University of the 21st Century
Recommendation Brief

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Overview

The University of the 21st Century is a strategic initiative providing an opportunity for the UC Davis community to redefine itself as an institution that employs innovation and prestige in its willingness to engage itself in a process of creative self-transformation. UC Davis leads the country in several academic disciplines and sets an example for a cooperative community of students willing to support one another in ways that distinguish UC Davis from others in the University of California system.

ASUCD, as the largest student government in the entire UC system, sets an example of this inclination towards eminent leadership fundamentally driven by the impassioned students. As the University of California, Davis transitions from one century to the next, the university’s leadership must spur a critical consciousness towards itself that radically rethinks its own decision-making apparatus, constantly ensuring that decisions made are in the best interest of the students.

Goals

ASUCD puts forward a philosophy of “by students, for students” that would serve as being philosophically and pragmatically adjacent to the goals of the University of the 21st Century, which seeks to segue “from the 20th century university community of scholars to the 21st century university community of learners, where we all—faculty, students and staff—use learning as a way to achieve excellence.” By fostering an inclusive environment that empowers as many students as possible to inform decision-making, the University of the 21st Century will be a step closer to achieving its aspirations. ASUCD shall thematically deliver a vision that follows:

1) A university where representation on decisions resembles the population of the university, by including more undergraduates;
2) A university that reconsiders the physical space, beyond just the social and political, that reexamines the architectural boundaries of interaction between students, staff and faculty;
3) A university that looks beyond a classroom to identify further dimensions of education as the participation of the students in the university and its governance;
4) A university that constantly organizes efforts and resources towards an affordable, if not cost-free education for an entire student population;
5) A university that affirms true race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, ability and gender diversity by eradicating violence towards identities across each demographic spectrum.
The Past and Present

Currently, when given light to the composition of the University of the 21st Century Committee and many campus committees in general, there is no centralized source of information aggregating the many committees a student can participate in. Furthermore, the composition of many of these committees is largely tailored against undergraduate representation. The University of the 21st Century Committee in particular only has presence through the ASUCD President and the ASUCD Vice President. In addition, we have seen compromised funding priorities of the institution towards: mental health, where the psychiatrist to student ratio is roughly 1:15189 and the psychologist to student ratio is roughly 1:1202, sexual violence, where UC Davis currently ranks number 1 in reported sexual assaults in the state of California and number 5 nationally, to name a few. UC Davis, along with many of the other universities, has risen tuition and fees to the point of which California residents pay $34,804 and out-of-state students pay $58,828 to attend UC Davis, pricing numerous students out of an education that they have a right to pursue.

Recommendations

With consideration of the vision put forth by ASUCD and feedback generated from ASUCD leadership, the following recommendations are made:

1) In order to critically engage students in an effective manner and preempt long-term participation and responsiveness, administration should prioritize communication with students from the beginning of the year onward, before any strategic project or initiative is even presented forward. The most viable way to ensure that students feel as though they are making impactful decisions is to gather input early on, and to recur consistent outreach throughout all academic years. Students should know that they are a part of the process for envisioning and contributing to the growth of the university by the time they set foot on campus for orientation.

2) In correspondence with the Academic Senate, an EDU 98/198 Directed Group Study course should be considered with an emphasis the governance of UC Davis. Directed Group Studies should be an option for students wishing to lead and facilitate future strategic projects and initiatives, reaffirming the intent that education is also in collaboration with various on-campus committees. Similarly, a POL198 course could be offered in the same vein beyond strategic projects and initiatives, immersing students in an applied learning environment targeted at the shared governance of the university.

3) Administrative personnel should reassess the physical environment that they interact with students in, and increase accessibility accordingly by navigating other spaces. Meals with Mrak best captures this concept, by connecting students and administrators in more informal and open environments. These spaces can be found all over campus, ranging from the student life centers to the Memorial Union.
4) UC Davis should converge every effort towards students paying as little as possible towards their education. The university should reinvest its endowments and fundraising towards necessary growth of capital projects only in the event of need to expand space for course instruction, instead making every effort to reinvest back to grants and programs dedicated to the affordability of the institution. Textbooks should transition towards open-source licensing to reduce the carbon footprint of the university and the financial burden on the pockets of students.

5) UC Davis should champion a holistic image of wellness that invests back into mental health and understands the environment by which students significantly indicate it as an issue. This includes QPR training that any student can participate in, counselors that can be regularly accessed by students, counselors of color abundantly hired for respective communities, and faculty that prioritize safety of the space they teach in.

6) The university should promote equitable gender safety practices between people and between physical spaces. This includes an investment in sexual violence prevention that is ingrained in the classroom as well as the residence halls, gender-neutral restrooms retrofitted to existing architecture and as a necessity on all future capital projects, and access to female hygiene. The university should avoid labyrinthine bureaucratic constraints on its commitment to improving the safety of students and subaltern considerations of student perspectives, instead prioritizing them whenever issues of gendered violence occur.

7) As a whole, the university should conceptualize its safety needs based on the sexual assault rates, frequency and magnitude of hate crimes, and attrition rates of course enrollment angled towards mental health, all of which have either stagnated or rapidly increased in just the transition to the 21st century. Understanding campus safety should be empirically and discursively evaluated by social and intrapersonal dynamics, through racial violence, sexual violence and mental health, rather than just physical dynamics through lighting and roads. The university has identified one facet in its auspices, which is expulsion rates for plagiarism in the academic environment, but must expand to all dimensions that compromise campus safety.

8) The university should champion academic success by providing for spaces enabling the fullest accessibility of a study environment. This includes increased availability of 24-hour study spaces and centers on campus with stations to recharge phones and laptops. The university should forgo the necessity of paying to take examinations by providing free access to testing materials, potentially at such study space locations.

9) The physical architecture of student life should be realized by the university’s commitment to facilities towards all facets of student life. Similarly to how students can access the Activities and Recreation Center for athletic activities, a student should be able to discover a facility for student organizations and student government that they can easily distinguish from one another, allowing for the university to promote the breadth of student experience in the fullest capacity.

10) The online dimension of the university should strive towards simplicity with regard to disseminating information. Each student’s online experience should be readily comprehensible by centralizing and consolidating the many websites and online resources into a central location, facilitating the process of students finding the information they need to learn more about what the campus offers.
Conclusion

Conclusively, ASUCD membership sees the University of the 21st century as an opportunity to recognize the channels of individuals and information that strikes at the root of how UC Davis operates as an institution of higher learning. The University of the 21st Century initiative can transcend into an echelon of thought that encompasses a culture of inclusion and a beating heart of activity that brings groups of people together in reorganizing the entire physical and social dynamic of the university and its students. Investing in the future will ultimately lead UC Davis into success and better student welfare at its many focal points.