

April 4, 2021

TO: Jason Stajich, Chair
Riverside Division of the Academic Senate

FROM: Lucille Chia, Chair *Lucille Chia*
CHASS Executive Committee

RE: Penultimate Draft of "Future Fluent: University of California, Riverside Strategic Plan, February 2021

As Chair of the CHASS Executive Committee, I want to explain why this memo is slightly later than the Senate office deadline. Because of the size of CHASS and the diversity of its constituent departments and programs, it seems important that these units have the opportunity to voice their views, not on the needs of their own department/unit, but on how the strategic plan should address in helping to strengthen CHASS as a school (e.g., ways of collaborating among its departments as well as with other units on campus; recognition of the distinctive educational and research goals of various CHASS units and how to determine growth in departments, etc.)

In addition, given that one of reasons for the widespread dissatisfaction voiced by other schools and individual faculty members has to do with the vagueness of the draft, the CHASS EC thought useful to ask if each department/program submit its own strategic plan that can then be combined and put forward by CHASS to be incorporated into a campus-wide strategic plan.

Below are summaries of comments from the departments that had a chance to reply by the Senate office's deadline for this memo, but I invited those departments and programs that did not have the time yet to deliberate on the draft to continue sending their comments to the CHASS EC, so we can compile an addendum to this memo. As one person pointed out, "I can only speak for myself in offering the opinion that EVERY unit (academic depts., colleges, and support units) on campus should have had the opportunity to submit brief (1-2 pages) statements outlining strategic goals at the start of the process. The work of the university happens in these units, and to ignore these units in the planning process is to disempower the very groups that do the heavy lifting."

Even as this memo uses many quotes from particular departments or individuals, they actually reflect the opinions expressed throughout CHASS as members of the EC have heard or read. This memo has chosen the most trenchant expressions of these widespread views.

I begin with the positive comments, which have been strikingly few and qualified:

--The Psychology department "was generally supportive of the goals articulated in the document but felt that the document offered too little in the way of a specific action plan or mention of resources needed to support such plans."

--Prof. Steven Brint lauds the intended partnering with Riverside community and government bodies, such as the California Air Resources Board, Chambers of Commerce, City of Riverside, and Riverside County "to bring a clean technology park to Riverside, establishing a center that advances sustainability, innovation, and social inclusion." Also, engaging "with local business and government leaders to sustainably develop the University Avenue corridor with mixed-use residential and commercial spaces that foster collaboration and innovation between UCR and the surrounding community."

--On the other hand, the English Department notes that "the emptiness of the language of community engagement which seems to lack a specific vision for how the concerns of the community/ies of Riverside and beyond might be engaged in our research agendas. We note that the Carnegie language leaves community engagement "elective" and wonder what teeth such a declaration may have."

What is missing from this draft of the strategic plan caused much dismay. Let us first enumerate points that concern the whole campus, and then CHASS.

Campus-wide concerns

First, this draft could have been far more substantive, providing meat for discussion and debate, if it had included many more of the specific suggestions and advice provided by the committees on whose hard work this draft is based. Instead, the draft lacks clear direction and reads like an oddly decontextualized document in many ways, with little clear sense of where UCR is going to or coming from. It is, at best, more of a value statement, or even one of wishful thinking or one that will not openly admit problems confronting the school.

As the English Department commented the draft is

neither a plan nor strategic. In the overall view of the faculty, it is a catalog of aspirational language with little substance. It seems to follow the lines of UCR self-promotion and public relations messaging rather than seriously considering what UCR will need to do over the next decade or so to maintain and improve its capacity to fulfill its mission with regard both to the student body, graduate and undergraduate, and to the Riverside and Inland Empire community. Its tone is that of a marketing document and faculty were disturbed by its entrepreneurial rather than educational language. Given both the challenges that UCR faces, in terms of budget and plant, and the potentials it embodies, in

terms both of its increasingly reputed faculty and its remarkable student body, the Strategic Plan falls far short of what might have been expected.

The Religious Studies Department observes that

The draft does not seem to address, or even substantively acknowledge, the existing inequities at UCR. By touting accomplishments and evading the acknowledgment of failures (not all groups of students do in fact thrive in UCR's climate, nor do all faculty or staff), and by determining to "avoid complacency" (p. 13), the strategic plan gives the impression of a university where everything is wonderful for under-represented and minoritized students, staff, and faculty. . .

Retention is listed as part of one of the five types of sustainability, but in the expanded points below [p. 18] there is no reference to retention whatsoever; addressing chronic understaffing, which would be an excellent area in which to begin (but not stop) addressing this theme, is instead treated as a problem of more hiring and more automation.

Several groups also noted that the draft does not mention shared governance, a cherished UC tradition that increasingly seems to be honored in the breach. This draft itself may be exemplifying this trend: surely more details from the input of the subcommittees listed (Appendix B, pp. 26-32) would have made this a more substantive draft.

In contrast, it is alarmingly revealing that the authors of the draft think of the students (and other groups?) as "customers" (p. 18: "designing and implementing efficient, integrated, *customer-centric* [italics added for emphasis] processes. . .").

What else is missing from the draft?

--no mention of the library or ITS, a strange and alarming omission for any university aspiring to excellence in teaching and research, and even for the UCR administration that seems so set on promoting online classes.

--no mention of the previous Strategic Plan

Several groups, including the EC, noted the current plan does not mention the previous Strategic Plan ("UCR 20--20: The Path to Pre-Eminence"), perhaps revealing an odd and dangerous amnesia, both the good and bad points of the previous strategic plan could have provided the new one some valuable lessons. Professor Steve Brint wrote that the current strategic plan shares some problems with the previous one: no implementation plan, nobody responsible for implementation, no timeline, no resources allocated for implementation. These are crucial points, even if the current plan purports to be a "high-level" plan, too lofty to discuss specific details. At a time when the campus is undergoing an across the board 11% cut, honest, realistic, and detailed (to some extent) assessment of the resources needed and where they will come from surely should have been include: could it be that the authors of the strategic plan, faced with uncertain future conditions, understandably but inexcusably shied away from

grappling with these issues and thus styled this draft as a high-level plan? In short, the draft does not provide a sufficiently detailed plan for how UCR should proceed, and nor does it not look to the past for clues on what worked and what did not.

CHASS concerns

In the draft strategic plan, the terms “arts” (pp. 6, 10, 15, 25 twice, 33) and “humanities” (pp. 6, 24) are mentioned only in aspirational context, and “social sciences” does even appear in the plan. It seems that all the schools of UCR are aggrieved by the dearth of mention in the draft, and again, the authors of the document might argue that it is a high-level plan not overly concerned with details. But this in itself is a huge problem. As Prof. Brint points out, “The report shows little understanding (or concern) for what we do well as a university and *how we can build on these strengths* [italics added for emphasis].”

The Religious Studies Department points out that “The one gesture to the humanities and arts is a single sentence that is remarkably unimaginative and that points not to the majority of CHASS faculty who teach and do creative work and research in these fields but rather to others whose work we should “foreground.” Historically marginalized groups become the objects of research here, not the subjects, and the humanities and arts basically disappear - virtually guaranteeing a further attenuation of funding for those fields as the university strategically places its resources elsewhere.”

The English Department’s critical remarks include:

--the lack of serious attention to what arts-based *research* entails and how it should be supported and represented. The almost complete absence of specific language on the contribution of the arts to student education, beyond the statutory reference to a “creativity” that seems more a euphemism for entrepreneurialism is striking.

--Likewise, the absence of any attention to the educational and research role played by the traditions of critique and interpretation that the humanities disciplines have historically furthered leaves a huge segment of CHASS virtually unconsidered in the current draft of the Strategic Plan.

--the insufficiency of the language with regard to diversity and inclusivity, which comes across as a lucky accident of UCR’s demography rather than a product of an historical labor of desegregation that is far from complete. Faculty are concerned that once again the labor of diversification—notoriously sustained by CHASS to an outsize extent—will fall on the shoulders of BIPOC faculty without proper resources or recognition.

In short, the draft says nothing substantive about CHASS, UCR’s largest and most diverse school, and one that is essential in defining our school as a university, not just a collection of units competing for funds and the administration’s favor as the school/program most likely to attract revenue and students, regardless of pedagogical and scholarly excellence.

Appendix

Given the overwhelmingly critical response from groups and individuals in CHASS, perhaps this plan should be scrapped and a new one be written. *But* If we wish to *amend* rather than scrap this draft of the strategic plan—a choice that seems unlikely given such campus-wide criticism—the Philosophy Department has offered additions or modifications to the wording that may prove significant:

Suggested additions to draft Strategic Plan **in red**

p. 5:

Mission

Instead of ‘The University of California, Riverside will transform the lives of the diverse people of California and the world through the discovery, translation, and preservation of knowledge, thereby enriching our shared future,’ we suggest making the ‘discovery, translation, and preservation of knowledge’ the principal aim as follows:

The University of California, Riverside is dedicated to the discovery, translation, and preservation of knowledge, there by transforming the lives of the diverse people of California and the world, and enriching our shared future.

Core Values...

The Greater Good: We are dedicated to advancing the public interest and fostering the common good, building on our historical and enduring commitment to underserved populations, **and informed by a broad, scholarly understanding of ethics, values, culture, and the human condition.**

p. 6, §1.1

...Our scholarship in the humanities and arts expands our understanding of the human identity and experience, **supports reflection on basic values**, and adds meaning to our existence.

p. 7, §1.1 – add new bullet point:

- **Commit resources to units, projects, and faculty that contribute to understanding the ethical and cultural consequences of scientific research, fostering collaboration and communication between faculty in science and technology and faculty in the arts and humanities.**

p. 7, §2, bullet 2

- ***Living healthier, and longer, and better:*** Addressing the most pressing challenges in neuroscience, cognition, aging, mental health, substance abuse, nutrition, and the social determinants of health. Developing and harnessing new biomedical technologies to discover, develop, and deploy new therapeutics.

Challenging presuppositions about and expanding our conception of the nature of human well-being and the possible forms of human flourishing.

p. 8, §2, bullet 4

Enabling a globally-connected economy: Mobilizing innovative uses of automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, embedded systems, and logistics to support and grow the economy. Securing and protecting information systems. Creating and ensuring sustainable supply chains. **Exploring and critiquing the social, cultural, epistemic, and ethical consequences of new technologies.**

