Acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the laboratory support capabilities of existing buildings is an excellent priority for the campus. This will help department Chairs understand the lab support capacity of the buildings they occupy. However, PRP is very concerned that this new layer of administration will have several severe ramifications on: (1) timely and essential building renovations, (2) continued access to research facilities with high levels of safety controls, and (3) placement of faculty in locations far from their home departments, which breaks down collegiality, and interferes with departmental and college hiring plans. We highlight several concerns.

In the past, the institutional memory regarding the quality of a research space and its associated infrastructure has been very short lived and often conclusions from campus space and capacity evaluations change over time. For example, prior to 2005, Design and Construction considered Batchelor Hall a ‘dead-end’ building, with little renovation potential, and, therefore, not worth any investments in improving of labs or infrastructure. This clearly changed as infrastructure renovations are now on going. Perhaps the new policy will help to prevent such inaccurate estimates of building capacities. This could be a positive outcome of the proposal.

PRP agrees that well-intentioned renovations that do not meet the needs of occupants or surpass building capacity are wasteful and frustrating for faculty. This is particularly important when the research needs of assistant professors are considered. Assistant professors must hit the ground running with spaces that meet their current and future research needs. Assistant professors have a
short timeline to establish their independent research program and any delays in having access to functional lab spaces have major impacts on acquiring preliminary data for grants, data for publications, and training graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. This is also a concern for faculty who need to expand their research space due to acquisition of essential new equipment or increases in personnel associated with a new grant. Delays in adapting research spaces can be detrimental for the required progress on a grant. PRP hopes that this new administrative layer does not delay assignment and approval of spaces for new hires.

Third, the UCR campus has never been nimble when it comes to renovations or space decision making. There is a need for more clear guidelines and a chain of command, otherwise delays in decision making will inevitably occur. Delays is essential renovations will occur impacting research productivity and faculty satisfaction. With the increased costs of students and postdoctoral fellows, any delays in functional research space are detrimental.

In the past and currently, research space has been largely assigned at the department level, with both college and Provost approval. The exception is for the two multidisciplinary buildings MRBI and Genomics, which each have their own mechanism of space assignments. The propose policy changes appear to minimize the role of the department in efficiently managing space for the changing needs of its faculty. PRP thinks that the policy needs to be revised to acknowledge that space assignments are deeply important to department sustainability, planning and growth. Departments have hiring plans to replace faculty who have separated to assure that teaching needs and research strengths are maintained. This is critical for retaining the international research notoriety of a department, college and campus. Unlinking space allocation from a department or from multidisciplinary buildings that have different space allocation policies will be disruptive and harmful to the campus. There does not appear to be a consultative process.

Additionally, the process of reassessing lab space allotments once every five years has a strong potential to disrupt researchers who are conducting different types of research. This is particularly a concern for Principal Investigators who work on projects that require stringent safety requirements (for example, BSL3 labs). These PIs must have an assurance that these labs are available when needed. As the research endeavors and staffing for research projects are dynamic and change from year to year, our recommendation is to have an annual departmental assessment of needs to minimize disruption to research endeavors.

PRP is very concerned about the proposed policy as it may result in placement of new faculty in random locations across the campus solely because a building might have the right infrastructure to support a particular professor’s research program. It is very important for faculty to be located adjacent to, within the same building, or in close proximity to faculty from the same department or who are linked by common research interests or approaches (eg., Genomics or MRB I). Assistant professors and tenured faculty who are new to UCR immensely benefit by the informal mentoring that is associated with co-localization. This informal mentoring is critical for the success of assistant professors in departments with non-optimal leadership or a history of non-collegial behavior. We hope that the new policy does not result in a mosaic of faculty scattered across the
campus solely based on building infrastructure. It will not be good for morale or research productivity. We recommend the inclusion of a clause in the review process to ensure researchers’ track records and broader research agendas are considered when making space allocation decisions.

Finally, we are concerned about the proposed policy with respective to current status of research facilities across different colleges. The proposed policy may heighten the research space inequities across the science colleges. While there are few buildings that were designed for cross-college research initiatives (MRB), most buildings were built or renovated for college or school use. Examples of buildings with contemporary research space designed for use within a specific college/school include the current SOM building, Engineering I and II (BCOE), Chemistry (CNAS), and Genomics (CNAS). This college-based building and space allocation philosophy is continuing on our campus with the construction of the new SOM building and with Engineering III being the top priority in the building queue. However, there are no complementary plans for enhanced research spaces for CNAS; this will amplify the research space inequities across the science colleges.

We provide one example of potential inequities; we are certain that there are others that could be provided. CNAS inhabits numerous older buildings that lack contemporary research spaces (ie., Spieth and Batchelor Hall). With no plans for building new research facilities for CNAS, CNAS life science research depends on access to the very limited, high quality research spaces that are currently associated with CNAS (such as in Genomics and renovated portions of Boyce). These spaces are required to maintain CNAS faculty numbers. PRP is very concerned that ‘higher-level’ space allocations without extensive consultation with department chairs will disrupt the success of on-going department faculty searches and near-term hiring plans to replace faculty who have recently separated. Such disruptions will negatively impact the ability of CNAS to maintain research prominence and meeting the teaching needs of the college. PRP has learned that the campus plans to move a BCOE faculty member into Genomics; we understand that this decision was made without consultation of CNAS department chairs or the Genomics Building Committee that currently governs the interdepartmental research spaces in Genomics. Placement of faculty from other colleges into current ‘college-controlled’ spaces will only increase tensions across the campus. These top-down initiatives are rarely viewed in a positive light.