RALPH HEXTER
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

Dear Ralph:

The challenges to the UC budget prompted our college to begin planning for its future several years ago. The premise of the planning process was that to maintain our excellence we must make difficult choices and reduce the scope of our academic, research, and service activities to better fit the reality of reductions to our recurring budget. We are not strangers to this difficult exercise. During severe (25%) budget cuts that targeted the AES from 2002-2004, we shed the Design Program (from the Department of Environmental Design) and we consolidated the Departments of Agronomy, Pomology, Vegetable Crops and Environmental Horticulture into what is today the Department of Plant Sciences. These difficult adjustments have served the college and the campus well.

As the most recent series of budget cuts began, we initiated discussions with our Dean's Council, Department Chairs and Directors Council, the CE Specialists Advisory Committee and the College Executive Committee about how to structure a new round of planning. These discussions led to the appointment and charge of the college Academic Planning Committee (APC) chaired by MRC Greenwood. This committee's report of July 2009 assessed the strengths and vulnerabilities of our college and its departments and made recommendations for the future based on these assessments.

The APC recommendations were discussed with the same advisory bodies listed above, which led to the appointment and charge of a subsequent College Planning Committee (CPC) to make specific recommendations for structural changes that would delineate our areas for future investment. This large college-wide faculty committee (26 members) was led by associate deans Mary Delany and Jan Hopmans. The CPC report was delivered in March 2010 and has been the document guiding the restructing of our college since that time. After receiving the CPC report we asked each of our departments to revise their academic plans based on the college planning decisions recommended by the CPC.
Attached to this letter are the following reports of our planning process:

- Academic Planning Committee Report, chaired by MRC Greenwood (July 2009)
- College Planning Committee Report, co-chaired by Mary Delany and Jan Hopmans (March 2010)
- Department Academic Plans, up-dated 2011

Ultimately our academic planning concluded with recommendations to merge faculty of specific departments. In reducing our faculty size to meet our recurring budget we recognized that we must reduce the scope of our activities to maintain excellence in the diversity of other areas we are invested. The planning also recognized, however, that synergies could arise from appropriate mergers particularly if future investments supported these synergies. My office supported the recommendations of the planning committees, and after discussing these recommendations with our various advisory groups, I made the following recommendations to our College Executive Committee:

1. Merge the Department of Human and Community Development with the Department of Environmental Design.
2. Merge the Department of Nematology with the Department of Entomology.
3. Merge the Division of Textiles and Clothing with the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering. We also have recommended closure of the undergraduate major in Textiles and Clothing because we can no longer commit the resources needed to sustain it.
4. We asked our four environmental science departments to jointly plan and strategize for future college investments in faculty for the environmental sciences to strengthen our overall environmental science programs and to avoid unwarranted overlap of programs among departments.

Our strategic planning was done with our current budget challenges being the primary driver of the planning, but in all cases the committees were charged to plan with continued excellence of our college into the future being the ultimate goal. When one considers the global challenges of the next decades, the disciplines of our college are needed more than ever. Our campus has identified food, water, energy, environment, health and society as core strengths of the campus; strengths that intersect with the world’s most critical challenges of the future. Our college contributes to each of these core strengths and our planning reflects a commitment to maintain our strength, and excellence, in these areas.

The focus of our academic planning is based on our departments. The approach of our planning committees was to address departments and not programs within departments. The recommendations of the committees thus addressed what we should stop doing at department levels. This hierarchy of planning was based on extensive consultation prior to the start of our process. Following that consultation, we agreed
that the college would oversee planning at the department level, but that planning within departments would be undertaken by the disciplinary experts in the departments.

Planning only by departments, however, limits opportunities that come from advances at the intersection of academic departments. Our college has recognized this and during the past decade we have actively promoted interdisciplinary planning both within our college and between colleges. We encouraged and financially supported such campus-wide centers and institutes as the John Muir Institute for the Environment, the Energy Institute, the Foods for Health Institute and the Energy Efficiency Center. Within the college we have launched the Seed Biotechnology Center, the Robert Mondavi Institute for Wine and Food Science, the Agricultural Sustainability Institute, the Center for Produce Safety, the Center for Regional Change, the California Center for Urban Horticulture, and the Center for Aquatic Biology and Aquaculture. Most of our college centers and institutes actively seek and support participation by faculty from outside our college. These centers were established to promote interdisciplinary research and for outreach to end-users of knowledge generated by campus researchers. We see these interdisciplinary centers as being increasingly important in the future, particularly as we seek to more actively engage external stakeholders in building strong collaborative programs with them.

Our college faces some unique challenges. We have achieved global recognition for the quality of our programs. Data from Thompson Reuters ISI ranks UC Davis as the most productive/cited research university in the US and the world in the core disciplines of our college. Such rankings are supported by all other types of surveys that rank our academic/research programs in our areas of activity. Our major challenge is that we have faced unusually severe budget cuts continuously over the past decade. As a result, our college has 61 fewer faculty members today than when I became dean in 1999. It should be clear that we cannot maintain the college’s world-wide scholarship preeminence if we continue to endure such large and disproportionate budget cuts. These reductions have been the result of differential cuts applied to the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES). Our most critical challenge for the future is to find ways to stabilize the funding for the AES within the culture of the University of California. If UC Davis is to maintain its competitive advantage in the areas of food, water, environment, energy, society and health that have traditionally been supported by the AES, solutions must be found to prevent future differential reductions of the AES budget. We are actively working to reinvent the concept of the AES into a campus-wide entity to attract new resources and to build on the identified strengths of UC Davis. This must be accomplished without destruction of the underlying mission of the AES and concomitant erosion of stakeholder support.

In summary, I have described our college’s recent planning process and have included all of the resultant documents of these planning exercises. I have listed the specific actions that we have recommended to our College Executive Committee in response to
the recommendations of our planning committees. I have briefly described the interdisciplinary initiatives that we have fostered and that build on strengths that reside at the intersections of departments and colleges/schools. Finally, I have identified the challenge of changing the Agricultural Experiment Station in ways that bring it more into alignment with the changes occurring in the state and the University of California. We see a reinvented AES as a vehicle that can lead the campus toward an even greater role in solving the critical challenges that the world faces, just as it has been central to building UC Davis' current global preeminence in the areas of agriculture, food, and the environment.

Best wishes,

Neal Van Alfen
Dean