

TO: Jason Stajich, Chair
Riverside Division

FR: Richard M. Carpiano, Chair
Executive Committee, School of Public Policy

RE: [Campus Review] Academic Planning: Draft Strategic Plan

Date: March 4, 2021

The Executive Committee of the School of Public Policy reviewed the document “Academic Planning: Draft Strategic Plan.” While members expressed that the document does a good job in articulating general aspiration (e.g., the four institutional goals), several significant concerns and limitations were also raised. These five items (of broad and specific focus) are detailed below.

Broad Issues:

1. There are almost no actionable recommendations—the “nuts and bolts” of policies that could change to advance the aspirations.
2. (Related to the prior point) There is not much content that critically examines why we currently do not meet those aspirations. For example, if we are not currently reaching our aspirations for equity and inclusion, what are the systemic reasons for that? The same is true for almost all of the other aspirations that the draft plan mentions—the lack of masters programs, the lack of professional development support for grad students, the lack of support for extramural funding, the lack of connections with the community, etc. Therefore, in a sense, writing this document as a set of general aspirations glosses over the systemic problems that are the root causes, and that makes it hard to develop actionable solutions.
3. There seems to be a lot of subcommittees and these committees require a lot of service from faculty and staff. Is it possible to reduce those?

Specific Issues:

4. Regarding online education, the document advances this instructional approach but does not engage honestly with its significant weaknesses.
 - a. It does not mention the considerable evidence—and everyone’s experience during COVID-19—that online education is of lower quality than in-person education.
 - b. It advocates for online education on the grounds of access, but does not acknowledge how online education compromises students’ performance and learning. As such, this

lack of consideration directly contradicts the plan's commitment to diversity and equity in education.

5. The document is devoid of any consideration of social class, economic inequality, or poverty. Indeed, the words “social class,” “socio-economic,” “poverty,” and “inequality” do not even appear in the entire text once. There is no serious way to address equity and diversity without addressing poverty, social class, and socio-economic disadvantage. The university appears to think we address this solely by addressing racial equity—but while race and class are almost always correlated, they are not the same and it is inappropriate to substitute one for the other. Moreover, despite ongoing pride and rhetoric about first generation students, UCR devotes almost zero resources to the study of social class, poverty, and economic inequality. There are only a very few faculty on campus studying or teaching about poverty and UCR has decidedly not invested in faculty searches in this area. Indeed, UCR offered zero undergraduate or graduate courses with “poverty” in the title until 2016 and now has only two. All of this undermines the stated goals of the plan. We offer two specific examples:

- a. Institutional Goal I.2 (page 7) reads:

Fostering an equitable society: Addressing systemic social and racial disparities in such areas as health, education, the economy, and freedom from violence and oppression. Developing innovative, socially sustainable public programs and policies. Foregrounding social, cultural, literary, artistic, and other intellectual contributions from historically marginalized groups.

Note how there is no explicit mention of social class, poverty, or economic inequality. Also, imagine this plank existing without any consideration of growing and supporting faculty teaching and studying racial-ethnic inequalities.

- b. Section IV.3 (page 16) reads “Identifying relevant foci and groups working on key issues such as basic needs, housing, food security, environmental quality, education, workforce development, political representation, health, racial justice, and others” and Section IV.4 (page 17) refers to “equitable economic development.”

Frankly, UCR cannot do this without a substantial increase in faculty with expertise in poverty, social class, and economic inequality. UCR does not have more than a couple of faculty with expertise on basic needs, housing, and food security, for example.

In sum, any serious engagement on these issues is impossible without greater investment in faculty studying and teaching about poverty, social class and economic inequality.

Thank you very much for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard M. Carpiano". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'R' and a long, sweeping tail.

Richard M. Carpiano, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Professor of Public Policy and Sociology