

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
THEMATIC PATHWAY TO REAFFIRMATION, AREAS OF FOCUS

PROPOSAL for WSCUC CONSIDERATION

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Executive Summary

The University of California, Irvine's (UCI's) students, faculty, and alumni benefit from the institution's high level of achievement in and concentrated focus on research, teaching, and learning. UCI aims higher. The institution recognizes the power of data analytics to drive continuous improvement in student success and has invested heavily in developing sophisticated and powerful tools for this very purpose. Faculty and staff devote considerable time and energy toward building strong, diverse, and meaningful learning communities to enhance students' educational experiences, generate positive educational outcomes, and set the stage for life-long connections among the University and its alumni. The application of UCI's data-analytic toolset has become a critical component toward achieving these outcomes.

The Steering Committee on Reaffirmation and its Executive Committee propose that UCI's self-study for WSCUC's Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation in 2023 focus on promoting student success across an increasingly diverse student body through:

- a) assuring mission-driven student experiences, including participation in rigorous academics and engagement in research;
- b) building inclusive learning communities in and out of the classroom; and
- c) developing and implementing institutionally tailored data analytics for continuous improvement.

Employing a broad range of pedagogical approaches that focus on student-centered learning, including research and creative expression, UCI will study whether the resulting spectrum of measurable outcomes in undergraduate and graduate student achievement demonstrate positive change over time. Specifically, UCI aims to discern empirically whether and to what extent different modalities of learning, such as participating in research and student learning communities, across diverse fields of inquiry, in and out of the classroom, serve to promote equity in learning and achievement among students from all backgrounds and current circumstances. As a result of the self-study, the University will be better informed to recalibrate efforts and resource allocations to align with continuous improvement in areas with potential for the highest impact, including students' enhanced educational experiences, realized learning outcomes, and overall success.

Overview of the Institution

The University of California (UC) is a central component of California's Master Plan for Higher Education, which assigns distinct missions to each of the state's three-part system of public higher education (the community colleges, the California State University, and the University of

California). The UC is California's research university system and, as such, has responsibility for baccalaureate, master's, doctoral, and professional education programs.

In 1965, UCI was founded with a mission to catalyze the community and enhance lives through rigorous academics, cutting-edge research, and dedicated public service. Today, the campus draws on the unyielding spirit of its pioneering faculty, staff, and students who arrived on campus with a dream to inspire change and generate new ideas as part of its unique contribution to the public good. The University community believes that true progress is made when different perspectives come together to advance our understanding of the world around us. Accordingly, the campus fosters an environment for the discovery and dissemination of knowledge in many forms to all levels of society.

UCI is the youngest member of the prestigious Association of American Universities, recognized for its premier research and graduate programs, commitment to undergraduate education, and a growing number of professional schools. The University's academic mission is organized around 14 schools: Claire Trevor School of the Arts, School of Biological Sciences, Paul Merage School of Business, School of Education, Henry Samueli School of Engineering, School of Humanities, Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences, School of Law, School of Physical Sciences, School of Social Ecology, School of Social Sciences, and the Susan and Henry Samueli College of Health Sciences, which comprises the School of Medicine, Sue and Bill Gross School of Nursing, and School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Additionally, the College has proposed the future School of Population and Public Health. With a strong commitment to diversity and building inclusive communities, the campus offers 222 degree programs and serves over 30,000 students. UCI is Orange County's second-largest employer, contributing \$8 billion annually to the local economy.

Among the institution's accolades, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked UCI as the number eight public university in the U.S. in 2021. UCI has risen consistently in national rankings that represent standardized key performance indicators, such as student retention, time to degree, and completion rates, among many others. The campus also is proud to have achieved (Fall 2020) its strategic goal to be California residents' first-choice among UC campuses, as demonstrated by the number of fall freshmen applicants. At the same time UCI has ascended in these areas, it has become an increasingly diverse learning environment for students and faculty alike. The *New York Times* ranked UCI as the number one university doing most for the American dream and, most recently (February, 2021) UCI was honored with a bronze award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science STEMM Equity Achievement (SEA) Change program. AAAS SEA Change uses these awards to recognize institutions for their progressive self-assessment efforts and strategic plans to diversify and transform science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine. Welcoming students from all 50 states and 65 countries, the University is recognized as a Minority Serving Institution, having earned specific designations as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution and a Hispanic-Serving Institution. These federal designations align with UCI's aspiration to be a national leader and global model of inclusive excellence. While national rankings and designations are important external indicators that signal institutional progress, the campus community aspires to understand better and influence more directly its sustained positive impact on *all* students' experiences and outcomes. This mission-driven goal is at the center of the proposed self-study.

Process for the Development of Themes

UCI's Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research (OAPIR) has primary responsibility for coordinating institutional accreditation. The Acting Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Institutional Research (AVPAPIR), and the Associate Vice Provost for Academic Planning (AVPAP), who also serves as the campus's Accreditation Liaison Officer, are leading the University's efforts for reaffirmation of Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) accreditation in 2023. UCI was granted WSCUC approval in winter 2020 to participate in the accreditor's Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR).

In summer 2020, the AVPAPIR and AVPAP, in dialogue with and having the endorsement of the Interim Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor (IPEVC), established the campuswide Steering Committee on Reaffirmation (SCOR) and its Executive Committee (SCOREX), two highly inclusive groups of Academic Senate faculty leaders and faculty at large, central administrators, students, staff, and alumni stakeholders, to inform and guide the full scope of UCI's TPR process. [See Appendix A: SCOR and SCOREX Rosters.] SCOR and SCOREX members represent UCI's broad range of academic and professional disciplines, as well as its demographic diversity.

SCOR's role is to envision, coordinate, and ensure the successful completion of all aspects of UCI's reaffirmation of accreditation process. The group's charge includes the following critical activities: become familiar with the timeline, significant phases, and milestones associated with the WSCUC accreditation process; offer feedback on project and communications plans and draft documents; contribute to the identification, development, and promotion of institutional themes that will be the heart of the reaffirmation effort and most likely will have transformational impact for UCI's students; serve on a theme-specific subcommittee related to the members' expertise and/or area of interest; facilitate broad campus participation in the reaffirmation of accreditation process; and participate in campus preparations for the Accreditation Visit (Fall 2022).

SCOR began meeting in September 2020. In the first meeting, members were provided background and training related to UCI's accreditation history and WSCUC's TPR process. The second meeting was co-led by WSCUC Vice President Barbara Gross Davis. In October and November, SCOR members generated and refined potential themes, with a goal ultimately to reach agreement on areas of focus salient to UCI's current strategic priorities and commitment to continue delivering on the institution's promise to provide students with the high-quality educational experience for which the campus is well-known and highly ranked. Members of SCOR, many of whom hold leadership positions across campus, further engaged in communications with stakeholders in their areas of purview and brought comments back to subsequent SCOR meetings for consideration. Consensus regarding a short list of TPR themes was reached by SCOR members prior to the first meeting of SCOREX.

The foundational role of SCOREX corresponds to that of SCOR, but the Executive Committee's charge additionally includes: proposing strategies for the University's self-study; reviewing UCI's findings related to alignment with WSCUC Standards and Criteria for Review, and proposing follow-up actions as necessary; and troubleshooting process challenges and providing

the campus with recommendations for their resolution. SCOREX met three times in December and January to consider, narrow, and further focus the areas of study proposed by SCOR members. In February, SCOREX co-chairs discussed the themes with the IPEVC and all academic deans. Feedback from that meeting informed final modifications to the proposal. Throughout the entire process, the AVPAPIR was in routine dialogue with the IPEVC about the themes, while the IPEVC was in communication with the Chancellor about the themes.

Description of the Theme and Subthemes

The UCI community seeks WSCUC's endorsement to focus its TPR for 2023 on promoting student success across an increasingly diverse student body through: assuring mission-driven student experiences, including participation in rigorous academics and engagement with research; building inclusive learning communities in and out of the classroom; and developing and implementing institutionally tailored data analytics for tracking and guiding change over time to facilitate continuous improvement.

UCI's SCOR and SCOREX groups agreed early in the process of identifying potential TPR themes to deliberately limit the scope of the self-study to a well-defined, and thus realistic, research project. In so doing, campus representatives recognized the need to balance UCI's strong desire to maximize the benefits associated with a focused exploration of the institution's educational priorities, with a reaffirmation timeline that concurs with the ongoing and expected coronavirus pandemic impact on faculty, students, staff, and other stakeholders. The University's description of the theme and subthemes is based upon the assumptions below.

1. The study spans all levels of students and degree programs.
2. The University aims to drive successes during and after a student's time at UCI.
3. Acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies are directly and indirectly measured through learning outcomes assessment. Student success overall can be further measured by quantitative (e.g., grade point average, retention, time to degree, degree completion, career placement, admission to graduate school, licensure exam results, alumni salaries) and qualitative indicators (e.g., student perceptions of learning, development of identity, sense of belonging, strength of alumni networks, preparation for their careers after graduation).
4. The proposed self-study includes attention to the teaching and research missions of UCI and does not extend to the public service mission.
5. Student experiences in and out of the classroom may be equally effective—indeed constitutive—in promoting student success.
6. Recognizing that there are many types of learning communities, UCI will begin the self-study with an emphasis on Lenning et al.'s¹ definition of a learning community: “. . . an intentionally-developed community that exists to promote and maximize the individual and shared learning of its members. There is ongoing interaction, interplay, and collaboration among the community's members as they strive for specified common learning goals.”

¹ Lenning, O. T., Hill, D. M., Saunders, K. P., Solan, A., Stokes, A., & Tinto, V., *Powerful Learning Communities: A Guide to Developing Student, Faculty, and Professional Learning Communities to Improve Student Success and Organizational Effectiveness* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Pub., 2013), 7.

7. Inclusive learning communities likely are critical contributors to student success.
8. The institution aspires to use more predictive analytics to examine the effectiveness of instructional and student-learning directed strategies to promote student success.

UCI has begun its self-study. Faculty, staff, students, and administrators from across campus have been engaged for months on planning the full range of the project, from envisioning its scope conditions to identifying existing data, and considering other types of data that might need to be collected anew. For example, SCOREX members and the IPEVC were circulating and providing feedback on a draft plan for operationalizing the self-study at the same time they were considering TPR themes. Communications related to the drafts were valuable in terms of achieving clarity and shared understanding about the project described in this proposal. In February, the SCOR and SCOREX groups engaged together in two additional extended meetings to reflect on core concepts related to the proposed themes, including the University's definitions of student success and learning communities (see the assumptions above), and the extent to which the data analytics currently being utilized on campus are helpful in this work.

Members of SCOR and SCOREX also began identifying data sources needed for the study. First, UCI has developed an extensive portfolio of learning communities for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, within and across degree levels and disciplines. However, given the size and decentralized nature of UCI, there is not a central repository for information related to learning communities. The SCOR group began developing a simple typology of learning communities, including institution-specific examples [see Appendix B]. Second, participants in the planning process began building a central inventory of UCI's information systems and analytical tools that have potential to be useful to or included in the proposed self-study [see Appendix C]. These early efforts toward tangible deliverables were very useful in transitioning the group's communications from broad and aspirational to focused and operational.

Upon WSCUC approval of the theme and subthemes, the University community, guided by SCOR and SCOREX, will engage in a focused study involving UCI's academic units and co-curricular programs. Additional campuswide communication will involve assuring that stakeholders have agreed to the specific student success factors that will be examined in relation to participation in rigorous academic experiences, engagement in research, and learning communities in and out of the classroom. This work will involve fully building out Appendices B and C of this proposal, the catalogs of UCI's learning communities and data systems respectively, and defining the specific academic and research-related experiences to be studied. These data collection efforts will be followed by analyses regarding the perceived efficacy of current data sets and data systems in addressing the goals of the self-study.

Where existing data systems fall short, they will need to be augmented for the purposes of the study and for related work that extends beyond the TPR timeframe. Briefly summarized in the aforementioned Appendix C, SCOR and SCOREX members will utilize a diverse array of existing datasets and attendant data analytics to address the questions that anchor the study and speak to the themes. In addition, they will gather original data specifically for this self-study. For example, SCOR members anticipate gathering focus group data from students at different educational levels across campus. These structured interactions will capture the broad range of rich experiences of learning, as well as the characteristics of learning communities, that serve as mechanisms for student success across the board for a diverse student body.

It is extremely important for UCI to engage its community at large in a systematic review of the extent to which the institution is meeting its mission-driven educational purpose, including involving students in rigorous academic and research experiences. WSCUC Standards and Criteria for Review (CFRs) most closely related to UCI's proposed TPR theme and subthemes follow: Standard 1, CFRs 1.2 and 1.4; Standard 2, CFRs 2.10, 2.11, and 2.13; Standard 3, CFRs 3.5 and 3.10; and Standard 4, CFRs 4.3 and 4.4. This self-study is being designed to best assess the campus's effectiveness in meeting these thresholds. Above and beyond that baseline, the University prides itself on serving an increasingly diverse student population; offering academic and co-curricular experiences that help students thrive during their time at UCI and afterward; and driving social mobility for students from all backgrounds and current circumstances.

UCI's faculty are interested in understanding and continuously improving upon student experiences and the outcomes students presumably derive from those experiences. Ultimately, the faculty would like to establish confidence in a set of experiences they could agree upon as being strong indicators of student success, broadly construed. Campus administrators have been working for more than two years to ensure that the discrete offices that rely on data analytics to assess and promote student success are inventorying and coordinating their efforts across individual projects. UCI's Data Analytics Work Group currently is focused on using data analytics to understand and identify challenges, related both to academic and university structures, that can be resolved through institutional change.

The Comprehensive Analytics for Student Success (COMPASS) project, for example, is a cross-functional initiative focused on undergraduate student success. The project draws on staff working in the Office of the Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, OAPIR's Division of Institutional Research, and the Office of Information Technology, in close partnership with the directors of undergraduate academic advising in each school and academic administrators throughout the University. This multi-part project focuses on bringing relevant student data to campus advisors, faculty, and administrators, with the goal of providing actionable information to improve undergraduate students' outcomes. As one desired outcome of UCI's TPR, the campus hopes to expand COMPASS to delve into exploratory data analysis, maximize institutional insights into student data, and reveal areas for potential increased reporting on risk factors, recommended curriculum changes, and improved academic support resources.

UCI's commitment to data-driven institutional improvement has been greatly enhanced by the nationally-recognized Measurement of Undergraduate Success Trajectories (MUST) project, funded by the Andrew J. Mellon Foundation². The UCI-MUST initiative is a pilot demonstration project that integrates unprecedented longitudinal data on undergraduate experiences, trajectories, and outcomes. The data strands in the project include: administrative, student services, and course transcript data (Strand 1); Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) data on academic engagement and performance (Strand 2); and repeated surveys, experiential sampling, and performance assessments (co-developed with ETS[®]) on collaborative problem

² The Next Generation Undergraduate Measurement Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and showcased on The PBS *NewsHour*, has been described as a "first of its kind study to try to better understand the value and cost of a four-year liberal arts education where students often live on or near campus and are exposed to a wide variety of subjects." <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/as-the-pandemic-upends-higher-education-is-residential-college-worth-the-cost>, last accessed 2/23/21.

solving, perspective taking, and confirmation bias, as well as use of existing instruments on critical thinking and online civic reasoning, psychological well-being, academic motivation, educational and professional identity development, and life-course agency (Strand 3). Findings generated from this project have informed UCI’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and campuswide data analytic efforts. For example, COMPASS is working to integrate academic engagement measures derived from Strand 2 work on LMS data into their campus-facing student success dashboard. More generally, the multidimensional character of integrated UCI-MUST data allows the campus to assess the reliability and validity of COMPASS measures through data triangulation techniques.

UCI will consider the TPR successful if the self-study results in the institution’s confirmation of the following:

1. the campus meets the WSCUC Standards and CFRs listed above as being particularly salient to the proposed theme and subthemes;
2. members of the campus community, across disciplines and educational levels, have a shared understanding of how student success is defined at UCI;
3. faculty, staff, and students can articulate campus-specific examples of mission-driven student experiences, including participation in rigorous academics and engagement with research;
4. members of the campus community, across demographic distinctions, can point to experiences in and out of the classroom that contribute both to their sense of belonging and perceptions of being supported in their educational endeavors at UCI;
5. students representing UCI’s diverse population know of and have the opportunity to become part of inclusive learning communities in and out of the classroom; and
6. UCI has a well-documented and widely drawn upon catalog of data analytics to utilize in ongoing assessment and improvement of student outcomes as they relate to the University’s educational priorities.

Timeline

UCI’s Timeline for the Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation (TPR) of Accreditation may be found below:

February 2020	UCI was approved for alternative pathway
March 1, 2021	UCI submits proposal for themes to WSCUC
April 1, 2021	WSCUC response to themes
August 2022	UCI submits full self-study to WSCUC
October 2022	WSCUC on-site review
November 2022	UCI responds to errors of fact in review committee’s report
December 2022	UCI responds to committee’s full report
February 2023	Commission decision
March 2023	UCI receives WSCUC’s Action (Decision) Letter

See Appendix D for UCI’s Multi-Year Workplan and Timeline for reaffirmation.

Resources

UCI's TPR, as designed, will not require additional capital resources. Significant expenses that have been and will continue to be incurred are related to personnel. Self-studies at the scale appropriate to a large research university are costly. The time and effort required of faculty, administrators, staff, student employees, and students cannot be overlooked, nor can it ever be fully quantified; that said, UCI hired two new staff positions to support reaffirmation efforts.

Institutional Stipulation

The attached Institutional Report Certification Form, signed by UCI's Chancellor Howard Gillman, attests to his endorsement of UCI's TPR proposal.