefdoms and inefficient and costly program redundancies.
- d. UCR does not have a crisis model or rainy-day fund for salvaging things when they go away. As the recession and pandemic have shown, it is essential to have a process and a financial cushion in place.

4. Other Concerns and Comments

- a. Some members were confused about exactly what Provost would like feedback about, as no clear plan is in place. Specifically, what would the Faculty Executive Committees be empowered to decide in the context of the schools and college strategic plans? How would that authority articulate with the Dean's and Provost's? Would the Faculty Executive Committees' plans need to be approved by the Dean and Provost?
- b. Planning should highlight and honor UCR's identity. How might we better engage our campus in articulating and sharing that identity? What is that identity? How do we—and should we—differ from the other UC campuses? How will feedback on planning be received to determine effectiveness?
- c. Where is the plan for how items listed in the strategic plan are to be accounted for?
- d. Some members liked the Provost's idea of the strategic planning document “living” on a website.