

# Unparalleled Student Experience Workgroup Interim Report September 2020

## Introduction

The University of California, Riverside is nationally recognized as a model of the kind of higher-education, research-intensive (i.e., R01) institution that can make a significant difference in the lives of low income, first generation, and historically marginalized students. In 2020, UCR was ranked #1 by *Money Magazine* as being the most transformative public university and #2 in Financial Aid by *Business Insider*. In their 2021 rankings, US News & World Report recognized UCR as #1 for social mobility for the second year in a row. These exceptional accomplishments situate UCR as a global leader in bettering the lives and futures of graduate, professional, and undergraduate students, especially for those traditionally least served by higher education. Importantly, UCR provides exceptional education without sacrificing the rigorous research of its faculty, and has a unique strategic opportunity for providing a model of a university education in which students collaborate with faculty in the co-creation of knowledge, technologies, and creative expression. From this perspective, the work of this committee recognizes that students cannot have a successful academic experience if that education ignores students' social and material experiences and the concomitant wisdom and insight students bring to UCR.

## Vision

The University of California, Riverside will be a student-centered, world-class research and educational institution; a model institution for jointly prioritizing research and creative innovation and educational excellence by actively engaging graduate, professional, and undergraduate students as partners with faculty in the development of knowledge, technological innovations, and creative expression. UCR will be an international leader in providing an inclusive, equitable, just, and empathetic environment to every member of its community to pursue diverse intellectual interests and to acquire a broad appreciation of humanity and human knowledge. The University of California, Riverside will be a campus of choice for those who seek an accessible, equitable, and excellent education with a staff, faculty, and administration composed of individuals that reflect the student body.

## Mission

The University of California, Riverside will prepare its students to be creative thought leaders, empathetic civic leaders, critical thinkers, innovators, and effective problem solvers by creating a community of learners where faculty and students are partners in creating and disseminating original intellectual or creative contributions to their discipline.

The University of California, Riverside tasks itself to have a significant impact on social mobility for its students, at graduate, professional, and undergraduate levels.

The University of California, Riverside will make itself accessible to and equitable for all students, regardless of economic status, disability, cultural background, family educational history, current economic burdens, and current personal, familial, and employment responsibilities.

### **Strategic Goals**

1. UCR will be an international leader among research universities in providing accessible education and social mobility for its graduate, professional, and undergraduate students by having all students create original intellectual or creative contributions to their discipline.
2. UCR serves its students with a representative and collaborative community that exemplifies respect, empathy, inclusivity, leadership, and scholarship.
3. UCR will be a national leader in empowering its graduate and undergraduate students' success beyond graduation.

### **Strategies and Initiatives**

UC Riverside cannot accomplish its strategic goals without reflecting thoughtfully on the ways graduate, professional, and undergraduate student needs differ from each other yet also depend on and reinforce each other. UCR is one of a small handful of R1 institutions that can help the academy better reflect those who attend its institutions, and we must make future decisions that honor that opportunity and responsibility. These strategic goals expand on the emphasis in previous strategic plans on undergraduate education to especially reflect the responsibility UCR has to improving its recruitment and training of graduate students, who often contribute invisible labor in both their research labs in and undergraduate instruction on UCR's campus while receiving relatively minimal support from the campus when compared to the institutional structures that support undergraduate students. Many of UCR's goals for creating an unparalleled student experience will benefit from strategic investment in its graduate students.

*Strategic Goal 1 UCR will be an international leader among research universities in providing accessible education and social mobility for its graduate, professional, and undergraduate students by having all students create original intellectual or creative contributions to their discipline.*

Based in part on the efforts emerging from *UCR 2020: The Path to Preeminence* (released in July 2010), the University of California, Riverside is now nationally recognized for Pell Grant recipient's graduation success. This decade of campus and student effort sets a strong foundation upon which UCR can grow to be an international leader as a top-tier student-centered research institution with social mobility benefits for both undergraduate and graduate students. UCR is committed to ensuring the success of

all students, especially students who continue to make history by challenging the stereotypes of a ‘traditional’ undergraduate or graduate student. Within the next decade, UCR will engage all students in research and educational programs that equal or surpass very best universities in the nation by having all students create original intellectual or creative contributions to their discipline, with a proactive focus on students with backgrounds and experiences that research-focused institutions historically ignored or marginalized.

An update in this Strategic Plan to the plan presented in UCR 2020 is an intentional consideration and focus specifically on graduate education. Graduate education is a centerpiece of a research institution and is the heartbeat of the faculty research enterprise. Graduate students are multifaceted and integral community members; they function as bridges connecting the campus by performing roles as students, researchers, instructors, and mentors for undergraduate students. UCR is uniquely poised to extend its national leadership in making a difference for undergraduate students to creative and innovative programs that have the same far-reaching benefits to graduate students.

To make a difference for our students, UCR must leverage and enable students’ own initiative. UCR must continuously expand the academic excellence and worldview for each student and must facilitate students’ evolving interests. It is critical that UCR is a community that prioritizes students’ access to faculty, teaching assistants, research mentorship, professional mentorship, advising staff, alumni, quality facilities, and peer networks inside as well as outside UCR.

The campus infrastructure at UCR also should ensure access and equity such that all students, regardless of their background or current circumstances, have reliable access to working instructional resources, learning spaces, and learning materials. Likewise, social and academic resources for students (including mental health and wellness) are available as they enter and leave campus, daily enhancing and supporting their unique and unparalleled student experience.

*Strategy 1.1 UCR should support all students with wrap-around networks that incorporate a purposeful and unified approach to the student experience that coordinates meaningfully between academic and non-academic programs and resources.*

#### Initiatives 1.1

- A. UCR is responsible for providing to students a fully realized network of social capital to facilitate students’ success on campus and after graduation. The provision of social capital is especially critical for the students that UCR prides itself in teaching – students who do not have an existing network of social capital in parents or others who have completed a university education. As such, all students have the right to reliable and effective mentorship and advising. All students should be able to find mentors on campus with whom they can identify, and therefore UCR must recruit faculty, staff, and administrators that reflect the nature of the student body. UCR also must proactively advocate for resources that support increases in the number of

academic advising staff, staff who provide other academic supports for students, and staff who facilitate students' social networking with mentors both on and off campus.

- B. For graduate students, each student should be enveloped into an advising network that includes thesis advising, inter-disciplinary research and learning opportunities, professional development, and career possibilities. Many of UCR's graduate students are limited to support from 1 or 2 mentors and the departmental Graduate Advisor. Students would benefit from greater investment in Grad Division and the programs that provide students with enhanced social capital a support they may not receive within their departments or from their advisors.
- C. For undergraduate students, the campus should prioritize bringing students into a dynamic and interactive community of learners. One initiative could involve the development of a comprehensive peer mentorship program. For example, new students could be paired with peer mentors; these students later become peer-mentors themselves; peer mentors stay mentors as they transition to life beyond their baccalaureate degree and into careers or graduate programs. Another potential initiative is to offer Learning Community opportunities for all new undergraduate students, including both first year and transfer students. These Learning Communities should be built on faculty-staff partnerships.

*Strategy 1.2 UCR should continue to prioritize social mobility for students, and should translate success in social mobility at the undergraduate level into (a) intentional and specific programs that guarantee access to this social mobility for all students, and (b) programs and opportunities that specifically enhance social mobility for graduate students.*

#### Initiatives 1.2

- A. UCR should proactively expand programs that have already demonstrated success to include as many students as possible. These programs include the current GRADEDGE/JUMPStart program, which could be developed into a first-year experience program for incoming PhD graduate students. As a campus of choice for students, there must be a concerted effort, targeted investment, and measurable accountability on behalf of the unique needs of students.
- B. UCR can make the "Early Start" summer bridge program widely accessible to all incoming freshmen who might benefit and also develop a version of the "Early Start" program, e.g. R'Start, for incoming transfer students.
- C. The Campus should dedicate resources in staff support and faculty incentives to enable the submission and successful receipt of training grants for graduate students. The Campus additionally should incentivize faculty to offer regional outreach efforts, summer research programs, and education abroad experiences. The Campus should target incentives to students least financially able to participate in such programs.

- D. UCR should enable and incentivize “Finish in 4” for undergraduate students, with targeted support to non-traditional and historically marginalized students. UCR will enhance and broaden the “Finish in 4” program by meeting each student where they are at – with academic and faculty advisors that understand and empathize at the student level, and make individualized personal-student goals that can allow each student to know what they need to know and access to the tools that will enable them to finish in 4. This also will allow students who cannot finish in 4 not to be penalized, but rather limit the financial and personal toll in completing their degree.
- E. UCR could develop a special funding mechanism or opportunities for low income, first generation, and/or historically marginalized students for their Master’s degree year in a 4+1 program.
- F. UCR should purposefully integrate career preparation into the undergraduate curriculum.
  - a. The development of valued skills should be incorporated meaningfully throughout the students’ general education and major in a way that is coordinated and scaffolded.
  - b. A truly unparalleled curriculum should proactively combine research training, community engagement, and job preparation.
  - c. Students should be trained, supported, and rewarded for being philanthropic with their time and talent in their communities.
  - d. UCR may develop something like an R’LEADERS program: Students can get a badge or certification by completing workshops/courses, volunteer or other work, mentoring, etc.
  - e. UCR should incentivize ‘finishing in 4,’ while also limiting the financial and personal toll of not completing the degree (e.g., students can benefit from 2 years of mentorship, GE and professional development even if they do not complete a BA or BS degree).
  - f. UCR should revamp the experiences of students who work on campus. These experiences should be coordinated into the students’ general educational experience as paid apprenticeship or internship opportunities for students. Develop on-campus work roles and apprenticeships that provide undergraduate students opportunities to put their academic skills to use in real-world scenarios, while receiving fair and adequate compensation for the work they produce while being mentored by subject experts.

*Strategy 1.3 UCR should position itself as a radical model for student- and community-centered courses and programs, including online/hybrid options.*

#### Initiatives 1.3

- A. Although space and financial consideration can factor into how UCR promotes and offers online instruction, an development of online/hybrid courses or programs should be guided by: (1) the pedagogical value of online/hybrid instruction for the students taking the course/program; (2) the potential for online courses and programs to resolve problems with equity in

- access to a UCR degree; and (3) how the courses/programs can address critical economic issues in the Inland Empire.
- B. UCR must provide coordinated and evidence-based training and resources for all faculty, instructors, administrators, staff and graduate student TAs who serve as role models, with an emphasis on how to actively dismantle prejudicial practices inside or outside classrooms.
  - C. UCR should, in particular, provide coordinated training for faculty members as graduate mentors.
  - D. UCR should offer key breadth course requirement classes across broad majors in online/hybrid setups that will allow students increased options to fulfill graduation requirements.
  - E. UCR should dedicate academic and infrastructure resources to online/hybrid courses to enable “finish in 4”.

*Strategic Goal 2      UCR serves its students with a representative and collaborative community that exemplifies respect, empathy, inclusivity, leadership, and scholarship.*

Our work in this area is grounded in the understanding that systems of oppression abound, that we are ourselves products of these systems, and we too often uncritically contribute to these systems. As such, we do harm to ourselves and each other. Students have a right to expect and receive humanity, empathy, and respect from faculty, administrators, and staff and to receive equitable access to all educational and career development opportunities. We also understand mere access is insufficient if only nominal or if opportunities require material or social privilege to actualize. Faculty, staff, and administrators are responsible for establishing a culture of openness for its campus and students. In particular, faculty research profiles, mentoring approaches, diversity, and accessibility have an enormous influence on student experience and success. Faculty understanding, respect, and cultivation of the vast diversity in student backgrounds and corresponding approaches to flexibility and individuality in mentoring will be critical determining which students will be successful.

The campus must also support empathetic and personalized student mentorship by respecting, acknowledging, fostering, and compensating faculty and staff effort and contribution in educating and mentoring graduate, professional, and undergraduate students. This labor must be distributed equitably, rather than (as is currently the case) being largely undertaken by racially minoritized faculty and staff.

A culture of respect afforded to graduate students must account for the fact that graduate students form a distinctive community on the UCR campus, making vital contribution to campus innovation, culture, and functioning while also being subjected to complex and often competing demands and responsibilities that are distinctively different from those of undergraduate students, faculty and staff. As graduate students’ needs are distinctively different from those of undergraduate students, UCR should address both the practical and academic needs of graduate students from a position of transparency, collaboration, and empathy. Of particular note, graduate students’ background and career goals are frequently different from those of their faculty mentors. Students’ evolving research interests and career goals should be welcomed, respected, and supported. Students’ individual research and career goals should be the primary factor in their

mentorship plan. As a focus on improvements to graduate student recruitment and education/training are a critical element of the UCR Strategic Plan, we present several specific initiatives below regarding UCR graduate students both present and future.

*Strategy 2.1 UCR should recruit, develop, and demand diverse, empathetic, and accessible faculty and staff.*

#### Initiatives 2.1

- A. The UCR community benefits broadly, and students benefit specifically, from an increase in faculty diversity, especially in STEM areas.
- B. As the academic advisors are often students' primary and first contact with the campus and their departments, students require adequate and effective access to academic advisors, and those advisors need campus support and respect to facilitate their interactions with students.
- C. UCR should indicate its view of the importance of diversity, empathy, and accessibility in interactions with students by adding award programs at college/school levels to honor faculty and staff's mentoring efforts as well as remediation and training when expectations are unmet.
- D. UCR should encourage and maintain diversity, empathy, and accessibility by strengthening faculty and staff training in mentoring at both graduate and undergraduate level and by requiring assessment of the quality of interactions with students in program reviews and in shortening the program review cycle to uphold accountability.
- E. UCR should engage all faculty and staff at all levels in constant training and improvement as ways to enhance the unparalleled experience in serving diverse graduate and undergraduate students. This should be understood as part of every employee's job and not something 'above' or 'beyond'.

*Strategy 2.2 UCR is a leader in addressing diverse student needs and ensuring that all students feel at home at UCR.*

#### Initiatives 2.2

- A. UCR can be unparalleled by understanding and addressing the unique needs of underrepresented and non-traditional university students at the graduate, professional, and undergraduate level, especially veterans, parents, undocumented students, formerly incarcerated students, students with disability, and international students.
- B. UCR can facilitate and support a large variety of student organizations. These organizations and corresponding physical spaces that support student interaction are hugely popular among undergraduates and are regularly cited as one of the factors most critical to their success. UCR will provide access to these organizations in central locations that can accommodate the growing campus population, with staffing levels that can also accommodate students who cannot access such resources on a "normal 8-5" time basis.
- C. UCR can facilitate and coordinate student participation in national support networks for students from diversities of backgrounds and needs.

- D. UCR can sponsor, organize, or develop national meetings and agendas regarding student needs, especially the needs of first generation, low-income, and historically marginalized students.

*Strategy 2.3 Addressing graduate students' role as central, and their needs as distinctive*

Initiatives 2.3

- A. UCR should develop a wrap-around support model for each student in a fashion that incorporates a purposeful and unified approach to the student experience that coordinates between academic, professional, career and non-academic needs.
- B. UCR should prioritize financial support and development drive for graduate student housing, scholarship, and mental health.
- C. UCR should prioritize graduate students who bring a demonstrated commitment to inclusive practices and research, especially in STEM areas. Such a commitment must be understood as a precondition for consideration on par with the expectation students demonstrate a commitment to their research area.

*Strategy 2.4 The campus infrastructure at UCR should ensure equity in instruction and in access to resources.*

Initiatives 2.4

- A. All students should have reliable and equitable access to their courses (e.g., can find parking for a reasonable rate and when they need it).
- B. All students should have reliable and equitable access to campus resources (e.g., accessible hours for the library, the Well and CARE, R'Pantry, and other basic needs).
- C. All students should have reliable and equitable access to technologies and portals required for their coursework (e.g., reliable Wi-Fi for iLearn and email, reliable printing for course papers, reliable access to published papers).
- D. All students should be able to focus their attention on learning during an uninterrupted lecture (e.g., chairs that are safe, projectors & speakers that work).
- E. Housing should be viewed as a critical resource and learning environment to enable all students to succeed. Therefore, an equitable and accessible on-campus housing policy will be central in making UCR a campus of choice for low income, first generation, and historically marginalized students.

*Strategic Goal 3 UCR will be a national leader in empowering its graduate, professional, and undergraduate students' success beyond graduation.*

UCR's undergraduate program is well poised to surpass most parameters of a leading research institution by a wide margin. Although UCR's graduate program at



present is at the level of national average, with the strategic investment of resources UCR can propel its graduate programs to become a leading university that improves the research enterprise. For example, we must strive to enable all students to afford the same level of success in terms of retention, graduation, time-to-degree, and job placement.

Undergraduate students should receive a 4-year program for career preparation that interacts and complements, but does not replace, General Education and Major Requirements in order to afford them the practical job skills that the evolving global economy requires. Graduate programs are driven by national need, state need and student demands. All students are expected to have broad understanding of knowledge and social needs beyond their majors or research specialties.

One of UCR's goals is develop students who are academic and civic leaders, both while at UCR and after their graduation. With a concerted alumni relation effort, UCR will strive to bring the alumni home in making sure our students realize the vast community of UCR members, and the value and opportunity of receiving a degree from this institution.

*Strategy 3.1 UCR should invest in professional and leadership skills training for all students.*

#### Initiatives 3.1

- A. The pedagogical training of UCR graduate students needs to be greatly enhanced. Investment in this training benefits the graduate students as they become professional instructors themselves, but it also benefits UCR undergraduates who have graduate students as TAs or instructors in a majority of their courses. A good example of the possibility here is an initiative in Grad Division to exponentially increase TA training of graduate students that would cost the campus only \$50K a year. These kinds of programs should be proactively encouraged and funded by the administration as their costs are low while their impacts are high.
- B. Graduate students should also have opportunities to develop professional skills that may be out of the realm of expertise of their thesis advisors or department. Grad Division presents an excellent model for providing scaled-up access to development of skills, especially through programs like the highly successful GradQuant (which we argue should be immediately re-funded) and the events and workshops organized through GradSuccess.
- C. Undergraduate students should receive a full career preparation program (over the students' entire time at UCR) that interacts with and complements, but does not replace, General Education and Major Requirements. For example, the campus could develop a coordinated program that introduces all new students (first-year, transfer, international, visiting) to UCR and the college experience, and provides a foundational introduction to key skills (e.g., critical thinking, teamwork, information literacy, how to read, how to learn from a lecture, how to talk to faculty & graduate students); the

campus could build on the success of First-Year Learning Communities and the Honors Ignition Seminar to have some version available for all UCR students when they join the campus. This first-year program could then be extended to meet the needs of students as they mature and grow in their time at UCR, culminating in hands-on experiences, internships, authentic research, etc. as implemented in Second-Year Learning Communities, Third-Year Learning Communities, etc.

- D. On-campus employers can transform “work-on-campus” programs into “apprenticeships” by adding educational values to on-campus job opportunities.
- E. UCR should develop a comprehensive alumni mentorship program to support undergraduate and graduate students.
- F. UCR should work with the local community to create sustainable partnerships for student internships (ideally paid).

*Strategy 3.2 UCR will be a leading national pipeline for low income, racially minoritized, and first generation students to become researchers and faculty in academia.*

#### Initiatives 3.2

- A. UCR can engage in national networks and develop new partnerships to increase graduate student diversity, especially in STEM areas.
- B. UCR can develop scholarship opportunities for UCR undergraduate students to enroll in 4+1 master’s degrees program.
- C. UCR can substantially expand the scope of UCR’s professional master’s degrees in new areas.

*Strategy 3.3 Support students developing critical thinking and leadership skills*

#### Initiatives 3.3

- A. All UCR students should participate in a degree program or major that has been intentionally designed to scaffold students’ learning of content and skills in a way that culminates in a ‘senior’ or ‘capstone’ experience that is only possible at UCR and that involves student creation of knowledge or creative contribution. UCR should develop students who have the desire and capacity to be involved in developing and enacting solutions to global and local challenges.
- B. All undergraduate students should have authentic research and experiential learning opportunities regardless of major.
- C. Undergraduate students should have the option of a creating their own major or completing a project-focused degree that begins in their first year and continues through a culminating experience (e.g., students can specialize in ‘meta-majors’ or ‘umbrella majors’: health in the IE, workers’ rights, poverty & inequality, technology & society, etc.)

- D. UCR should support students' participation in national networks (e.g. SACNAS, FirstGen, R'Leadership).

## Metrics and Parameters

To be considered in the next revision, potentially embedded in the concerned initiatives.

## Methodology

At its initial meetings, this workgroup determined to leverage this occasion to identify both UCR's existing strengths and its opportunities for growth. The committee decided to approach the strategic planning task by developing a vision with the far future in mind (35 years) while also accounting for the current status of challenges at UCR as a reality check. This committee quickly identified a core strength on which UCR should continue to build: UCR is a campus defined by its active engagement with students who are traditionally either excluded from or underrepresented in the academy, especially Underrepresented Minority students, FirstGen students, and students who complete preliminary course work at campus other than UCR (i.e., transfer students). This committee also articulated a firm commitment to defining 'unparalleled student experience' as extending beyond the specific timeframe in which individuals are enrolled as students, extending before their matriculation and long after their graduation. This workgroup developed the following criteria internally to ensure credibility:

- Its process is consultative, inclusive, and substantive, involving consultation with multiple on-campus stakeholders
- Its vision for 2050 is bold, but some of its initiatives must fill near term needs
- It should be sustainable, in terms of both changing administrative leaders or budget challenge

This workgroup met once a month each quarter in 2019-2020, with the exception of May 2020 due to the disruption of COVID-19. This workgroup's initial work includes numerous internal and small group meetings among its members. By the end of fall 2019, this workgroup developed four subgroups: *undergraduate experience*, *graduate experience*, *student feedback*, and *engaging the community*. While the first two subgroups developed internal reports on the needs, strengths and opportunities for the undergraduate and graduate programs, the student feedback group was especially designed to consult with a wide range of current students at UCR. Formats for connecting with undergraduate and graduate students differed. For undergraduate students, some students participated in a 15-minute survey/poll at the beginning of a course or meeting (ASUCR Senate Meeting [n = 13], CHASS First Year Learning Communities [n = 61], GSOE Transfer Students [n = 12], and the HASS course for students needing extra support [n = 48] ); and other students participated in smaller, more intimate discussions (the ASUCR Executive Council, International Undergraduate Students, Undergraduate

Education's Student Advisory Council, and Undergraduate Education Student Workers). A report from these discussions with undergraduates is in Appendix 2. The focus group meetings took place mostly in January and February of 2020. Concurrently, the workgroup chair and vice-chairs engaged in dialogue with campus advocacy groups regarding undergraduate advising, undergraduate curriculum, graduate advising, and faculty and student diversity. These advocacy groups include chairs and vice-chairs of various academic senate committees, GSA leadership teams, plus some faculty members, vice-chancellors and deans. By the end of the winter quarter, this workgroup had compiled most data and input to draft its first report, then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The pandemic and social movements through the spring and summer quarters solidified this workgroup's determination to call for access and equity as UCR's key features beyond academic matters. During the summer, the workgroup prepared its first interim report and submitted it to the Steering Committee. It engaged with the campus community for final correction in fall quarter 2020 before it finalized its report.

Closing

## Appendices

Appendix 1. Committee Membership

Appendix 2. Report on Student Focus Group