UCR | Strategic Planning Committee
Survey on Academic Excellence

UCR 2020 Faculty Survey Results
Final Report by Professor Steven Brint
April 2010

Academic Excellence Survey Administration Details

The UCR Academic Excellence Survey was designed to capture faculty perceptions of academic excellence on the UCR campus.

The survey was launched on January 11, 2010.

UCR faculty were emailed (two email lists were provided by C&C). Valid email addresses:

- 692 full time faculty
- 161 emeriti

Email reminders were sent on January 14, January 18 and January 21. The survey was closed on January 22, 2010.

Survey Response Rate Was Excellent!

A total of 309 UCR faculty completed the survey.

Full time:
- 59% (410/692) of full time faculty started the survey
- **71% (292/410) of those who started the survey completed it**

Emeriti:
- 20% (32/161) of emeriti started the survey
- **53% (17/32) of those who started the survey completed it**

Data from full-time and emeritus faculty were combined for all analyses to preserve anonymity

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Survey Items

- Survey described AAU criteria and then asked respondents their opinions about current academic excellence at UCR in the context of research collaborations, research centers and graduate programs.

- This was followed by items regarding their opinions about the opportunities for excellence in the future with respect to these three contexts.

- Respondents also had the opportunity to give their **candid opinions about academic excellence at UCR**.

- Respondents had the option of indicating their primary school/college and rank.
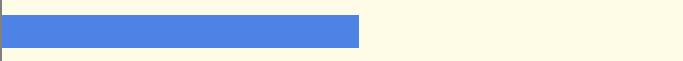
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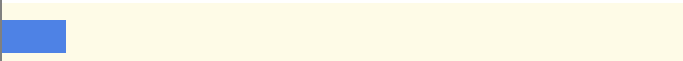
Your Primary College/School

#	Answer		Response	%
1	BCOE		22	7%
2	CHASS		123	41%
3	CNAS (including Biomedical Sciences)		119	40%
4	GSOE		10	3%
5	SoBA		6	2%
6	Prefer not to say		19	6%
	Total		299	100%
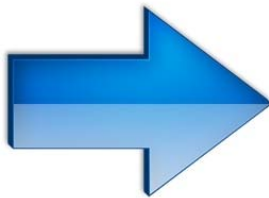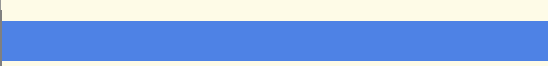
Note: Total Ns vary from question to question because respondents were not required to answer each question and could skip questions as desired. Respondents were also not required to complete the survey. (442 respondents started the survey; 309 completed)

Your Rank

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Assistant		50	17%
2	Associate		50	17%
3	Full		156	52%
4	Emeritus		14	5%
5	Prefer not to say		28	9%
	Total		298	100%

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Current Research Collaborations

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Are you currently involved in research collaboration with other faculty members at UCR?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		233	66%
2	No		119	34%
	Total		352	100%

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Inclusion Rules

10% of College faculty responding OR a critical mass of five faculty members for collaborations, centers, and programs primarily housed in the smaller colleges.

School/College	No. Respondents	Minimum Mentions
BCOE	22	5
CHASS	123	12
CNAS (incl. Biomed)	119	12
GSOE	10	5
SoBA	6	5

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Current Research Collaborations Mentioned that Met the Inclusion Rule

Current Collaboration	School	Mentions
Environment/Climate Change/Sustainability	CNAS	24
Plant and Cell Biology	CNAS	22
Nanotechnology	BCOE/CNAS	21
Pest Control/Pest Invasions	CNAS	13
Genomics	CNAS	13

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CHASS and CNAS Current Research Collaborations Mentioned < 10%

CHASS

Early Modern Group (7 mentions)

Creative Writing (5 mentions)

Diversity & Race (4 mentions)

CNAS

Conservation Biology & Ecosystems (11 mentions)

Evolutionary Biology (9 mentions)

Vector Biology & Disease (7 mentions)

Earthquake-related (4 mentions)

Water (4 mentions)

GSOE/CHASS

Higher Education (4 mentions)

Existing Research Centers

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Research centers are organized units which typically occupy a physical space and seek grants to support the work of affiliated researchers. Are you currently affiliated with a research center?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		134	39%
2	No		206	61%
	Total		340	100%

Existing Research Centers Mentioned that Met the Inclusion Rule

Existing Center	School	Mentions
Center for Ideas & Society	CHASS	29
Institute for Integrative Genome Biology	CNAS	23
Center for Environmental Research and Technology	CNAS	22
Center for Conservation Biology	CNAS	18
Center for Plant and Cell Biology	CNAS	17
Center for Nano-scale Science and Engineering	CNAS/BCOE	16
Center for Invasive Species Research	CNAS	12

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CHASS and CNAS Existing Research Centers Mentioned < 10%

CHASS

California Center for Native Nations (6 mentions)

Blakeley Center on Sustainable Suburban Development (CSSD) (5)

Presley Center for Crime and Justice Studies (3)

Institute for World Systems Research (3)

CNAS

Center for Disease Vector Research (CDVR) (11 mentions)

Water Science & Policy Center (5)

Air Pollution Research Center (5)

Agricultural Experiment Station (3)

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Current Graduate Programs

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Current Graduate Programs Mentioned that Met the Inclusion Rule

Current Program	School	Mentions
Entomology	CNAS	41
Plant Sciences	CNAS	38
Chemistry	CNAS	22
EEOB	CNAS	22
Philosophy	CHASS	22
Dance	CHASS	20
English	CHASS	18
Creative Writing	CHASS	14
Psychology	CHASS	14
Environmental Science	CNAS	14
Chemical/Environ. Engineering	BCOE	13
Computer Science	BCOE	8

Future Research Centers and Schools

Future Research Centers Mentioned that Met the Inclusion Rule

Future Center	School	Mentions
Climate and Ecological Systems Change	CNAS	18
Genomics-related (e.g. epigenetic)	CNAS	13
Health-related	SOM/CNAS	12
New Materials	BCOE/CNAS	8

Only one future School met the 10% inclusion rule:

Public Policy (15 mentions)

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Faculty Candid Comments

Candid Opinion Question Wording

"Please use the box below to give us any feedback you would care to on UCR's opportunities to raise academic excellence. You may wish to discuss fields in which UCR has a comparative advantage due to the eminence of current faculty, UCR's location, its demographic composition, or other factors. You may wish to discuss the feasibility of entirely new structural arrangements for supporting academic excellence on campus. Or you may wish to discuss programs that would require substantial improvements to perform at the level expected in a top-ranked research university. These are only suggestions: please write about any topic on your mind related to the theme of how UCR can raise academic excellence.

"Please note: **Your responses *are not linked in any way to individually identifiable information*. Only anonymous data are being collected and only aggregate results will be reported.**"

61% of the Faculty Voiced Their Opinions

Of the 309 faculty that completed the survey, **61% (190/309) took the time to voice their opinions on the state of academic excellence at UCR.** Many of these 190 responses were quite lengthy (no word limit was placed on the response).

Academic Excellence Subcommittee members Steven Brint and Donna Hoffman **independently** read and coded each response as follows:

- ✓ Up to **three themes** for each response (e.g. admit better qualified undergraduates).
- ✓ The **valence** of the response (e.g. satisfied, angry, frustrated, fearful, etc.)
- ✓ Whether any part of the response should be **excerpted** for the Strategic Planning Report

Brint and Hoffman discussed independently derived coding schemes to arrive at consensus. The two coding schemes were in close agreement. A third independent coder from the Sloan Center reviewed the initial coding schemes. The third coder concurred with the coding scheme.

Content Analysis Qualifications

- Fewer than half of Senate faculty responded to the survey. CNAS faculty and full professors were over-represented among survey respondents.

- The largest number of comments, by far, involved positive statements about the respondent's own department or program and its importance to the university.

- We discuss general themes that were mentioned relatively often (14 times or more). Only two of these more general themes were mentioned by as many as 10% of the 190 faculty members who provided candid comments.

- Those primarily responsible for choosing categories and quotes are not necessarily entirely disinterested parties.

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An Overall Assessment

The majority of the responding faculty demonstrated a strong commitment to academic excellence.

Most respondents said they wanted higher standards and more support on campus for high-impact research. They saw themselves as good -- even outstanding -- scientists and scholars, but feared that some members of the campus community were not as committed to excellence for a variety of reasons. They hoped that the current campus administration and the strategic plan would make tough choices to steer the campus toward a higher level of academic accomplishment and regard.

An Example of this Perspective

We are currently in an environment where resources are distributed for political reasons rather than for advancing the reputation or quality of the university. We should focus on what we can be excellent at… Hire great people and great things will happen. Build on strength in strong departments that have a record of knowing what they are doing. I think there is too much emphasis on finding the newest center that will magically transform UCR.

7 Frequently Mentioned Themes

1) Improve the personnel process (22 mentions)
2) Implement incentives and improved infrastructure to promote research (19)
3) Improve the work of the Office of Research (15)
4) Build on existing campus strengths (14)
5) Create fewer, more competitive programs and/or small, high-quality programs (14)
6) Admit academically better qualified students (14)
7) Do not allow campus politicians to influence decisions/rely on hard evidence about quality to inform decisions (14)

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Excerpting Quotes to Illustrate Themes

In the following sections, we excerpt quotes from the candid comments to illustrate five composite themes that emerged in the candid comments section of the survey. These composite themes are drawn from the 7 frequently mentioned themes.

Composite Themes:

- ✓ Improve the standards of the personnel process.

- ✓ Improve research incentives and the research infrastructure.

- ✓ Build on existing strengths and organize fewer, more competitive programs.

- ✓ Gradually improve the academic profile of incoming students.

- ✓ Develop and support leaders who will take responsibility for campus improvement.

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quote

Improve the Personnel Process

Tenure and promotion decisions should put due stress on "high-impact" papers. The current promotion system counts papers as "beans," and insignificant, un-cited journals are cultivated by junior and senior faculty alike to get "easy" papers for promotion. Clear guidelines to chairs and in the APM should be instituted. A number of unproductive senior faculty members step up the promotion ladder with very little true national recognition, mentoring, grant support and research excellence. Retirements and higher standards for promotions are needed. Strength does not always lie in numbers and size -- in fact strength lies in quality.

Frankly we need to hire based, first, on research productivity, rather than (any other criteria). Faculty need to be evaluated and rewarded based on the visibility/prestige of their publication record.

Improve the Personnel Process

Determination to improve and bring the campus to the level of top ranking departments in the country seems to be missing on this campus. The quality of work is often ignored against the quantity, especially from the committees dealing with personnel cases. There is too much concentration on service and teaching. People with superb research are lost in favor of people playing the game of mixed strategies, good teaching and high quantity of noisy research with low quality.

Improve Research Incentives and Infrastructure

To become a prominent research university, UCR needs to have a MUCH better infrastructure. OR is utterly dysfunctional, I seriously believe that the only way to turn it around is to force a complete change of leadership, down to several levels below. Research support throughout UCR is spotty at best, and mostly relying on great work from selected (and few) individuals, rather than from a consistent attitude of service to the faculty research needs. Until this infrastructure is greatly improved, our chance of achieving excellence is greatly diminished (and, even if we achieve it, under some perverse measure of excellence), UCR still will be a place where inefficiencies will take too great a bite out of the pleasure of academic/research life. Sorry to be so frank, but I have been a faculty member at another public university, and I know things should/must be better.

Research productivity would be greatly enhanced by a well-functioning OR.

We need a research office where the stated philosophy is that the staff are there to facilitate the production and processing of a proposal (and the work once awarded).

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Improve Research Incentives and Infrastructure

Support grants acquisition meaningfully. Consider substantial grant acquisition as a criterion meriting any sort of reward. For every proposal to write, you have to fight it through the office of research, where the staff know very little about UCR's realities. I do not know how many memos I and the staff in my department had to write to convince OR that UCR does not provide office materials for graduate students and postdocs and that this is a valid item for NSF. Removal of OR and authority to sign off proposals at the Department level would be one option.

Starkly different from top-tier institutions is the level of staff and administrative support. I found that I have to constantly "nag", urge and supervise various staff (both within the department and at the office of research) to, e.g. finish budget preparation for proposals, manage the sub-awards, bill the accounting office, etc etc. This makes it hard for me to focus on research, and I know for certain that other top-tier institutions do not function like this. So I would really appreciate if we hire more and better staff, not to police our work, but to *help* the faculty members to secure and manage external grants.

Improve Research Incentives and Infrastructure

quote

The most important impediments over the years at UCR have been 1) a lack of critical mass to support training grants and user fees for pieces of equipment and 2) a lack of communal research equipment and support personnel for that equipment…We have struggled at a major disadvantage…. I cannot tell you how many grant proposals I have had that referred to – the lack of cutting edge technology in the proposal – things I cannot propose since it is not available to me here and wouldn't work well with an office campus collaboration.

" *quote* " Build on Existing Strengths and Organize Fewer, More Competitive Programs

UCR has many outstanding individuals, but it has been hampered by trying to do too much. The campus cannot excel in all areas. Programs with under 50 majors should be consolidated or eliminated. This is particularly true if the scholarship produced by faculty members is not cited and does not lead to other forms of scholarly recognition (e.g. grants). Some programs are fine in terms of scholarship, but are too small (to be competitive). These could be consolidated. Centers that are not producing scholarly work and grants should be closed, and others with better current potential should be opened with seed money. These decisions should be based on empirical data about scholarly contributions, not on the preferences of a few vocal or well-connected people on campus. Many of the top contributors on campus say little and just do their work. Some of those who contribute little to scholarship have a disproportionate influence because they speak to a political constituency. This is a big problem for the university, but one that can be overcome if our administrative leaders act on what they know about the academic contributions of the faculty.

“ Build on Existing Strengths and Organize Fewer, More Competitive Programs

Compared with other UCs/Tier 1 research universities, (I see) a dearth of functionally effective research institutes on this campus, leading to a comparatively low level in intellectual vitality. This campus, under current financial conditions, should not be developing, let alone starting, new graduate programs (with the possible exception of public policy). Likewise, UCR should not be pursuing ill-defined (including interdisciplinary) academic programs that are likely to cannibalize or divert scarce resources from existing ones. Such programs should be embodied in research institutes sufficiently defined to promote intellectual coherence and visibility, while sufficiently broad to avoid being captured by individual faculty or small groups incapable of scaling up.

"quote" Build on Existing Strengths and Organize Fewer, More Competitive Programs

One approach to planning further growth is by identifying departments or programs that are excellent *relative to their size*. Growing that way is more likely to nurture and propagate cultures of excellence. Changing the culture in legacy programs at UCR (those that have been here for a long time) is a much more difficult proposition.

Several areas fall short of national excellence by sheer lack of investment in critical mass…We should grow faculty in those areas where we have a foundation to achieve excellence.

Gradually Improve the Academic Profile of Incoming Students

One strong limitation to maintaining a high level of competitiveness is the academic preparation of students being admitted to our campus. According to public national rankings, at least in the last 3 years which I have followed, UCR has admitted students to its undergraduate programs with the lowest SAT scores in a list of 100 top public universities. In correlation with this, and at least in the life sciences, admissions to the graduate programs (masters and PhD) require relatively low GPA and GRE scores in comparison with top universities nationwide. My hope is that UCR will raise the academic expectations and requisites for admission into its undergraduate and graduate programs.

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" _quote_ "

Gradually Improve the Academic Profile of Incoming Students

Recruiting of graduate students to new or existing programs is difficult because of the environment. It is almost impossible to recruit students from other UC campuses because of the reputation of UCR. Although I agree with the idea that success breeds success, the campus does a terrible job of nurturing that first round of success on which to build.

The main problem is the quality of the graduate students and their preparation/interest in research. By comparison to past experience, it is simply impossible for me to do work at the level required by the scholarly community I inhabit using UCR grad students.

Leaders Who Will Take Responsibility for Campus Improvement

Many UCR faculty members are more interested in campus politics than academic excellence. Even more unfortunate, participation in campus politics is a career path for some faculty at UCR. Campus politicians are rewarded with courses off, summer supplements, and merit increases. This is a direct threat to UCR's striving for academic excellence since politics and academic excellence are orthogonal constructs. I have never been at a university overrun by petty self-serving "you scratch my back I'll scratch yours" campus politics to the degree I have seen at UCR.

There is a need to break the stranglehold of the "old UCR" on campus…There is a serious need to reform the composition and operation of the Academic Senate….There is a very real lack of appreciation for administration as a profession requiring training, education, experience, and skills.

Leaders do not, and have no incentive to, strive for excellence, but rather focus on making sure everyone is happy and there is as little disagreement as possible.

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quote

Leaders Who Will Take Responsibility for Campus Improvement

For an institution that aspires to go up significantly and quickly, we need strong leadership that is willing to make hard decisions that may not necessarily be popular to some.

UCR has to break free of its "small campus" mind-set and develop a select number of prominent programs instead of continuing to try to be all things to all people. Strategic planning is sadly overdue and a chance to turn the campus in a new direct was blown over the past decade. Decisions must be made that will inevitably make some people very angry -- past administrators avoided this responsibility but the time has come.