

Unparalleled Student Experience

Final Report

October 2020

Introduction

The University of California, Riverside is nationally recognized as a model of the kind of higher-education, research-intensive 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, medical, 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. Taking the view of students as co-creators and collaborators, the work of this committee recognizes that students cannot have a successful academic experience if that education ignores what students bring to the collaboration: students' own 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 along with educational excellence by actively engaging graduate, medical, 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.

The University of California, Riverside tasks itself to have a significant positive impact on social mobility for all graduate, medical, professional, and undergraduate students.

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, economic background, 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, medical, professional, and undergraduate students by having all students create original intellectual or creative contributions to their discipline.
2. UCR will serve 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, medical, professional, and undergraduate students' success beyond graduation.

Strategies and Initiatives

UC Riverside cannot accomplish its strategic goals without reflecting thoughtfully on the ways graduate, medical, 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 improve its recruitment and training of graduate students. Graduate students often contribute invisible labor in both their research labs and undergraduate instruction on UCR's campus while receiving relatively minimal support from the campus. Many of UCR's goals for creating an unparalleled student experience will benefit from strategic investment in its graduate students and programs that support their success.

To promote social mobility, UCR will be intentional in its recruitment efforts to enable economically disadvantaged and underrepresented students to have access to UCR and to thrive while at UCR. To achieve these goals, UCR will invest in faculty, staff, and facilities to provide every student with equal opportunity to succeed in the timely completion of their degrees and with minimal financial debt. Students will enter a campus electrified with peers, advisors, and mentors from diverse backgrounds who enable learning in an environment buzzing with diversity of experiences, knowledge, and opinions. We will surround students with empathetic peers, advisors, and mentors to enable their academic exploration without fear. Our curriculum will be meaningful and relevant to knowledge exploration and national needs. Our pedagogy will be both technologically and culturally relevant for the students. And UCR graduates will be confident that their individual social mobility, as measured by specific outcomes such as

post-graduation employment and/or admission to programs that continue the student's learning, are key metrics by which UCR measures the success of the extended UCR family.

Strategic Goal 1 UCR will be an international leader among research universities in providing accessible education and social mobility for its graduate, medical, 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 the graduation success of Pell Grant recipients. 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 ensuring access to these opportunities for students with backgrounds and experiences that research-focused institutions have historically ignored or marginalized.

For this vision to become a reality, UCR must (a) cultivate the individual drive, initiative, and excitement that students bring to their own education, (b) provide opportunities for all students to pursue academic excellence, (c) problematize the students' conceptions of knowledge and where it comes from while also building students' own efficacy for contributing new knowledge and insights, and (d) support students' expansion of their evolving conception of the world, of who they are and of who they want to be. Taking this student-centered approach, it is critical that UCR 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 knowledgeable and empathetic advisors and reliable access to working instructional resources, learning spaces, and learning materials. Likewise, academic and social resources for students (including mental health and wellness) should be available as students enter and leave campus, daily enhancing and supporting their unique and unparalleled student experience.

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 units and people across campus by performing roles as students, researchers, instructors, and mentors for undergraduate students. UCR is uniquely poised to extend its national leadership in undergraduate education to creative and innovative programs that have the same far-reaching benefits to graduate students.

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 all 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. "A primary function of social capital is to enable a student to gain access to human, cultural, and other forms of capital, as well as to institutional resources and support."¹ 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 support 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 advancement. 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 and support they may not receive within their departments or from their thesis advisors.
- C. For undergraduate students, the campus should prioritize bringing students into a diverse, 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 strengthened faculty-staff partnerships.

¹ Perna, Laura W., and Marvin A. Titus. "The Relationship Between Parental Involvement as Social Capital and College Enrollment: An Examination of Racial/Ethnic Group Differences." *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 76, no. 5, 2005, pp. 485-518, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2005.11772296>.

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 GRADEGE/JUMPStart program, which could be developed into a first-year experience program for incoming PhD graduate students. As a campus of choice for students, UCR must launch a concerted effort, with targeted investment and measurable accountability, on behalf of the unique needs of graduate, medical, and professional 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. These bridge programs must also consider UNEX students and find opportunities to integrate with all UCR 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 participate in 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 could 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 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 approach also will limit the financial and personal toll of not completing the degree in 4 years by ensuring benefits to the students’ education at UCR are spread throughout the years they are here.
- 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 to utilize scholarly methods in screening information, organizing investigation, synthesizing useful information into knowledge, and communicating their findings effectively.
- d. Students should have multiple opportunities to apply their academic skills outside classrooms and as they transition into workplaces.
- e. Students should be trained, supported, and rewarded for being philanthropic with their time and talent in their communities.
- f. UCR may develop something like an R'LEADERS program, in which students could earn a badge or certification by completing workshops/courses, volunteer or other work, mentoring, etc.
- g. The campus should actively consider ways to integrate UNEX students into this development and think of ways to encourage students to partner with UCR for life-long learning after graduation.
- h. 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, general education, and professional development even if they do not complete a BA or BS degree).
- i. 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. In this effort, UCR can develop on-campus work roles and apprenticeships that provide undergraduate students opportunities to put their academic skills to use in non-academic situations, 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 considerations can factor into how UCR promotes and offers online instruction, 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, 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. Pedagogy training for faculty and TAs should transcend beyond one's instructional skill or technological savvy. It should be culturally relevant and culturally aware.
- E. 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.
- F. UCR should dedicate academic and infrastructure resources to online/hybrid courses to enable "finish in 4".

Strategic Goal 2 UCR will serve 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 that 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 available only to some students to actualize. Faculty, staff, and administrators are responsible for establishing a culture of openness and transparency for the campus and its students. In particular, faculty research profiles, mentoring approaches, diversity, accessibility, pedagogical approaches, and teaching practices 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 for increasing the number of students with access to personalized mentorship, or at minimum, instruction targeting the students' actual learning needs.

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

With specific respect to graduate students, a culture of respect must account for the fact that graduate students form a distinctive community on the UCR campus, making vital contributions 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' backgrounds and career goals are frequently different from those of their faculty mentors; and the frequency and nature of these differences can and should expand as UCR targets greater diversity in the students admitted to graduate programs. Students'

evolving research interests and career goals should be welcomed, respected, and supported. Students' individual research and career goals should be the primary factor guiding 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. However, as with the previous section, we also present strategies and initiatives relevant broadly to the student body at UCR.

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. Faculty excellence in advising and mentoring students should be encouraged, documented, and rewarded.
- C. 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.
- D. The Campus should campaign to receive and to allocate equitable state funds to provide sufficient advising and support staff for UCR's students. Staff to support recruitment, academic activities, and career opportunities are particularly critical for the success of UCR students who are first-generation or from socioeconomic backgrounds that would benefit from this support.
- E. UCR should highlight and promote 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 mentoring efforts as well as remediation and training when expectations are unmet.
- F. UCR must encourage and maintain diversity, empathy, and accessibility by strengthening faculty and staff training in mentoring at both graduate and undergraduate levels. The success and effort of individual faculty and staff should be commended and honored explicitly in the personnel review and merit process.
- G. Regarding programs for students, UCR must hold programs and units accountable through rigorous assessment of the quality of interactions with students in regular and consistent program reviews, with the complimentary goals of honoring successful programs and assisting struggling programs. As with other efforts that involve additional, non-compensated time from faculty and staff, those with direct responsibility for overseeing and evaluating student advising and mentoring should be involved in the program assessment process and should be incentivized in some way through the personnel review and merit process.
- H. UCR should engage all faculty and staff at all levels in regular and repeated training on ways to improve and enhance the collective provision of an unparalleled experience to UCR's diverse graduate and undergraduate

students. This training should be understood as part of every employee's professional responsibility, and not something 'above' or 'beyond'.

Strategy 2.2 UCR should be 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, medical, professional, and undergraduate levels, especially veterans, parents, undocumented students, formerly incarcerated students, students with disabilities, and international students.
- B. UCR can facilitate and support a large variety of student organizations. These organizations and the corresponding physical spaces that support student interactions provide valuable social capital to students, are hugely popular among undergraduates, and are regularly cited by students as one of the factors most critical to their success. UCR should 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 during the standard 8-5 business hours.
- C. In order to facilitate connections between students' academic and non-academic experiences on campus, as well as to use funds efficiently, departments, colleges, or schools should research ways to coordinate their support efforts in collaboration with student cultural centers (e.g., in the form of a department chapter).
- D. UCR can facilitate and coordinate student participation in national support networks for students from diversities of backgrounds and needs by sponsoring, organizing, or developing national meetings and agendas regarding student needs, especially the needs of first generation, low-income, and historically marginalized students.

Strategy 2.3 UCR should acknowledge 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 drives for graduate student housing, scholarship, and mental health.
- C. UCR should prioritize recruitment of 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. The Campus should have an efficient information system to capture all resources available to students, students' actual use of those resources, and whether those resources benefit students. This kind of information system will serve as a learning resource, an advising resource, and, critically, as a resource for accountability.
- B. 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).
- C. All students (including medical and professional students) should have reliable and equitable access to campus resources (e.g., accessible hours for the library, career center, the Well, CARE, R'Pantry, and other basic needs).
- D. All students should have reliable and equitable access to technologies and online portals required for their coursework (e.g., reliable Wi-Fi for iLearn and email, reliable printing for course papers, reliable access to published papers).
- E. 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).
- F. Affordable housing is a critical resource for both undergraduate and graduate students. 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, medical, 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 within the near future. Although UCR's graduate program at present operates around the level of the national average, a strategic investment of resources at UCR can propel its graduate programs to become a leading top-choice university known globally to improve the research enterprise of both disciplines generally and students specifically. To achieve this kind of globally-recognized status for graduate education, UCR must strive to enable all students (meaning ALL graduate, medical, professional, and undergraduate students) to achieve the same level of success in retention, graduation, time-to-degree, and job placement.

All UCR students should benefit from programs for career preparation that interact with and complement, but do not replace General Education and Major Requirements. UCR can greatly enhance its local reputation among employers (who view UCR students as less qualified for employment than Cal State or private college students)

and its global impact by supporting the development of the practical job skills that the evolving global economy requires. One of UCR's goals is to develop students who are academic and civic leaders, both while at UCR and after their graduation. As UCR makes decisions about future investments in educational programs for its students, it will be critical to find a balance in meeting the needs of the global community, the nation, the state, and each individual student. One focus for this balance is to keep sight of the fact that all students should graduate from UCR with both a broad understanding of knowledge and social needs beyond the expertise students develop by majoring in a specific discipline and the skills required to meet the challenge of exceptional global and local problems (e.g., climate change, social injustice, economic inequity). This focus highlights the critical fact UCR should develop the infrastructure for maintaining this community of 'big problem solvers' into which new students to UCR and the newest graduates of UCR become members. With a concerted alumni relation effort, UCR should strive to bring the alumni home and involve our alumni in enveloping UCR students into the vast community of UCR members. Imagine the power we have in these numbers to create big solutions to big problems.

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

Initiatives 3.1

- A. Graduate students should 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.
- B. The goal of TA training should transcend compliance training. The pedagogical training of UCR graduate students needs to be greatly enhanced. Investment in this training benefits 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 substantially increase TA training of graduate students. These kinds of programs should be proactively encouraged and funded by the administration as their costs are low while their impacts are high.
- C. TA training also could be in partnership with academic departments and facilitated by faculty mentorship or with UNEX for special certificates.
- D. 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.

- E. On-campus employers can transform “work-on-campus” programs into “apprenticeships” by adding educational values to on-campus job opportunities.
- F. UCR should develop a comprehensive alumni mentorship program to support undergraduate and graduate students.
- G. With UNEX, UCR could work with the regional community to create sustainable partnerships for student internships (ideally paid).
- H. As work-from-home becomes viable in some career sectors, UCR should explore the option of remote internship nationally and globally.

Strategy 3.2 UCR will be a leading national pipeline for low income, historically marginalized, 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 a 4+1 master’s degree program.
- C. UCR can substantially expand the scope of UCR’s professional master’s degrees in new areas.
- D. UCR academic units could partner with UNEX to help achieve regional and international outreach, especially as a pipeline to adults who have not yet completed a degree.

Strategy 3.3 UCR will actively and intentionally 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).

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 historically underrepresented minority students, first-generation students, and students who complete preliminary course work at campuses 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 included 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). The focus group meetings took place mostly in January and February of 2020, and emerging themes from the discussions with students on campus were incorporated into

the reports by the other subcommittees. 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 of the data and input required to draft its first report; then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

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

Progress, Success, and Accountability

In discussing the development of a report on the Unparalleled Student Experience with the UCR community, a prevalent and pressing concern was around the question of "How?" How would UCR progress towards these goals? How would we measure success? How would the campus be held accountable to meeting the critical goals identified in the strategic priorities outlined above? Throughout the document, the committee has taken pains to use plain language around prioritization. Those things the campus *must* do are indicated as such. Where a desirable goal or option is discussed, we tried to use language like "could" or "may".

Specific metrics are also difficult to identify for measuring progress or success. Many of the priorities above are about global access and inclusion. The campus must not merely make programs "available" to students if those programs are offered in such a way that they are rarely utilized. The transformative power of a UCR education comes when all students participate in the transformative – unparalleled – effort of completing their degree.

Concerns of accountability were resoundingly echoed in many contexts as the committee shared its work with stakeholders (i.e., members of the UCR campus community). This deep and consistent concern reveals two primary insights. First, that the work of the committee is laudable, and the report articulates goals the campus deeply wishes to achieve. Second, that the campus community has concerns that these goals will not be pursued in a consistent, ongoing way. To that end, we make two suggestions.

First, campus decisions must be grounded in the goals outlined in the strategic plan. Campus leadership must be clear on how decisions support the strategic goals of this and other committees. The strategic plan must be a *starting point* for decision making, not an afterthought. The extent to which the campus leadership respects and honors these recommendations will be evidenced through the ways in which decisions are made and communicated.

Second, the strategic plan must be evaluated much like any program or department on campus. In much the same way an academic program undergoes periodic review, the implementation of, and commitment to, the strategic plan by campus leadership must also undergo periodic evaluation. Some form of a review will likely happen through WASC, who called on UCR to, “commence a strong and coherent assessment initiative to include both undergraduate and graduate programs, professional development for faculty and staff in assessment best practices, and appropriate allocation of financial and human resources capital.” However, relying on a WASC review or delaying a review of progress toward strategic goals until the next accreditation review is both insufficient and disingenuous to the efforts presented in this report on behalf of UCR faculty, staff, and students. The goals and details discussed above point the campus toward fulfilling demands from outside bodies such as WASC, but campus leadership must strive beyond those externally determined goals. We have engaged intentionally in vast consultation to develop a set of strategies and initiatives that reach far beyond what others say UCR should be to articulate what UCR sees itself as becoming.

The good-faith engagement in developing this strategic plan for the future of the student experience at UCR requires clarity in the final report about how final priorities are chosen and a plan for assessing if UCR stays on track for those strategic goals. In particular, it is essential to appoint diverse group of people inclusive of all those influenced by the strategic initiatives of UCR to evaluate campus efforts in the prioritization, progress, and success of the goals outlined above.

Closing

Once this committee started working in summer 2019, it quickly became aware of many challenges UCR faces. Yet, the preliminary investigations and consultations of this committee also highlighted pride in UCR and its many accomplishments. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in winter 2020, this committee recognized that UCR is a home away from home for many UCR community members. It is particularly so for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or students who are the first, and perhaps only, university students in their families. Our campus is their chance, perhaps the only chance for some, to pursue their dreams and launch their desired careers. In June 2020, we witnessed a national social awakening in the BLM movement, with UCR paying greater attention to and awareness of the social injustices that permeate our nation and the academy. UCR students took on the role of teachers, educating faculty, administration, and staff about the impact of these injustices on their lives and learning. We must honor their work by denouncing and deconstructing white supremacy and racism in all their forms. Throughout the spring and summer, the UCR community has transformed itself from mostly in-person teaching to mostly remote learning; and faculty, staff, and students have remained resilient in their efforts to maintain the bonds that join us all as members of the UCR family. As we complete this report, the financial impact of the pandemic is looming and largely unknown. Our hope is that this report provides guidance in the short term when financial decisions are being made that impact the education of UCR students. However, this report also takes the long view; and this committee is inspired by the

dedication, courage, and resilience of our colleagues and students who joined us in envisioning UCR in 2054.

Endorsed by the Unparalleled Student Experience Committee:

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Vice Chair: Rebekah Richert, Professor of Psychology, CHASS

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