

Stewardship Review
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UC Merced
Self-Assessment

Preamble

Stewardship involves the thoughtful and responsible care of something that has been entrusted to the steward. It is an ethical concept that requires a focus on others rather than self and that is rooted in a relationship of trust.

For the purpose of this review, my stewardship pertains to the UC Merced Campus—its mission, its programs, its people, and its communities. I have written this self-assessment as a narrative reflection focused on how I’ve attempted to respond to a series of stewardship challenges and opportunities.

Context

When I arrived at UC Merced nearly five years ago, I found a campus still in its early stages of development on both the academic and operational sides of the house. Few people who come to UC Merced as faculty or staff come with a background of experience in working in a start-up campus—myself included—where the usual operational and administrative support systems are not yet fully in place. My first clues that this would be a challenging environment were the weeks and multiple “tries” that it took to get basic IT communication devices to sync up and the inability to find basic information on the campus website.

The State of California was also struggling through a deep and prolonged recession. State resources, then and now, were tight and the campus lacked a significant endowment to draw upon and to invest in its people and operational systems. It was operating habitually in a deficit situation, depending on loans from the UC Office of the President (UCOP). Despite continued growth in the student body in conformity with UC enrollment growth goals, the capital development of the

campus lagged three years behind this growth, creating serious space deficits.

The good news was that many people on campus expressed a deep commitment to UC Merced's mission, its distinctive student population, and its potential regional impact. UC Merced had attracted an amazingly talented young faculty who had already developed a strong array of undergraduate degree programs and who understandably wanted the institution to begin to focus more on its graduate offerings and graduate student recruitment.

To accommodate student growth, and the increase in faculty positions required to support student growth, responding to the burgeoning space deficit was a critical priority. The campus also required fiscal stability and budget constraint to avoid chronic deficit spending and increased indebtedness as a result of that spending. Critical weaknesses in the operational infrastructure needed to be addressed—including but not limited to the IT infrastructure. There was also a need to put into place support for faculty in areas ranging from faculty mentoring to an improved research infrastructure. The campus climate, while generally positive, was marked by chronic distrust of administration, and there was a clear need for better communication, transparency, and collaboration across the campus and between campus units.

Stewardship accomplishments and challenges

The challenges outlined above have guided the focus of my stewardship during the period under review.

By far, the most time consuming of these challenges has been the creation and implementation of a strategy for the continued capital development of the campus. It became clear during my first year here that the path forward would be different from the path travelled before—out of sheer necessity--and that the campus expertise required to find new solutions was lacking. I engaged the Urban Land Institute to help us think through options, and I hired a Chief financial officer with solid experience in public infrastructure finance to help lead our efforts.

Following a period of intensive research and consultation with experts in capital development and finance, the development strategy now known as Project 2020 was identified as the most viable path forward. As the chief advocate for Project 2020, my task was to garner the required support from a variety of external constituencies to enable the project to move forward. These constituencies ranged from the UC Board of Regents to organized labor. Since the DBFOM (Design, Build, Finance, Operate, Maintain) model employed by Project 2020 was new to the University of California and indeed to higher education more generally in the United States, considerable time and great care was given to exploring all potential risks and remedies and to educating stakeholders and decision makers about the process.

With initial approvals from the UC Board of Regents and Department of Finance, Project 2020 will enable us to nearly double the space currently available on the UC Merced campus within an accelerated 4 year timeframe. It also ensures that these new buildings do not create significant deferred maintenance costs that divert resources from academic programs and student support. Although the new spaces created will not include everything the campus desired, these spaces will represent a significant expansion of academic, research, and student support facilities on the UC Merced campus.

The creation of this capital development strategy necessarily required significant work with respect to the campus budget and also negotiation with UCOP for enhanced financial support. The outcomes of these two efforts resulted in a critical memorandum of understanding (MOU) between UC Merced and UCOP detailing important financial support agreements and the campus's first all-funds budget and long-range financial model.

The MOU provides the campus with a guaranteed funding stream linked to student growth to 10,000, significant financial support for building the second phase of the campus, \$5 million to help create a bank for faculty start-up packages, and a commitment to funding campus wetland and roadway mitigation obligations. With the campus's first all-funds budget and financial model completed this year, we are now able to reliably project revenues and expenditures and to thus move towards

longer term funding commitments. The commitment to fund approximately 25 new faculty positions a year for five years is one of the most significant drivers in this funding plan.

In its initial phase, UC Merced focused on developing an array of undergraduate programs and on the recruitment primarily of undergraduate students. But a research university campus also needs a strong array of graduate programs and the ability to competitively recruit talented graduate students. To support this increasing emphasis on graduate education, I initiated the creation of a new graduate division headed by a graduate dean. The nascent functions of this division are already providing meaningful support to graduate groups and for graduate student recruitment and services lacking prior to its creation.

The UC has a strong provost structure, and at UC Merced as elsewhere, academic stewardship is largely delegated to the provost. The provost, for example, led the campuses long-range enrollment and strategic academic focusing initiatives. However, I've provided direct stewardship of the academic and research mission of UC Merced in several key areas. In addition to initiating the new Graduate Division, I also initiated the creation of an Undergraduate Division to focus on key areas such as general education (College One), student advising support, and undergraduate student academic success. The former academic personnel office was expanded to include a broader range of faculty welfare support service, focused initially on providing recourses that help faculty succeed as teachers and scholars. Additionally, the Division of Research was expanded to include a new focus on building productive university/industry collaborations and on helping faculty who wish to commercialize their discoveries and inventions through licensing and start up activities. In partnership with the City of Merced, we opened a Venture lab to provide faculty and students who wish to start businesses with appropriate support.

I have also been able to provide direct stewardship in selected academic program and research areas. For example, I partnered with faculty in the successful effort to have UC Merced's grasslands and vernal pools accepted as part of the UC Natural Reserve System. I was a key player in bringing major endowment support to UC Merced's Center for

Humanities. I negotiated with the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources for increased support related to our research related to agriculture. And I have also worked to establish research and development opportunities for faculty (and internships for students) in leading San Joaquin Valley industry.

On the operational side of the house, finding a path forward for creating required systems and promoting operational effectiveness has proved to be daunting, but not impossible. For example, many of UC Merced's business processes could be simplified as a result of process mapping focused on reducing unnecessary redundancy and by leveraging technology. But a prior condition of effectively leveraging technology is to have a well-functioning IT infrastructure. When I arrived at UC Merced, the IT infrastructure was split into two divisions with a history of fighting each other for control and an unwillingness to collaborate for the good of the campus. I directed the consolidation of these units, authorized the hiring of a new Chief information officer, and committed to the investment required to substantially increase the accessibility, speed, and reliability of the campus network.

A deeper challenge is related to a campus culture that has lacked a "customer service" focus and creative problem solving orientation. Changing this will take time but some important steps are underway, including changes in leadership in the human resources area, staff performance evaluations that now include innovation, problem solving, and customer service as core competencies, and the Chancellor's Staff Innovation Awards that provide recognition and reward to staff who initiate innovative and cost effective proposals for improving campus operations or customer service.

Communication and transparency are important to me, as they are to the campus community. While I have endeavored to make improvements in these areas, much work remains to be done. I extended the Chancellor's Cabinet to include deans and the chair of the UC Merced Division Council to improve communication and transparency on the academic side of the house. I initiated monthly brown bag lunches, open to any staff or faculty member, to respond to question or listen to concerns. Senior administrators, including the chancellor, have initiated a series of web chats where participants can

send their questions anonymously and get real time answers. But internal communications channels, which are instruments of transparency and also feedback, have remained clogged and ineffective, particularly in some areas of the campus, including at least some of the schools.

As much as we need buildings, effective operations, and financial stability, even more important than these things is the welfare of our faculty, staff, and students. Clogged or otherwise ineffective two-way internal communications contributes to frustration and a loss of faculty and staff morale. Finding ways to improve communications at all levels must be a continuing institutional priority.

UC Merced has the privilege and also the challenge of educating a predominantly low income, first generation, and minority student population. These students are bright but often come from lower performing schools and from families who cannot assist their children academically. The success of these students at UC Merced is critical and has positive impacts on students as individuals as well as their families and communities.

Although 4-6 year graduation rates for such students at UC Merced fall well above the national average for students with a similar profile, these rates are below the UC average. The cost for educating such students is greater than the cost of educating students who come from wealthier backgrounds, better schools, and who have benefitted from better college preparation opportunities. Thus, UC Merced has been challenged to find fiscally prudent and yet effective ways to provide the academic and social support services that will help these vulnerable students to succeed.

My stewardship in this area has included garnering private support for student success functions, ranging from the Bright Success Center to support for undocumented students. Additionally, I've worked directly with business and industry both in the San Joaquin Valley and the Silicon Valley to create paid internship opportunities for students. I've commissioned focus groups with student populations least satisfied with the campus climate (based on a UCOP campus climate survey) and have charged various members of my administrative team with

implementing actions responsive to what we learned from these focus groups. A more systematic study of undergraduate student retention challenges is underway but remains to be completed.

Finally, a recounting of my stewardship accomplishments and challenges during the past 5 years would not be complete without mentioning the events of November 4, 2015. This is a day I will never forget—a day marked by blood and pain on the UC Merced campus. My challenge as the chief campus steward was to not only manage the crisis but to manage it in a way that exemplified the values of our community and helped us to heal. I am proud of the way in which the campus responded and the bonds of compassion, forgiveness, tolerance and community that it exemplified.

Looking Forward

Since its founding, a commitment to inter and trans disciplinary teaching and research has been a cornerstone of UC Merced's academic strengths. This commitment is currently embodied in the results of the strategic academic focusing process, which also recognizes that disciplinary strength is foundational to effective inter and trans disciplinary work. Going forward, it will be important to evaluate the viability (with agreed upon measures of success) of the inter and trans disciplinary alliances identified through this process, the effectiveness of cluster hiring, and the structures that will both support disciplinary and inter and trans disciplinary work within and across schools. This will require strong communication and collaboration between faculty and academic administration.

Issues related to campus diversity and climate must also be at the forefront of our attention and work. The diversity of our student body is not reflected in the diversity of our faculty and staff—and students in particular have noticed. Having role models and exemplars that students can identify with is a critical component in the development of student aspirations and feeling of belonging. Although we have been making steady progress in faculty diversity, we need to continue to focus on this challenge and also work to ensure that our campus

provides a supportive and inclusive climate for faculty, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds.

The campus is currently engaged in a workforce planning initiative to identify the most critical functions for future staff support. Our long-range budget model demonstrates that our ability to hire new staff will be limited and hence gives rise to the need to focus those hires in areas of critical importance. Clearly, effective stewardship of the mission of UC Merced dictates that we give priorities to staff support that enhances teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and student success. There are certainly other areas of critical need, and responding to these needs may require some retooling of the existing workforce, restructuring in administrative and support areas, and a concentrated focus on increasing operational and administrative efficiencies.

With respect to the latter, we have already seen some administrative consolidations. The Department of Physical Design and Construction is slated for consolidation with Facilities Management, with a single lead administrator rather than two. Similarly, the Department of Public Safety was merged earlier this year with other units that include environmental health and safety, risk services, and workman's compensation, with a single lead administrator.

Another anticipated result of workforce planning will be a realignment of some student affairs and academic affairs functions, particularly with respect to the new undergraduate and graduate divisions. The driving question for any such realignment must be the structure and staffing configuration that will best promote student success at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in the coming decade.

My own immediate office has been downsized from a staff of eight to a staff of three. This has allowed me to use some salary savings to support a new chief of staff position, currently in the recruiting stage, that will help the campus create an external relations and marketing strategy aimed at improving our student recruitment efforts, fundraising ability, political clout, and reputational awareness both regionally and nationally. UC Merced has a compelling story to tell, and if we tell it well and to the right people, it will enhance support for our academic programs and students in the years to come.

Given campus fiscal constraints, there must also be a continued focus on enhancing revenues from non-state sources. Some of our revenue enhancing opportunities are internal—for example, better management of auxiliary enterprises, continuing education offerings, and self-sustaining professional degree programs. Others are more externally focused such as building new donor pipelines. Although our endowment remains modest, it has steadily increased in the years I have been here, and I am particularly pleased with significant increases in the rate of alumni giving as this will benefit the campus in years to come as our alumni achieve the capacity to make major gifts to their university.

UC Merced is currently in an awkward transitional stage—from start-up to early stages of maturity as a research university campus. Some of the literature on organizational change refers to this stage as chaos. What worked initially, when the campus opened to 750 students with a handful of faculty, is often not what will work best for a campus of 10,000 students. This holds true for areas ranging from school structure to dining services. In this transitional phase and for this reason, there are a myriad of change initiatives underway.

These change projects, initiated from diverse quarters of the institution, have not been prioritized or indeed even rationalized by and to the broader campus community. In an effort to bring a sense of priority, transparency, and ownership to these change initiatives, I launched a visioning and change alignment process, led by a firm known as The Grove, to guide the campus in developing a strategic framework that aligns campus change initiatives with a shared campus vision. The results of this broadly participatory process will help the campus prioritize the changes most critical to achieving the vision and bringing greater transparency and accountability to these efforts.

While this process is ongoing, the initial iteration showed a remarkable consensus across faculty, staff, and students regarding the things we care about and our aspirations for the future. These shared visions should continue to create a dynamic driving force for innovation and

perseverance as well as improved collaboration and communication as we forge the path that lies ahead.