

Sarah Miller

Subject: FW: Your Chance to Provide Feedback on the Strategic Plan Draft "Future Fluent"

To Whom It May Concern:

The CNAS Executive Committee recently discussed the *Future Fluent* strategic plan as contained in the PDF file (UCR Strategic Plan - Penultimate Draft.pdf). Although we greatly appreciate the efforts of the "100 UCR campus and community members [who] have worked to develop a strategic plan," we conclude that the current draft falls far short of the mark. In brief, the current draft is largely vacuous, platitudinous, lacks specifics, and would do more harm to UCR than good.

Our committee had lengthy discussions, which I will attempt to summarize here. Many of the comments were rather harsh, but I will resist the temptation to sanitize them. For example, it was suggested that the report should instead be named "*Future Effluent*." Another wrote: "It's a vision document without a vision. It's written by people with no deep or meaningful understanding of the institution they lead."

From here on, I will present the comments in semi-random order, as follows:

We heard multiple reports of feedback having been given to the working groups that was entirely ignored. These instances included a student who was placed on the committee without consultation, and became so disturbed by the lack of receptivity to their comments that they resigned.

Some of our faculty noted that they did attend the town halls, but that the answers to questions/suggestions seemed to be the same at all times: "We will look into that..." -- even to the very obvious questions. They concluded that the feedback was not taken seriously or even considered.

Apparently, some earlier drafts of the report contained specifics, but these could not gain a consensus, and what appears to have emerged is a type of lowest common denominator.

The document is very generic, with many catchy sentences, but no action plan and inadequate highlighting of UCR's existing strengths.

Pablum.

Page 5 could just be removed -- it really says nothing.

The phrase "inclusive excellence" is used in a way that implies no real understanding of what it means. It needs to be more than a slogan in this document.

Although UCR's status as a land-grant institution sets us apart from most of the other UCs, this special status is scarcely mentioned and we see no discussion concerning how it could or should inform our future plans or be leveraged for success.

Although UCR has great strengths in the life sciences (biological sciences) -- separate from the biomedical sciences -- this is mentioned nowhere in the draft.

Ditto for the agricultural sciences, which are scarcely mentioned.

Our strengths in chemistry and physics are scarcely mentioned.

Statements such as the following are far too generic to be of any use, and instead come across as somewhat embarrassing: "Our applied research leverages this foundation and addresses such critical challenges as climate change, disease, sustainable growth, and social disparities. Our scholarship in the humanities and arts expands our understanding of the human identity and experience and adds meaning to our existence."

A similar criticism applies to this: "UCR's future research enterprise will build on excellence in basic and applied research and creative activity across disciplines."

These types of statements also suggest that UCR has no clear plans to focus our efforts or target particular areas in which we might be able to stand out in comparison with other institutions, especially our sister UC campuses. The lack of specifics does not reflect well on our vision (or lack thereof).

In this context, we were pleased to see one specific, new initiative:

"Partner with 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."

We noted some puzzling statements, such as "Develop non-traditional alternatives to the one-on-one apprenticeship model of doctoral education." Where did this come from? Would this be trying to solve some unstated problem with our current model?

We did note these statements of goals regarding subjects that involve CNAS:

"Living healthier and longer: 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."

"Mitigating and adapting to climate change: Deepening our understanding of the natural environment and how human activity impacts it. Protecting, recovering, and enhancing environmental quality and agricultural productivity. Developing clean technologies and energy sources. Advancing environmental sustainability."

However, the lack of any specifics regarding HOW we might do these things serves to undercut the lofty goals. Platitudes do not a strategic plan make.

The document makes one passing reference to interdisciplinary research but no mention of interdisciplinary graduate programs, which are suffering at present due to the current funding models.

With respect to process, we would have thought that it might have started with a call to all campus departments to, say, make suggestions for five things they would like to see in a strategic plan. These suggestions could then have been categorized and funneled into a set of goals or objectives. We see no evidence that departments were ever consulted directly during the process, which sells short our many talented faculty, staff, and students, as well as the value of the departmental structure, which is, after all, where the rubber meets the road for research, teaching, and service.

In closing, one of our faculty referred us to a passage here:

<https://presidentialhistory.com/2011/08/hardings-pompous-phrases.html>

"... an army of pompous phrases moving over the landscape in search of an idea; sometimes these meandering words would actually capture a straggling thought and bear it triumphantly as a prisoner in their midst, until it died of servitude and overwork."

Given the foregoing criticisms and others not listed here, we call for this draft to be scrapped and the entire process to be rebooted.

Respectfully,
Theodore Garland, Jr.

Chair, CNAS Executive Committee

|