

Draft for Discussion

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

PART I. Introduction

A. The Framework

The framework measures campus and Universitywide performance in meeting key research, teaching, public service and other goals. It includes an annual report that takes a broad look at access and affordability, student success, research impact and funding, faculty diversity and quality, and other issues. In addition, the framework will include periodic sub-reports that bring specific areas more sharply into focus. Together these reports — all of them made public via the World Wide Web and distributed in printed form to the Board of Regents, the California Legislature and state officials — will provide a clear look at the University that will be used to support:

- transparency and public accountability;
- strategic planning and decision making;
- budgeting, including budget trade-off decisions; and
- management performance evaluation.

In these regards and for these reasons, it is one of the highest priorities of University President Mark Yudof and the University of California Board of Regents.

This first report is presented in draft to the Board in September 2008. After a period of public review and comment it will be revised and presented again in its first published form in May 2009. Subsequent editions will be published annually thereafter.

The current draft comprises two parts.

Part 1. Introduction — offers an overview of the framework and its purpose and will evolve to highlight areas of strategic interest.

Part 2. Universitywide indicators — documents campus as well as Universitywide progress using longitudinal data that track trends over time and make comparisons between campuses and in many cases with the eight research universities (four private and four public) that UC has historically tracked for purposes of benchmarking faculty salary and other budget data. This part of the report is organized into sub-sections. Each focuses on specific goals, having to do, for example, with research or undergraduate student success. And each is oriented with explanatory text that identifies the goals being addressed and the data that are used. Interpretive annotations are used sparingly and reflect the Universitywide picture. Specific differences among the ten UC campuses are not discussed though clearly will be part of ensuing deliberations.

Future editions of this report may also include profiles of each of the ten campuses. These would include for each campus a brief statement of its strategic goals as well as data that demonstrate progress in meeting them. Here campuses may choose what measures to use and be responsible for any explanatory or interpretive text.

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B. Scope

The framework focuses on goals that are indisputably at the heart of UC's mission as California's public research university. It opens out immediately onto student access and affordability and onto the nature and quality of the student experience. It also gives pride of place to the quality and success of UC faculty, the scope and impacts of their research, and the significance of graduate and professional education. Cross-cutting themes such as diversity recur throughout the work so they may be developed and evaluated in the context of other key information about the University's students and its faculty.

Future editions will extend the scope of the report so that it may illuminate progress toward meeting goals in other areas: for example, patient care, compliance and risk management, UC contributions to agriculture and environmental sustainability. And they will grapple ultimately with issues such as learning outcomes that are impractical to include at present because measures are either unavailable or perceived as inadequate.

The work of the Regents' Committee on Long Range Planning continues to be influential in the framework's development. The dual emphasis in Part 2 on university and campus indicators, and the aspiration toward a third section devoted wholly to campus profiles, reflects the vision for the University that the Committee has embraced — of ten distinctive campuses, each with its own academic strengths, capable of acting together in service to the state.

The Committee's work has also provided a touchstone in discussion on what goals to focus attention on in this early draft. Particularly formative is the Committee's work distilling in one place and from several sources — the California Master Plan, the Board of Regents' policies and budget priorities, the Academic Senate, and the campuses' strategic and academic plans — a clear statement of the University's goals and the strategies that may be pursued in order to achieve them.

C. Methodology

The report adheres throughout to a number of standards that have been developed to ensure accessibility, integrity and consistency.

- Data are preferred where they are routinely produced and publicly available. This will continue even where newly adopted measures require the compilation of new data.
- Data are presented graphically rather than in tabular form so they may be accessible visually to the widest possible audience. For consistency, repeated use is made of twelve standard graph and chart types. In order to stimulate the widest possible discussion and analysis, annual publications of the accountability framework will, beginning in May 2009, make available via the Web, all data underlying the published graphs and charts.
- Each measure is presented first as trend data for the system as a whole and next as trend data for each of the ten campuses.
- With some measures, campus-level data for a single (most recent) year is shown next to comparable data from eight leading research universities we have chosen to compare ourselves to. Typically, the comparison institutions include four public universities (Illinois, Michigan, SUNY Buffalo and Virginia) and four private ones (Harvard, MIT, Stanford and Yale). In a few cases comparisons are made to averages for all four private and all four

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public institutions respectively in order to simplify and facilitate comparisons against institutions with very different funding and legal mandates.

- When comparisons are made, the data for the UC campuses and the comparison institutions come entirely from publicly accessible national data sources, such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) or the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS).
- Where comparative data are made available, they are presented graphically with each UC campus, followed by the four public comparison institutions in alphabetical order followed by the four private comparison institutions again in alphabetical order. Consistent use of this arrangement ensures that a degree of neutrality is maintained in presenting comparison data.
- Graphs and charts are introduced with brief descriptive titles. In some cases, additional information is supplied, typically in bulleted form, but only where the information provides new or essential context.

Despite these attempts at standardization, assessing institutional performance remains an inexact science. Few measures are entirely beyond dispute. Oftentimes this reflects legitimate differences of opinion about exactly what should be measured, and how to measure it. Should enrollment numbers be based only on fall term or a year average? Should faculty counts be based only on full-time regular-rank (that is, tenured or tenure-tracked faculty), all instructional faculty or all faculty except those in the health sciences, who are funded on a different basis? How should time to degree be measured — cumulatively from the time a student enters an institution, or by the number of terms they start or the number of terms they actually complete?

Even where measures seem to be precise (applicants' SAT scores, graduating seniors' grade point averages), interpreting them can be more art than science and require a great deal more context than any single measure can supply. When compared to Harvard, Stanford, MIT and Yale, UC students on average take longer to complete their undergraduate degrees, and there is a higher rate of attrition among them. But how are these data to be interpreted? Is it important to know that undergraduates at the four private institutions are better prepared for university, at least as is evident in the higher average SAT scores of their incoming freshman? Are UC undergraduates more likely to leave and complete their degrees at another institution? Is there something about the relative socioeconomic and demographic breadth of UC's intake — a high percentage of low-income or first-generation students — that contributes in explaining the trend?

The point here is not to explain UC graduation rates but to draw attention to two challenges — reading too much into any single measure or interpreting data without adequate context — and an opportunity — fostering discussion that informs university decision making as well as good public policy.

In addition, accountability is hampered in many places by data that are relatively poor owing to the complexities inherent in defining and collecting them. Particular weakness is evident in this draft report in sections on faculty and graduate students. It reflects the variability among institutions in determining, for example, who is a faculty member or who is a graduate student (as opposed to a student studying for a professional degree). These difficulties impact on the research section, too, where typical success measures (number of research dollars generated,

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number of patents produced) need to be normalized for an institution's programmatic scope (universities with medical schools receive more research funding from the National Institutes for Health) and for faculty size, neither of which is entirely practical.

Nowhere are the methodological challenges greater than they are with comparing institutional performance. The use of comparative data to assess institutional performance is necessarily constrained by what data is publicly available. For many measures — student-faculty ratios, for example — there are no national standards. Even when comparative data are available, they can be problematic in ways that reflect very real institutional differences. As already indicated, what counts as a tenured faculty member at one university, for example, may not even be in a category eligible for tenure at another. To overcome these difficulties, universities maintain data in their own internal databases that do not always perfectly match what they report to national databases. This practice introduces its own problems. The University of California, for example, defines “professional” students differently than the National Center for Education Statistics, which maintains IPEDS. Accordingly, when UC or any of its ten campuses report the number of professional students for purely local purposes, they may produce numbers that are slightly different from those that are available in the IPEDS databases.

Selecting comparison institutions is also complicated. Is it better to use the same comparison group for every measure or to constitute different comparison groups depending on what is being assessed? And is it appropriate to compare each of the ten UC campuses against the same group despite the campuses' celebrated distinctiveness? To take a polar example, should Merced, which opened in 2005 with approximately 1,000 students, be benchmarked against the same institutions as Berkeley or UCLA, UC's two flagship campuses, which each enroll approximately 35,000 students and are widely recognized as two of the leading public research universities in the country?

Despite these difficulties, great pains have been taken to compare UC performance on as many measures as possible, focusing in particular in this first edition of the report on those measures that document student access, affordability and success. Where comparisons are made, they are made against the group of eight institutions that UC has historically used to compare faculty salaries and other key budget information. The reason is simple. Comparison provides the only means of locating the experience of this University and its ten campuses in a national higher education context. It is important to point out that comparison data do not identify successes or failures. To do that we need to assess our performance against clearly articulated campus and systemwide goals. They are, nonetheless, vital to our developing a broader understanding of this institution, its promises and its challenges.

Next steps

The framework results from the confluence of several creative streams:

- It is a natural outgrowth of the Universitywide academic and Regents' long-range-planning processes that have evolved in coordination as a means of determining Universitywide strategic and budgetary priorities.

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- It draws extensively on performance data that are routinely prepared by the campuses and at a system level in support of a variety of objectives.
- It promotes and in turn reflects the University's efforts to be more open with and accountable to the state and to rebuild trust and strengthen its relationship with the people of California.
- And it responds to state and national pressures for greater accountability in higher education as articulated by the California Postsecondary Education Accountability Act (SB325, Scott, pending), Secretary of Education Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education, the 2008 Higher Education Reauthorization Act and the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) adopted in November 2007 by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).

The framework is intended to contribute to, not substitute for, other accountability efforts in which the University is engaged. For example:

- UC annually reports to the legislature on a variety of measures that respond to interest in its expenditure of public funds.
- Each campus is currently preparing its own accountability template modeled closely upon the Voluntary System of Accountability.
- The University supports the development of a statewide accountability bill and will be responsive to SB325 (Scott), if and when it passes.

Furthermore, it is intended to evolve with the University's understanding of its own goals and with increasing sophistication nationally of accountability measures.

On this last point we acknowledge the debate that continues to surround many accountability measures. In particular, the comparison of campuses with different histories, resources, strengths and weaknesses can mislead as easily as it informs. The current selection — intended to be indicative of key trends — will be subject to ongoing revision and refinement through consultation with the campuses, the Academic Senate and the Board of Regents.

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