

Education Initiative Proposal for the Chancellor's Strategic Plan

Introduction

In response to the call from the Executive Vice Chancellor to provide input to the Chancellor's Strategic Plan, the Education Initiative Working Group has drafted the following document which (1) describes current challenges and opportunities on our campus and (2) summarizes the proposals of the four subcommittees of the Education Initiative (Engagement Inside the Classroom, Technology-Enhanced Education, Real World/Transferrable Skills/Career Competencies, and Co-Curricular and Out-of-Class Activities).

It is important to note that since the Education Initiative launched in Fall 2012, more than 80 faculty and educators have volunteered to be part of discussions and planning for a cultural transformation on campus by participating as members of the Education Initiative Working Group or on the related subcommittees. The faculty members are from all parts of campus – they are junior and senior, tenured and contingent, and are all eager to continue their participation in and contribution to the Education Initiative. The non-faculty educators came from across campus, including departments, colleges, ORUs, the library, and Student Affairs.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Education Initiative was formally launched as a complement to UC San Diego's research initiatives with the purpose of exploring and leveraging current best global thinking about educational strategies. The Education Initiative's goals are: (1) to provide undergraduate students with an integrated and clearly articulated educational experience that will support their intellectual, academic, cognitive, and social development by capitalizing on our campus's strengths; (2) to provide graduate students with a comprehensive preparatory program that, in addition to guiding them in conducting research, develops them to be engaged leaders in academia and beyond; and (3) to provide faculty with clear and comprehensible access to the latest research on learning and teaching, and the resources for incorporating it in their classes.

Preparing our undergraduate and graduate students to meet the global challenges of the 21st century requires addressing both the level of preparation students have coming into the university and the skills and knowledge they need to acquire to succeed after graduation. This in turn requires pedagogical models that address the specific needs of our student population and a better structure for communicating to our students about the requirements and expectations of their majors and future careers. Students should also be able to have wide access to academic resources and co-curricular opportunities that enhance skills such as oral and written

communication and critical thinking, and expose them to interdisciplinary work, cross-cultural collaboration, leadership opportunities, etc. None of this can be done, of course, without providing adequate resources, support, and engagement opportunities to our faculty.

Undergraduate Students: (1) Undergraduate students are admitted with varying levels of preparation. This can result in a longer time to degree which can discourage some students from staying in college or in their majors. Incidentally, 59% of incoming freshmen to UC San Diego declare engineering or one of the natural sciences (biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics) as a major, but only 43% graduate with degrees in these fields. (2) More than 70% of our undergraduate students receive some financial aid, 42% of our students do not have English as their first language, and more than one-third of our students are first-generation college students. (3) According to employers and alumni, our students, especially in science and engineering, need to further develop their oral and written communication skills.

Graduate Students: There is a need on campus for greater emphasis on transferrable skills, consistent with the recommendations of national bodies, including recent reports from the Council of Graduate Schools as well as federal funding agencies such as the National Institutes of Health. Creating a culture in which departments see graduate students, as well as the many postdoctoral researchers and research scientists who also wish to contribute to the education of undergraduates, as preparing for careers in both research and teaching is vital. In addition, since not all graduate students pursue academic positions, they also need to be seen as preparing for careers outside of academia. In order for graduate students to acquire a full portfolio of skills that will equip them for careers both inside and outside of academia, the necessary training, support, and resources need to be allocated.

Faculty: Demonstrated teaching excellence is expected of all faculty members at UC San Diego. There is a vast and growing body of published research pertaining to the scholarship of teaching and learning. However, it is unreasonable to expect that all of our faculty become experts in this field and develop, on their own, the skills to translate new knowledge about how humans learn into concrete pedagogical applications inside the classroom. There is, therefore, a need for a resource that will guide faculty members' development of teaching skills, establish meaningful teaching assessment and evaluation processes, and promulgate evidence-based information about best practices in teaching and learning. Similarly, the increasing role of technology to support student-centered learning environments means close collaboration is required between those working pedagogically with faculty to address learning needs, and the educational technology that might be selected to enable faculty pedagogical goals.

Proposal Summary - Culture of Engagement

After reviewing the responses from the subcommittees, it was clear to the Working Group that, although each subcommittee had a different charge and focus, they were all proposing either

similar or related courses of action and that the overarching theme was “engagement” of both students and faculty. There also seemed to be an overwhelming agreement that the campus needs a two-pronged, interconnected plan – one for faculty and one for students – but under one organizational umbrella to accomplish a shared mission. Finally, it also became clear that achieving these goals requires a cultural transformation and a bold vision.

The Engagement Inside the Classroom subcommittee proposal focuses on strategies to promote a culture of educational engagement and calls for the establishment of a single, comprehensive center within Academic Affairs, provisionally named the Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELТ) that would encompass two newly-conceived and interrelated units – provisionally named the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Center for Academic (or Student) Engagement – as well as other units that already exist at UC San Diego.

The Technology-Enhanced Education subcommittee proposal also focuses on strategies to better support faculty teaching and student learning with the appropriate technology and research-based pedagogy. This subcommittee proposes that there is a need to radically expand the mission of the current Center for Teaching Development and increase collaboration with the Academic Computing and Media Services Center (ACMS), to better support faculty. These support mechanisms would be most effectively housed in the CELТ unit mentioned above under the Center for Teaching Excellence which would serve as a home where champions/researchers regularly interact, network within, between, and across campus units, and share ideas, results, and best practices.

The Real World/Transferrable Skills/Career Competencies subcommittee proposal focuses on defining what activities our students need to participate in to develop real-world skills and how to best incorporate these activities inside and outside the curriculum. It also calls for space and equipment to be available for student projects, such as design and project studios. The working space and support for acquisition of real-world skills need to be provided through a more coordinated collaboration between already existing units. It would be most effectively housed in the CELТ unit under the Center for Academic (or Student) Engagement that would provide, for example, workshops for both undergraduate and graduate students addressing an expanded real-world skills list, utilizing expertise from campus, alumni, and the community.

The proposal from the Co-Curricular and Out-of-Class Activities subcommittee and its subgroup called Co-Curricular Transcript, focuses on supporting students in fostering and better capturing their academic and co-curricular activities. The coordination of these activities would be most effectively housed in the CELТ unit under the Center for Academic (or Student) Engagement, which would not only provide the educational activities, but would better communicate with students about how to find these activities and why they are important. It would also provide a structure (or co-curricular transcript) to better capture these activities.

(All original responses from the subcommittees are attached.)

Conclusion – A Bold Vision

By uniting all these activities under the umbrella of a single comprehensive Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching, the campus would convey the understanding that teaching and learning are integrally intertwined, that research and practice are mutually enriching, and that we must create multi-directional, active connections to improve what is currently a fragmented approach to teaching and learning at UC San Diego.

The members of the Education Initiative welcome the opportunity to work towards improving student and faculty engagement. We are eager to continue working on this goal now and through the implementation process as the campus works towards a university that truly values engagement in our educational mission, and that serves as a model for other public research universities. The timing of the Education Initiative and the Strategic Plan are perfectly aligned to successfully accomplish this transformational project.