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To: MARTHA CONKLIN, CHAIR, DIVISION COUNCIL

From: EVAN HEIT, CHAIR, CAPRA

Re: CAPRA Comments on UCM Strategic Academic Plan

CAPRA has completed a preliminary review of UC Merced Strategic Academic Plan DRAFT Version 5.0 (September 15, 2008). We have not done a complete resource analysis, and indeed we note that in a later stage of strategic academic planning, there will need to be analysis of resources required as well as prioritizing and planning of a timetable. Instead, our comments are in the spirit of the current document, in terms of responding to the overall vision. Still, it is important to keep in mind that UC Merced, like any campus, will face choices in the future due to finite resources. Also, it will be useful to consider which strategic directions would bring in new resources rather than compete for resources.

- Perhaps what is most eye-catching about this document is the research themes. We wish to pose two closely related questions: What proportion of resources will be invested in thematic versus non-thematic research, and how broadly will these research themes be defined? Clearly, academic excellence ought to be possible outside of these themes, avoiding a situation in which faculty outside of the research themes cannot succeed. We also pose the question of what will academic excellence mean in general terms, independently of these themes (e.g., in relation to the outside scholarly community or national rankings). Finally, what will the connection be between pursuing these themes and the goal of enrollment growth?
- Although this is a forward-looking document, the campus already has faculty expertise related to the five themes. It is important for faculty with relevant expertise to comment on these themes. What is the match between these themes and the vision held by current faculty in the schools? Relatedly, how well does each of these themes build on our current faculty strengths? CAPRA also recommends that faculty consider the exact names of these themes: Environmental Sustainability, Human Health, Cognitive and Information Sciences and Management, World Heritage, Social Sustainability and Justice. Names

sometimes take on an importance of their own, so it is important that faculty comment on whether these names accurately convey what is intended. With regard to the material in the Undergraduate Education section, CAPRA found these goals and objectives to be much less concrete than the research material. We pose the question of how exactly would these objectives be manifested. Even before considering resource implications, faculty will need to have more specific information about what these principles might look like in practice in terms of new educational programs or changes in existing educational programs.

- We appreciate the idea of linking the research themes to teaching. But just as for research above, we pose the question of what proportion of teaching will be thematic versus non-thematic. For example, when thinking about future majors, what proportion will be derived from these themes? What will the general standards of academic excellence be, independently of these themes?
- The document refers to the top tier of research universities, the Association of American Universities (AAU). Is it an explicit goal for UC Merced to join this tier? To what extent will following this plan bring us towards that goal? If this is the goal, what is the priority of achieving it, and to facilitate this, should we do an analysis of the programs at those universities?
- CAPRA appreciates that this document spans undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. With regard to the professional schools proposed, we pose the question of what are the standards for a UC-quality professional school, as opposed to a professional school that could be at any public university. We also suggest that a general standard be made explicit, so that it can be incorporated into the description for each proposed professional school.

CAPRA also had the following comments about the Organizational Plan developed by the SAP process:

The plan does not reach any conclusions on the number and scope of schools and this is probably an issue that cannot be resolved without a more complete analysis of the costs of different structures. Moreover, it may be premature to re-structure the current schools given there is still great uncertainty in the direction and growth of the academic and research programs.

The plan does reach consensus on the recommended structure for Bylaw 55 units, in which each unit must be responsible for delivering a degree at either the undergraduate or graduate level. These units will be the building blocks for the larger academic structures and the plan rightly suggests that Bylaw 55 planning should go forward.

The proposed (minor) changes in the resource allocation process mostly seem reasonable. However, the final recommended addition of a research performance "self-assessment" which may be more effective as an appendix or separate annual report since the broad distribution of the school's strategic plan may limit how open the self-assessment is.

Sincerely,

Evan Heit, CAPRA Chair

cc: CAPRA
Senate Director Clarke
Senate Analyst Paul