COMMITTEE ON PHYSICAL RESOURCES PLANNING

Date: November 6, 2023
To: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division

From: Linda Walling
Chair, Committee on Physical Resources Planning

Re: [Campus Review] Report Review: Sustainability, the Environment and Climate Crisis Ad Hoc Committee Report

The Physical Resources Planning Committee (PRP) discussed the Sustainability, the Environment and Climate Crisis (SECC) Ad hoc Committee report (January 31, 2024) on April 12, 2024. The PRP agrees with the report that there is an acute need for sustainability efforts at UCR to become more transparent to all members of the campus. The PRP agrees with the SECC about the need for early and substantial faculty involvement in sustainability issues and actions on our campus. There is a need for consultative discussions and accountability on sustainability actions at UCR.

The PRP forms this opinion based on its annual review and response to the campus’ Deferred Maintenance and Capital Projects Plan. In PRP’s June 9, 2023 response to this document, PRP voiced concern that there was a lack of transparency and accountability about UCR’s sustainability projects and their annual progress. In regard to sustainability projects, PRP is informed and not consulted. This is appropriate, as long as there is faculty engagement in the sustainability action decision-making process.

Although there is a need for early, consistent and meaningful engagement of faculty in UCR’s sustainability planning, the PRP does not support the creation of R’Earth, its proposed administrative structure, or an independent Senate Sustainability Committee. Furthermore, the PRP does not support the proposed expansive role of the proposed Senate Sustainability Committee, which includes curriculum development and oversight and research grants. Our comments follow.

Senate Faculty Involvement in the Sustainability Dialogues

Currently, four Senate faculty have a voice in sustainability issues on our campus through the UCR Sustainability Committee, including the Faculty Chair of the Sustainability Committee. It is PRP’s
understanding that the faculty, staff and students of this committee are informed about sustainability initiatives; this is not consultation and therefore there is a need for change. We must assure that there is early and substantial involvement of Senate faculty in UCR sustainability decisions; this is critical for shared governance.

There are two solutions to the current lack of faculty engagement in sustainability decision making. One is creation of a standing Senate Sustainability Committee, which was proposed by the SECC, that will interface with the Sustainability Office (or the proposed R’Earth umbrella) and also have a broader scope with curricular and research components. The second alternative is to formally appoint a joint Senate Administration Committee to address UCR’s sustainability issues.

The majority of the PRP Committee do not support the independent Senate Sustainability Committee. There are four major concerns. (1) There is concern that an independent Senate Sustainability Committee will not change the campus decision-making process. There is concern that an independent Senate Sustainability Committee will continue to be informed of decisions rather than be engaged as active participants in decision making on sustainability issues impacting our campus. (2) There will be a power differential if there is an independent Senate and an Administrative committee for sustainability. (3) PRP views that partnering of Senate Faculty with the administration on sustainability issues is critical. Having experts in all aspects of sustainability in the room for early discussions is needed. A joint Senate-Administrative committee would enable this, remove duplicative actions, and assures faculty engagement and consultation. This partnership abolishes the power differential. (4) Creating two parallel entities for sustainability issues increases the Senate faculty and administrative workload.

Oversight of the sustainability curriculum

The goal of understanding the current and proposed courses in sustainability is laudable. However, the PRP does not support the proposal that a new Senate Sustainability Committee be charged with the identification of current and development of future sustainability curriculum. Curriculum development is the responsibility and privilege of individual faculty, their departments and the college’s Executive Committee. There is already sufficient Senate level approval of courses through Senate committees (Educational Policy and Graduate Council). Furthermore, a new Senate Sustainability Committee is unlikely to be broad enough to represent all critical areas of sustainability research and education.

The PRP understands that there is a need for the campus to identify current and proposed courses that address sustainability to meet the ASSHE STARS requirements. A new Senate Committee with this charge is not needed. However, PRP agrees that there is need for a dialog about courses with substantial sustainability content.

We understand that the UCR Sustainability Committee is currently using a ‘key word’ strategy to identify courses with curriculum that is related to sustainability. PRP thinks this is a good first approach. However, a more rigorous approach is needed, as ‘key words’ approach is likely to miss classes that were established prior to the term ‘sustainability’ becoming prominent on our campuses.

PRP recommends: (1) that all new course proposals should be required to indicate if their course has a substantial content (via a check list and a 2-3 sentence statement) and (2) find a simple mechanism to identify currently approved classes with substantial content related to sustainability. This will require communication with colleges, department chairs and faculty.
Prior to initiation of the curriculum review process, PRP recommends that the Sustainability Committee clearly define ‘sustainability’. This would determine the group of faculty who should be involved in the discussion of UCR’s sustainability curriculum. We recommend that this conversation initiate with college-level conversations. Department Chairs can ask their faculty to identify their current classes with a substantial sustainability emphasis. College Executive Committees can compile these classes to provide the required information for ASSHE STARS. This should be a short-term initiative and does not need a permanent Senate Committee. If a longer-term need is identified, perhaps one member of each College’s Executive Committee can be appointed as a sustainability liaison.

PRP is also concerned that establishing a Senate level Committee with the charge for development and oversight of sustainability curriculum sets a dangerous precedent. PRP does not think that permanent Senate committees should be established for promoting cross-cutting research and curriculum development. This is the role of faculty, departments, centers and institutes, not the Senate.

Oversight of Sustainability Research

The SECC report also proposed that the new Senate Committee be charged with allocation of funds for sustainability research. It appears that this is already occurring under the auspices of the UCR Sustainability Committee; PRP was not aware of such opportunities for students and faculty. Therefore, there is concern that the current process is not transparent or equitable. If research funding for sustainability is available, there should be a call to all Senate faculty for participation. Given that OASIS project currently supports sustainability projects, the use of UCR Sustainability Office funds to support research seems like a poor decision.

Perhaps an intercollege committee or a committee from the Research Office to enable collaborations is needed. It is unprecedented for a Senate Committee to coordinate disciplinary research. Formation of a Center or Institute is clearly more in alignment with other national initiatives.

Role of the UCR Sustainability Committee in Equipment Selection for New Faculty Hires

PRP discussed the fact that established faculty have been contacted by staff from the Sustainability Office and advised to replace ‘energy-hog’ equipment with more energy efficient equipment. We agree with this recommendation. However, in the majority of cases, this is financially impossible for most faculty. For example, the costs of replacing an existing -80oC freezer with an energy-efficient freezer exceeds $12,000 and PIs will not divert research funds to replace a functional freezer.

If this type of change is desired, PRP recommends that the UCR Sustainability Office be proactive. Perhaps the UCR Sustainability office can advise new hires about sustainable equipment purchase decisions. This could be coordinated through the college and departments. Often more energy efficient equipment is more expensive than standard equipment. Perhaps the campus can provide the funding differential between the two models.

The R’Earth Concept

The campus’ ‘restructuring’ of the Office of Sustainability in 2016 had major impacts on campus sustainability efforts. It is clear that sustainability must once again become a higher priority for UCR. The SECC Adhoc Report suggested creating R’Earth to integrate campus sustainability efforts. While PRP
agrees that restructuring of the complex web of sustainability decisions is needed, the R’Erath proposition does not resonate. In particular, the PRP opposes the creation of the Vice Provost of Sustainability. As the majority of PRP does not support creation of a new Senate Sustainability Committee and its proposed role in curriculum and research, PRP does not support the R’Earth concept. PRP views the creation of a seemingly unending administrative expansion. Sustainability funds should be focused on changing the campus not creating new inflated administrative structures. PRP thinks that alternatives to the R’Earth proposal should be pursued. Due to the likely budgetary constraints in 2024-25, an economical and effective new administrative structure needs to be pursued.

**Correction to the Adhoc Report**

Based on a year of discussion about the OASIS building in PRP, it is clear that the SECC Adhoc report does not accurately reflect the difference between OASIS and the OASIS building. For this reason, the language in this section should be modified accordingly. The OASIS grants administered by the RED Office is indeed broad and impacts many faculty on the campus. In contrast, the OASIS building only supports CE-CERT labs, a small number of Senate faculty, and, potentially, research closely aligned with CE-CERT’s emphases. In addition, it is PRP’s understanding that the only incubator facility space in the OASIS building is dry office space. Given these fundamental concerns, this section of the report needs substantial revision. Finally, there is no OASIS Research Park on the Capital Plan at this time; this should be removed from the document.

**In summary**

PRP acknowledges the energy and thoughtfulness of the SECC Adhoc Committee and its Adhoc Report. However, PRP does not support development of R’Earth nor of a Senate Committee on Sustainability. Senate Committees do not create or control curricula or research.