Leading the Change:
The UC Santa Cruz Strategic Plan

Report and Recommendations of the Distinction in Research and
Scholarly Activities Committee

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Executive Summary

The Distinction in Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities Subcommittee broke into three working groups to tackle the list of focus areas in the charge. Using data collected from the campus wide survey, as well as focus groups with stakeholders, the subcommittee proposes the following goals:

- Establish unique shared strengths
- Establish new evaluative process for assessing areas of excellence
- Increase attraction and retention of excellent faculty, staff, and students
- Incentivize the pursuit of extramural funding through equitable access to time and money
- Revise the merit review process
- Create spaces and programming to increase research collaboration
- Create and reclaim time for research and better institutionalize research support through centers and institutes

Introduction

Charge

We are a campus of extraordinary scholars, scientists, and creators who individually and collectively advance work that matters. By identifying areas of distinction, we can better highlight our discoveries, tell our stories, and plan to extend our reach into new or emerging areas. The committee will create opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to discuss how the campus should approach achieving even greater distinction in research, scholarship, and creative activities over the next decade. Venues for discussion might include town hall meetings and open forums, both in-person and online, as well as focus groups and surveys. The cross-cutting themes of equity, social justice, and academic excellence should be central to every aspect of the committee's work and meaningfully integrated into all committee outputs.

The committee is asked to address the following areas but may choose to consider additional topics based on community input:

- Identify the current cross-cutting themes and areas of research, scholarship, and creative work that distinguish UC Santa Cruz.
- Identify new or emerging areas of research, scholarship, and creative work that the campus should consider for investment; provide a rationale and indicate how each area would support the UC Santa Cruz mission.
- Identify existing barriers to be removed and additional infrastructure needed to support current research strengths and to develop new and emerging areas. These might include major instrumentation, power stability, and library and computational resources, as well as staff, space, and housing. What broad structures do we need to elevate research at UC Santa Cruz to the next level, and in particular, what roles do centers and institutes play in this effort?
- Propose approaches to provide greater internal recognition of faculty contributions in research, scholarship, and creative work, especially in collaborative, interdisciplinary, public-facing, and community-engaged

research,and with attention to reducing identity/cultural taxation and acknowledging invisible labor.

- Identify ways in which faculty, students, and researchers can be better supported as they engage the community in research and outreach.
- Identify ways to better support faculty, students, and researchers throughout the external funding process, from proposal development to implementation.
- Suggest ways we can better leverage the assets of our international partnerships and relationships with federal and state agencies, multi-campus research collaborations, and our networked campus (main campus, Westside Research Park, Coastal Campus, Scotts Valley Center, Silicon Valley Campus, MBEST, and the Natural Reserve System).
- Suggest ways we can better highlight our discoveries and creative work and tell our stories to raise our profile as a distinct and distinguished research university and MSI.

The outcome of the committee's efforts will be goals, metrics, and a narrative for each area addressed, which are summarized in a report that incorporates campus feedback to advance our distinction in research, scholarly and creative activities. The final version of the report will be integrated with the work of the other committees to form the campus strategic plan.

With the completion of the strategic planning process, an implementation committee will be established to monitor progress toward achieving the goals laid out in the strategic plan using the metrics defined in the plan.

Subcommittee Strategies

After reviewing the charge, the subcommittee elected to establish working groups to divy up the long list of focus areas laid out therein (for detailed list with member breakdown, please see the appendix):

- Work group 1 - Areas of Research Excellence
- Work group 2 - Barriers to and Support of Research Excellence

- Work group 3 - Recognition of Research Excellence

The working groups independently generated items for the campus-wide survey in January. After the results were released, each working group reviewed the results with an eye towards their topical focus and incorporated the findings into the goals and metrics below.

In addition to the campus survey, the subcommittee engaged with stakeholders in focus groups.

The first focus group was a joint town hall style event held on Zoom in partnership with the subcommittee on Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resilience. An invitation went out to the entire campus community. During the event, attendees self-selected breakout rooms to join over the course of an hour to respond to prompts. The feedback was recorded on Jam Boards, and each Board of our working groups can be found in the appendix.

The second and third focus groups were identical events with two different audiences. The invitees to the first event were all department chairs, while the second focused on all center/institute directors. Each event was held over lunch (provided); they allowed representatives from each of our three working groups to get feedback directly from the participants over the course of 90 minutes. Notes from each event can be found in the appendix.

Emerging sub-themes

While many themes came up in discussions with stakeholders (see a full list from our Fall '22 report), we list some of the most consistent themes here.

- Infrastructure - For the faculty engaged in engineering and natural sciences research, the constant interruption to power came up again and again. Access to more network capacity similarly was raised.

Universally, concerns about space were raised by all stakeholders, both for working and living. It is impossible to discuss the future of the campus and not hear about the housing crisis and how it impacts all members of the campus community. Questions about how to expand our faculty ranks when office and lab space are already close to capacity were frequently raised.

- Faculty review process - The current approach to reviewing faculty on three discrete areas (research, teaching, and service) was seen as antiquated and counterproductive. This approach doesn't effectively account for the kinds of work that faculty produce at the intersection of these areas, and there was a lack of clarity among stakeholders about how the campus evaluates contributions to equity, inclusion, and diversity in the process. Stakeholders expressed a need to rethink the merit and promotion process to better value invisible labor, public-facing and community-engaged work, and work that drives our research capacity in the university. The current model seems to assume a laboratory model and a focus on individual (versus collaborative) effort when assessing research productivity. The model needs to be expanded.

- Lack of staff support - Faculty repeatedly expressed frustration at the way their time is often spent doing administrative tasks (the most common example was reimbursement forms). Calls for more support for events and programming, logistical support, and grants/finance support were consistently heard. The subcommittee and stakeholders recognized that institutes and centers play a vital role in supplying this support to some faculty.

- Lack of engagement - Throughout the process, invitations to participate in brainstorming, focus groups, or feedback were consistently ignored. In addition to focus groups, we sent prompts to both department chairs and directors inviting offline feedback. Only five people responded. Themes of being overworked were consistently heard, and this likely contributed to low engagement.

Goals

As mentioned in the previous section, the subcommittee established three working groups. Our goals will be presented by each working group.

Working Group 1 - Areas of Excellence

This working group was tasked with exploring the following two directives from the charge for the Research subcommittee.

- *Identify the current cross-cutting themes and areas of research, scholarship, and creative work that distinguish UC Santa Cruz.*
- *Identify new or emerging areas of research, scholarship, and creative work that the campus should consider for investment; provide a rationale and indicate how each area would support the UC Santa Cruz mission.*

In the last 20 years, the campus has generated two bottom-up academic and research plans, in 2008 and 2017-2021. The [2008](#) effort was managed by the campus and required divisional plans (pulling together reports by departments and research institutes and centers) that were then synthesized into six transdisciplinary themes, along with each division's disciplinary goals. The [2017-2021](#) effort was led by external consultants and was not structured around departments or divisions. It focused less on the instructional mission or existing research strengths and more on aspirations for new research directions. A large number (28) of Themed Academic Working Groups generated ideas that were vetted by an Academic Advisory Committee to yield a [smaller set of most promising areas](#). These ideas were synthesized into three very broad (perhaps overly broad) thematic areas: Earth Futures, Digital Interventions, and Justice in a Changing World.

These planning efforts were intellectually rich and generative. They were attentive to our place and reputation in the ecosystem of higher education, though more our self-

perception than an informed assessment of how others think of us. These plans produced more ideas than we could successfully follow up on, but there was little explicit prioritization (e.g., based on cost, or competitors, or overall likelihood of success) or implementation planning (e.g., milestones we should meet to lead to a successful launch or acceleration of a research area). As we discovered when the subcommittee began its work in late fall, while the campus has some internal measures of research success (funds raised, major awards received, publication and citation metrics, patents, creative works produced, etc.), which can and do figure into our External Review process, it does not have access to comparative external information to determine if we are leading or trailing with respect to these measures in a particular discipline or to help us understand if the scale of investments in faculty and other support we could supply are adequate to elevate research prominence.

Our two goals for research excellence flow from these observations.

Goal 1: Establish unique shared strengths

In conversations within our subcommittee and with stakeholders, there were often references to shared points of pride about how the campus defines and approaches its mission. We believe that ethos should be more clearly articulated and understood inside and outside the campus to serve as unique, shared strengths – the attributes that would lead faculty, students, and staff to choose UC Santa Cruz for their careers and education and would attract funders to invest in our vision and areas of excellence. That ethos will likely align well with the university's stated "branding" proposition: **We lead at the intersection of innovation and justice, seeking solutions and giving voice to the challenges of our time—leading to transformative change inside and outside the academy**. But we must be clear that this statement is more than just a marketing tool; it should be seen as a crystallization of how we approach our mission that will spur action and shape decisions about our future. To do this, it will likely require greater detail than this statement, for example considering the university's commitment to community-engaged scholarship, its research mission as a minority-serving institution, its long-standing commitment to

environmental stewardship and justice, and its ability to generate scholarship that shapes and creates new fields of study. These more specific examples emerged in conversations with stakeholders, but our efforts were far from systematic or exhaustive.

- **Recommendation:** The campus should engage in a deliberative process involving faculty, students, staff, and key outside constituencies (potential students, funders, faculty at other universities, etc.) to evaluate its brand/ethos statement as it relates to research, scholarship, and creative work with the following three objectives that can be treated as metrics.
  - **Metrics:**
    - Establishment of specific examples of these unique, shared values and strengths (ideally supported by recent examples of success relevant to each value).
    - A campus understanding and acceptance of these shared values and strengths, which can be assessed through polling and survey data.
    - Polling/surveying to determine if our perceived values and strengths are recognized by key <u>outside</u> constituencies, which can shape our messaging and communications.

Goal 2: Evaluation and review

Our subcommittee went into the strategic planning process hoping we could surface a few broad areas (three to five) that could be a focus of campus research investments in the next five to ten years. In our stakeholder events, we tried to point participants to the promising areas identified in the 2017-2021 planning effort. But perhaps because of the planning fatigue noted above or our lack of bandwidth to elicit the deep engagement needed, we made no progress on this front. This contrasts with the experience of the Climate subcommittee as it engaged stakeholders on research. With a narrower remit, they were able to make more progress identifying shared and promising research goals.

A related topic is how we assess research excellence in our existing departments and programs. As noted above, our current External Review process is largely inwardly focused. We get an external perspective from the three individuals (typically) who agree to participate, but we collect and share no information that takes an external, comparative view. The review process is overstuffed, evaluating instruction, research, and service in a short window of time. The reviews are widely spaced, and only in the most negative reviews do we ever set up annual or biannual evaluations of progress on goals. Ideally, from a research perspective, these reviews should help us understand when we might effectively invest in an existing research area to raise our prominence or protect such an area against erosion due to generational turnover or poaching. Our reviews are already effective at identifying when a program is nearing breakdown and providing advice on how to navigate back to a healthy state. We need to ensure they continue to play that role.

- **Recommendation 1:** The campus should try a different approach to evaluating the ideas that arose in the 2017-2021 Strategic Academic Plan and the aspirations that have arisen since then as areas for growth and investment over the next five to ten years. That process would ideally consider the alignment of current and aspirational research efforts with the values and strengths identified as part of Goal 1 and whether the likely scale of campus investments in them over the next decade could lead to a substantial advance within existing research areas or the successful launch of a new research area.

  For those deemed ripe for concerted investment, we need to develop clear implementation plans. We will need to acquire and provide access to appropriate tools and comprehensive data, engage meaningfully with internal and external stakeholders, and include measures reflective of contributions in areas that aren't always reflected in typical measurements like extramural funding and rankings (in particular, ways to evaluate areas that are legible within and beyond the university). We might look for guidance in assessing

traditional and non-traditional areas by learning how research is evaluated in different disciplines across the UC system. Implementation plans should consider new structures for support and coordination, identify leaders and champions, value strategies to raise the visibility of programs internally and externally, guide allocation of resources, and identify new funding opportunities.

- ○ **Metrics**: Ideally, metrics and benchmarks would be developed to measure our progress along each of these implementation areas.

- **Recommendation 2:** The campus should examine its External Review process in relation to research. We might consider separating department reviews into two stages, as at some other UCs – one stage more internal and focused on teaching and a second phase with the external committee focused on research and examining the outcomes of the earlier teaching-focused review. There should be greater attention to external comparisons in assessing research excellence in a discipline specific fashion. As with the evaluation of potential areas for investment highlighted in Recommendation 1, we should be attentive to more specialized types of assessment for the non-traditional areas that we aspire to foster. The review process should help campus leadership decide from a research perspective when it might make sense to invest in growing an existing department or program.
  - ○ **Metrics:** Ideally, metrics would be developed to measure progress toward goals developed in External Reviews, and those metrics would be evaluated on a regular basis (annual or biannual).

Working Group 2 - Barriers and Support

This working group addressed barriers and support structures and focused on the following directives.

- *Identify existing barriers to be removed and additional infrastructure needed to support current research strengths and to develop new and emerging areas. These might include major instrumentation, power stability, and library and*

computational resources, as well as staff, space, and housing. What broad
structures do we need to elevate research at UC Santa Cruz to the next level,
and in particular, what roles do centers and institutes play in this effort?

- *Identify ways in which faculty, students, and researchers can be better supported*
  as they engage the community in research and outreach.
- *Identify ways to better support faculty, students, and researchers throughout the*
  external funding process, from proposal development to implementation.

Goals 3-5 address three areas related to the first two bullets that will be critical to
maintaining and elevating research and creative work at UCSC: engagement, physical
infrastructure, and attraction and retention of faculty, staff, and students. Goal 6
addresses the third bullet and focuses on incentivization and equity related to the
pursuit of extramural funds.

Goal 3: Engagement

We need to advance our mission, values, and strengths by investing in institutional
structures, facilities, staff, and recognition and resourcing mechanisms that bolster
interdisciplinary, community-engaged, and center-scale work. As noted elsewhere,
participants in stakeholder meetings expressed a strong desire to work across
disciplines as well as outside academia. Additionally, to be competitive for many major
external funding opportunities, collaborations across disciplines and sectors, including
with community groups and industry, are essential. However, reward structures; internal
administrative practices; and lack of support, visibility, and physical and programmatic
spaces of exchange were cited as barriers.

- **Recommendation 1:** Revise the recognition, budgeting, and award practices
  that discourage collaboration and reinforce departmental silos. Centers and
  institutes could support breaking down these barriers.
  - **Metrics:** See Goal 7 regarding revising the merit review process and Goal
    8, Recommendation 2 regarding team teaching. Increased ease of course
    cross listing. Increased consistency of processes across divisions.

Increased ease of allocating funding and credit in multidisciplinary awards. Regular meetings of center and institute directors to share best practices and facilitate engagement.

- **Recommendation 2:** Increase access to UCSC-affiliated physical spaces that facilitate formal and informal exchange. See Goal 8.
- **Recommendation 3:** Implement UCSC-wide initiatives, programs, and practices that encourage collaboration across disciplines/divisions and build on successful efforts such as the Interdisciplinary Faculty Symposium and other more informal convenings.
    - **Metrics:** See Goal 8, Recommendation 2 regarding team teaching. Increase in the number of and support for interdisciplinary symposia and smaller-scale convenings. Seed funding allocated to building and growing collaborations across disciplines and divisions, particularly in support of identified areas of excellence. Recognize transdisciplinary research and teaching in merit and promotion files. Implement a central system that makes it easier to find collaborators (e.g., automated or manual profiles, opt-in database, etc.).
- **Recommendation 4:** Prioritize support for community-engaged work. Individual faculty, centers, and institutes have a strong record of community engagement. However, to sustain and grow UCSC's impact, additional investment in related staff, space, and programming is recommended. Additionally, reward structures should be revised to clearly value the time and results of this work.
    - **Metrics:** See Goal 7, Recommendation 2 regarding merit review process. Hire staff, perhaps to be placed with Campus + Community, dedicated to facilitating community engagement consistent with best practices and UCSC values. Evaluate feasibility of making Campus + Community a campus-level entity and resource and act in accordance with recommendation. Implement seed funding that rewards community engagement. Building on models of existing centers and institutes, work with local venues and organizations to host community events and research activities, in addition to growing and leveraging off-campus

UCSC spaces like MBEST. Apply for Carnegie designation as a community-engaged campus.

- **Recommendation 5:** Increase undergraduate engagement in research and creative activities.
  - **Metrics:** Increase in undergraduate research opportunities across fields and increase in hourly rate to be more competitive with off-campus opportunities. Reevaluate hourly assessment. Increased use of work-study within research. Increased grant and philanthropic funding of undergraduate research. Involvement with the National Council on Undergraduate Research. Increased accessibility of research and creative spaces, particularly those off-campus, by UCSC transportation. See Unparalleled Undergraduate Education and Experience Committee recommendations regarding establishing a co-curricular transcript.
- **Recommendation 6:** Increase impact and visibility of UCSC scholarship by making research outputs and data as openly available as possible. While UCSC authors regularly publish, we need to grow the practice and culture of open-access publishing and data sharing.
  - **Metrics:** Greater participation in UC Academic Senate sponsored Open Access policies measured through increased deposit in the UC systemwide Open Access Repository (eScholarship), increased participation in UC Senate-UC Library negotiated transformative agreements, deposit of data in UC-sponsored and/or discipline-focused repositories. Increased number of faculty research start up packages that include open access funding. Open-access considered during merit-review where appropriate. To be determined: how compliance with new federal data sharing mandates is measured.

Goal 4: Physical research infrastructure – Creatively address the facilities, power, and computational constraints that limit the potential growth of research and creative work

Stakeholders repeatedly cited the lack of functional space needed to conduct excellent

research and creative work. Additionally, deferred maintenance was cited as having an adverse effect on research, as well as the ability to attract and retain excellent faculty. Reliable power and increased computational resources are also critical to productivity, the continued strength of high-profile programs, the growth of emerging areas of excellence, and risk mitigation. Both students and faculty noted that broadband coverage is inconsistent across campus, including in areas where research and training activities might be expected to take place, also curbing productivity.

- **Recommendation 1:** Conduct an external review of the current utilization and condition of existing research and creative spaces, as well as future needs, inclusive of storage.
  - **Metrics:** Review would inform planning for the reorganization of space and investment in new buildings, renovation, and partnerships/ agreements. Implementation of a set of recommended steps.
- **Recommendation 2:** Evaluate accessibility and additional uses of developed land, 2300 Delaware, and similar options, as well as options to further leverage partner facilities (e.g., NOAA).
  - **Metrics:** Report and recommendations. Implementation of a set of recommended steps.
- **Recommendation 3:** Increase stability of power to UCSC facilities.
  - **Metrics:** Decrease in overall number of power interruptions, particularly to resources at high risk for negative impacts. Improvement in coverage of and seamless transfer to auxiliary systems when power is interrupted. More concerted investment in Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) systems to support critical instruments that power down during the transient power drop on transfer to auxiliary power systems.
- **Recommendation 4:** Increase computing capacity and network coverage and capacity.
  - **Metrics:** Increase in access to supercomputing capabilities and secure data storage. Identify gaps in network coverage and strength and bring all spaces where research and training activities might reasonably occur up

to National Telecommunications and Information Administration broadband standards or better.

- **Recommendation 5:** Prior to implementation, leverage Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resilience Committee (CCSRC) recommendations and implementation outputs to inform approach and prioritize/plan system and facility upgrades.
    - **Metric:** CCSRC recommendations, the recommendations of the Decarbonization and Electrification task force report, and risk assessments incorporated into plans to improve physical research infrastructure.

Goal 5: Attraction and retention – Increase the successful recruitment and retention of a diverse community of excellent faculty, staff, and students

- **Recommendation 1:** Increase access to affordable housing. Major initiatives are underway to increase student housing on campus. However, stakeholder feedback indicates that housing affordability continues to be a major barrier in attracting and retaining the excellent faculty, staff, postdocs, and students on which the research enterprise depends. Fundraising and planning to enable the renovation and building of additional housing facilities on UCSC properties will remain critical, as will working with local leaders to advocate for programs and policies that support off-campus access.
    - **Metrics:** Increase in the number of affordable UCSC units available for staff, faculty, and students. Decrease in proportion of UCSC renters who are severely rent-burdened or living in overcrowded housing. Increased support for faculty who are relocating.
- **Recommendation 2:** Revise pay-related practices and policies that encourage job-shopping and job-hopping. See Goal 7, Recommendation 1 regarding the Special Salary Practice and Goal 9, Recommendation 2 regarding staff advancement. Additionally, while equity increases have narrowed the gap, starting staff salaries at UCSC are still lower than at many other UCs, which can

result in other campuses benefiting from UCSC investments in staff training while UCSC units bear the costs of recruitment and understaffing.

- ○ **Metrics:** Decrease in difference between average starting percentile of UCSC and UC campuses with comparable costs of living. See below for others.

- **Recommendation 3:** Increase faculty diversity. Diversity, equity, and inclusion as a driver of research excellence were repeatedly highlighted in stakeholder meetings. Participants noted that while the diversity of the student body and upper administration has grown, representation among senate faculty has not kept pace. The planned Faculty 100 hires over the next 10 years provide an opportunity to remedy the gap. The campus should support and incentivize the hiring of UC President's Postdoctoral Fellows. Other recommendations included here and made by the Inclusive and Thriving Campus Community Committee should aid in attracting and retaining diverse talent.
  - ○ **Metrics:** Increase in how well the senate faculty reflects the diversity of California. Increase in numbers of offers to and acceptances of UC President's Postdoctoral Fellows. See additional metrics in other committee reports.

Goal 6: Incentivize the pursuit of extramural funding by facilitating equitable access to time and money

- **Recommendation 1:** Reduce the administrative burden on faculty, particularly post-award. Two avenues were highlighted during discussion: 1) increasing staff support, especially for large, complex proposals and awards and within departments, centers and institutes (see Goal 9); and 2) streamlining processes and policies to increase overall efficiency while effectively mitigating critical risks to researchers and the university. Obtaining matching funds, IRB, procurement, reimbursement, accounting and reporting, and burdensome administrative proposal requirements (some of which spring from growing requirements from federal sponsors) were called out repeatedly in stakeholder meetings and survey responses. While substantial progress has been made in many areas identified in

the NCURA report, it would also be useful to review it for additional points of potential efficiency and staffing recommendations.

- ○ **Metrics:** Reduced time spent by faculty on administrative tasks related to conducting research. Implementation of a more transparent, consistent system that enables research accountants and PIs to easily track spending and reporting requirements. Reduction in steps related to and decrease in overall time spent on cited processes. Equitable support structures across divisions. Collective advocacy towards federal sponsors to clarify, test, and streamline new requirements.
- **Recommendation 2:** Equitably balance expectations for research productivity with expectations for teaching and service. Reduced teaching load, whether through funds for release or buyout, or through more fundamental changes to the evaluation of standard loads; number of faculty and students; or course and requirement structures, was the most consistently cited suggestion to benefit research and creative work. As noted in Goal 9, research excellence requires time. Stakeholders pointed out that most R1 universities have lower teaching loads, most UCs have lower student-to-faculty ratios, and that UCSC has a high number of course offerings.
- ○ **Metrics:** Curricular analysis conducted by Academic Senate. Comparable teaching loads and student-to-faculty ratios (by discipline) as other similar R1s and UCs. Increased research activity. See Goal 9, Recommendation 3 for other related metrics.
- **Recommendation 3:** Increase equitable access to seed funds at multiple levels and across divisions to help initiate impactful projects, as well as to bridge funds to sustain GSRs and project scientists during limited gaps in external funding.
- ○ **Metrics:** Annual seed funding calls, accessible to all divisions, for different stages of preliminary work. Increase in the proportion of GSRs and project scientists who do not have a break in funding.

Working Group 3 - Recognition

This working group focused on the area of faculty recognition, centering its work on the

following two bullet points from the committee's charge.

- *Propose approaches to provide greater internal recognition of faculty contributions in research, scholarship, and creative work, especially in collaborative, interdisciplinary, public-facing, and community-engaged research,and with attention to reducing identity/cultural taxation and acknowledging invisible labor.*
- *Identify ways in which faculty, students, and researchers can be better supported as they engage the community in research and outreach.*

Based on focus group and survey feedback, our goals address the question of **how we, as a campus, can better support UCSC researchers' excellence while centering wellness and acknowledging Covid impacts.** The goals we outline below are all things that would allow people to spend more time on actual research, make it more impactful, and recognize it appropriately. We place value on space and time, and also acknowledge that an additive model for both faculty and staff workloads leads to burnout. We also believe that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on research will be felt for years to come, and it may take some time to understand all of the barriers to research that the pandemic introduced.

Goal 7: Revise the merit review process

UCSC takes a maximal approach to merit review. Could we envision a simpler practice? Based on stakeholder feedback, we recommend rethinking, revising, and streamlining the merit review process. An initial set of metrics and activities could be employed to ascertain the extent of the barriers that the current merit review process may pose.

- **Recommendation 1:** Reduce the amount of time spent on merit reviews. Faculty members, departments, AHR units, deans, CAP, APO, and the CP/EVC's office spend considerable time crafting and reviewing merit review files. A simpler practice that is more efficient would reduce workload while we maintain transparency and ensure equitable salary increases.
  - **Metric**: Ask for guidance from the Senate, including a review of the

current merit review process and an analysis of the impact of the Special Salary Practice (SSP). Has the SSP helped to bring up our salaries relative to the other UCs? Are we in a space where the SSP has run its course and is now harming more than helping us? Can we get faculty salaries to a high-enough level relative to other UCs, with salary equity programs, that we can replace the SSP (with its high focus on performance by area) with something more streamlined and holistic? Compare our process with other UCs, across UCSC departments, and what we've done in the past (including the "short form merits"). Pull together recommendations across years of CAP/EVC memos so they are easier to access and keep track of. Move some to CAPM.

- **Recommendation 2:** Acknowledge a broad definition of research, including community-engaged, public, and digital scholarship. With the CAP/EVC memo from September 2022, our campus is moving to understand research more capaciously than it has in the past. However, survey data shows that there remains the belief that public-facing work is undervalued as research. In addition, a broader consideration of research should take into account scholarly activity that happens at the interaction of research, teaching, and service. Merit reviews should also incentivize risk taking in research and acknowledge how taxing it is to try to be outstanding in all three areas at every review (as incentivized by the SSP). We want researchers who will take their fields in new directions. The current merit review process, however, disincentivizes risk taking. How can we change that to reward good trying?
    - **Metrics**: Increased number of merit reviews with outstanding research contributions that are based on public-facing scholarship. Increased number of successful promotion cases that feature public-facing scholarship.
- **Recommendation 3:** Credit and clarify expectations around DEI contributions. Stakeholder feedback revealed that faculty and reviewers are confused about standards and recognition for DEI contributions to research, and to other categories. For faculty engaging in invisible labor, which is often DEI-related, we

need a mechanism to recognize, alleviate, and compensate for that labor, which often has a direct impact on research productivity.[1]

- ○ **Metrics:** Ask for guidance from CAAD and VC DEI to clarify expectations around DEI contributions. Future faculty surveys should show a decrease in the amount of invisible labor. Development of structures, like Equity Advocates, to make this labor visible and compensated for.

- **Recommendation 4:** Consider addressing the long duration of faculty at Associate Step 4, and the complications of enforcing boundary step rules on salary that disadvantage faculty moving quickly through the steps. Solutions might include bringing back Associate Professor Step 5 and/or hiring at lower entry steps with higher off-scale components, as other UCs do. Transitioning to appointing new faculty at lower steps (with higher off-scales) is another option to slow the time toward reaching barrier steps.

- ○ **Metrics**: Increased salaries for Associate Professors at the barrier steps. Decreased time at Associate Professor Step 4. Increase attention to the time and salary progression in the Associate ranks for faculty who otherwise are moving quickly through our system.

Goal 8: Create and maintain spaces, both formal and informal, for the exchange of ideas to promote research collaboration

Informal and interdisciplinary interactions are a hallmark of UCSC's founding as a different kind of UC campus. Stakeholder meetings revealed that faculty want to interact with one another. However, isolation – especially since the pandemic – and the campus's space challenges have conspired to limit the informal interactions that build research excellence. Here we make three recommendations, each with metrics to measure progress.

- **Recommendation 1:** Proactively create spaces with food that foster

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[1] Recommended readings include: Liu et al 2022 "Normalizing Diversity in Merit Review Forms" *PS: Political Science & Politics* , Volume 56 , Issue 1 , January 2023 , pp. 123 - 127
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096522000920
And
https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2023/03/30/equitably-recognizing-and-rewarding-women-faculty-color-opinion

inter/transdisciplinary research exchange, including casual spaces that encourage faculty and students to talk over food. This also would bring faculty into campus areas outside of their offices, labs, and classrooms. These spaces are needed year round.

- ○ **Metrics:** Ensure there is an operating café or other establishment with food and tables in every area of campus (Crown/Merrill, Stevenson/Cowell, University Center, Science Hill, library, bookstore, Rachel Carson, Oakes, etc.). Converting an existing facility into space that encourages collaborations and meetings over coffee, lunches, and after-work happy hours. Departments and divisions would be incentivized to use funds for faculty to meet with colleagues and students to encourage collaborations and mentoring.
- **Recommendation 2:** Provide central support for team teaching that may likely emerge from the above interdisciplinary conversations.
  - ○ **Metrics:** Measure progress through central support to divisions and departments specifically earmarked for team teaching within and across departments/divisions. To build research excellence, a call for team-teaching proposals could include statements on how the team-taught course will contribute to new/joint research (including on pedagogy) by the instructors.
- **Recommendation 3:** Fundraise and plan for a conference center to hold more events that would emerge from informal collaborations, and hire staff to support events beyond existing research centers.
  - ○ **Metrics:** Take steps to leverage UCSC's Silicon Valley and Scotts Valley locations, and MBEST, or modify University Center, Stevenson Event Center, or Merrill Cultural Center to host larger conferences with breakout areas.

Goal 9: Create and reclaim time for research

A common refrain from our stakeholder feedback was the erosion of time for research due to the increased demands on faculty/researcher time. Excellent research requires sustained time. The campus has structures to recognize potential or existing research

excellence such as centers, institutes, clusters, and other initiatives. But to be successful, these need to come with time so that the researchers involved can realize the potential that got the initiative launched in the first place.

- **Recommendation 1:** Increase staff support for research. A high priority raised in stakeholder meetings is increased staffing and staff training for grant submission and grant management. Another priority is more staff support for purchasing, hiring, and other expenditures of research funds. Innovative research often involves building or purchasing something out of the ordinary, or new kinds of collaborations. These cannot happen without adequate staff support.
    - **Metrics:** Track how the ratio of staff to research support staff at UCSC compares to our peer institutions. Monitor the workload of the financial analysts, and keep track of whether the university is providing them the information and tools they need to apply for and manage grants from an ever-increasing variety of sources.
- **Recommendation 2:** Improve staff retention. Staff need to move positions within UCSC in order to get an appreciable increase in salary. Salaries are often higher at other UCs, so staff often move to other UCs after UCSC invests in their training. This incentivizes turnover, reducing the effectiveness of the research staff positions that we do have (too few, at the moment). We need ways for staff to advance within UCSC so that we can retain them and maintain continuity of skill sets and experience.
    - **Metrics:** Track staff retention and advancement by job type, by job series and by where they are in the campus organization. Identify who will do the tracking, perhaps the Director of SHR?
- **Recommendation 3:** Reduce time spent in the classroom to be consistent with other UCs. UCSC faculty teach substantially more than comparable faculty at other UCs or faculty nationally, which impacts research productivity and wellness. Classes at UCSC meet 190 minutes per week, compared to 150 minutes per week at, for instance, UCLA and other UCs. This adds up to 400 extra minutes of classroom teaching per course at UCSC relative to other UCs (1600 additional minutes in the classroom for instructors who teach 4x/year). No

doubt this structural over-teaching contributes to UCSC having one of the (or the?) highest student-to-faculty ratios in the system.

- ○ **Metrics**: Make teaching times consistent with faculty at other UCs to reclaim time for research. Evaluate progress toward reducing student-to-faculty ratios.
- **Recommendation 4:** Provide resources to centers and other research initiatives that translate to time that will raise the research profile of the campus. Create guidelines for the establishment, review, and sunsetting of centers, and for allocating resources including for director compensation, staff support, space, programming, initiatives, and development. Ideally centers and institutes should function as more than the sum of their affiliated faculty and researchers.
  - ○ **Metrics:** Increased grant activity and increased support for interdisciplinary research. Increased effective management of shared facilities. Establishment of clear guidelines and processes for starting, reviewing, and sunsetting centers (as there are for institutes).

Appendix

[Fall Report](#)

Data sources

Climate Resilience and Research Joint Townhall

[Breakout room prompts](#)

[Work group 1 JamBoard](#)

[Work group 2 JamBoard](#)

[Work group 3 JamBoard](#)

[Notes from work group 3](#)

Chair & Director Focus Groups

[Center & Institute Director Focus Group - notes from event](#)

[Center & Institute Director feedback - written](#)

Department Chair Focus Group - notes from event

Department Chair feedback - written

Prior Strategic Planning Resources

2018 Strategic Academic Plan - Areas of Excellence/Focus

2020 NCURA Peer Review