

Date: September 26, 2013

To: UC Merced Faculty

From: Joint Administration-Senate Strategic Academic Focusing Working Group

Subject: Request for faculty feedback on strategic academic focusing

Our campus has reached a critical new phase of its development: We are no longer constrained by the basic needs involved in establishing a brand new research university; we are now presented with the opportunities and challenges of advancing and developing our university towards excellent academic programs that are recognized nationally and internationally.

In 2009, the campus created a [Strategic Academic Vision](#). Refinement is now needed to take into account changes that have occurred since that time. Strategic Academic Focusing must consider where future investments in academic programs and support infrastructure are best made.

The Chancellor and campus have set a goal to grow to 10,000 students, of which 1,000 are to be graduate students by the 2020-2021 academic year. This is commonly referred to as the [2020 Project](#). In the spirit of shared governance, the Provost/EVC and the Academic Senate Chair established the Joint Administration-Senate Strategic Academic Focusing Group (with members from the faculty and the administration) whose charge is to facilitate a campus dialogue aimed at a more focused strategic academic vision.

As a first step in the process, we want to hear from faculty and campus units. Thus, we are requesting feedback from academic units, graduate groups, organized research units, and individual faculty or groups that may contribute to establishing a more focused strategic academic vision. Your ideas or responses are not restricted to the aforementioned 2009 document.

We ask that responders address the following five questions:

1. What refinements to the 2009 Strategic Academic Vision are needed-both in terms of more narrowly focusing or removing current research themes or adding new ones? Consider collaborative, multidisciplinary research themes that can help to forge UC Merced's identity.
2. What are the important research problems or questions in your field(s) and, relative to your response to question one, what research themes does your disciplinary or interdisciplinary field contribute to?

3. Within the context of the 2020 Project, what sort of resources are realistically needed for you to address these important research themes, problems, or questions?
4. What national programs align most closely with yours today and what are the programs (if any) to which you aspire to be like by 2020? If you aspire to establish a unique program, what differentiates it?
5. How does your program help to meet important campus metrics of campus enrollments (undergraduate and graduate students), research productivity, student retention rates, reliance on non-ladder rank faculty, etc.?

Responses will be reviewed using the following guiding principles. We encourage writers to consider them as well.

A. Rational fairness and equity: Having a balanced approach based on reality and context, as we consider what to build and support, in contrast to what we will not foster. Context is current status of programs and faculty, student base, and cost; it also includes future prospects in student needs, funding, and fit with general mission (to come out of this planning process). Fairness and equity avoids favoritism based on personal interest, seeks balanced choices, but all within the contexts mention above.

B. Transparency: During the planning process, information and methods of decision-making are not held back from interested parties (e.g., faculty, students, and community). Things are not done by individuals or committees without providing the rest of the faculty with an opportunity for feedback or response. This does not mean that decisions cannot be made that may reflect only the minority opinion/preference. However, the process used in this planning mission are made known to the rest of the faculty.

C. Fidelity: If changes to the campus mission, design, composition are to be made, they should be made in light of prior contracts (implied or explicit). These contracts may have been made to units, people, programs, etc.

D. Balanced approach between undergraduate and graduate education, with a recognition of the original mission of the university.

E. Recognition that UCM cannot be all to everyone, and that is must identify itself uniquely with its own philosophies and niche, in order to be competitive and successful in the near future. We can be a UC campus with its long standing quality approaches to education and research in general, but we need to be more.

In parallel to this process, the campus has underway a project to develop additional space for faculty, research, teaching and students. We acknowledge that our campus is facing restrictive limits on space resources as present. However, we ask that proposers take a reasonable and realistic approach to identifying space and other resources needed to make the initiative successful.

The due date for initial responses is Friday, November 8. Upon receiving these responses, the Working Group will review and consolidate the submissions and present the consolidated effort to the campus for input.

We will communicate with you shortly concerning the exact format for submitting responses. The Working Group will be hosting several Town Hall events where you will be able to ask questions and voice your concerns. In addition, you may also email your questions to sa2020@ucmerced.edu