

## Strategic Directions Initiative: Summary of Focus Groups and Web Survey

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Launching USD's Strategic Directions Initiative, President Lyons charged its Steering Committee to update the University's mission statement and develop visions and goals to guide its progress over the next five years. The timeline is aggressive: the committee first met in October 2003 and will present a set of strategic directions to the Board of Trustees in April 2004.

### Talking to Constituents

Dr. Lyons requested that both on- and off-campus constituents assist in identifying the major themes to inform these endeavors. During October and November, Institutional Research and Planning conducted 19 focus groups for students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and Linda Vista community leaders to ask what USD does well, what USD could do better, and what actions the University might consider for the future. Business, community, and church leaders were interviewed by phone to solicit their input. The focus groups and phone interviews involved 238 participants and yielded a database of over 2000 comments.

During January, an invitation to participate in a Web-based survey was e-mailed to students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The objective of the survey was to determine which of the themes that emerged from the focus groups had broad support among these constituents. There were 3390 respondents to the Web survey, and 66 employees responded to a shorter paper-based version distributed in areas without computer access. Based on the number of e-mail messages sent, we estimate the following response rates:

- 18% of alumni (1401 of 7850)
- 20% of students (1341 of 6650)
- 42% of faculty and staff (714 of 1700)

The final survey question invited respondents to list other issues not already covered. This question generated 68 pages of comments, which were given to members of the President's Executive Council for their review. The majority of the comments concerned administrative issues and are being addressed by the Executive Council.

### Identifying Major Themes

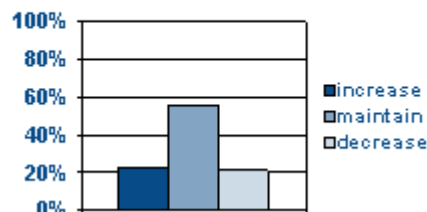
Of the many themes identified through these information-gathering efforts, several emerged as major themes with broad support. These major themes are discussed below, with comments from the focus groups and phone interviews substantiated by results from the survey.

**Catholic identity:** Focus groups identified USD's Catholic identity as a fundamental institutional strength. Because USD is a Catholic university, people expect ethics, values, spirituality, social justice, kindness, and service to be important on campus, and they expect USD to be informed by teachings of the Catholic Church. Faculty and students did not feel that academic freedom was threatened by USD's Catholic identity. Faculty stated that USD's academic environment gives them freedom to teach, develop courses, and express themselves.

Overall, survey respondents were comfortable with USD's Catholic identity; the majority of respondents (56%) wanted to maintain the current emphasis, as indicated in the graph.

The remaining responses were almost equally split between those wanting to increase the emphasis (23%) and those wanting to decrease it (21%).

How much should USD emphasize its Catholicity?

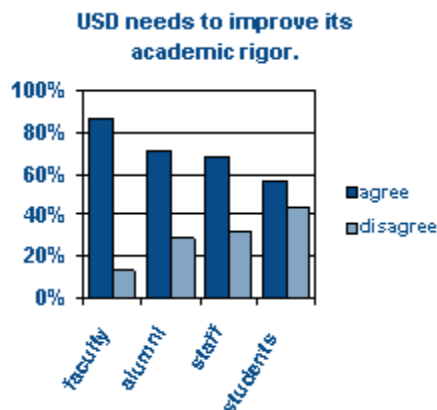


**Academic Excellence:** Focus group participants were proud of USD's growing reputation for academic excellence. A strong national reputation is important to students and alumni, who want their degrees to be recognized as coming from a quality institution. Among survey respondents, most of the students and alumni (89%) thought USD should place increased emphasis on its national reputation; 73% of faculty and staff agreed.

Many faculty were supportive of USD's teacher-scholar model, with its objectives of increasing the number of full-time faculty and promoting faculty research. Despite USD's efforts to hire full-time faculty, participants expressed concern that USD still relies too heavily on part-time faculty in some programs, and 73% of faculty survey respondents thought USD should decrease the use of part-time faculty.

Repeatedly, focus group participants stressed the faculty's teaching focus as one of USD's major strengths. Continued emphasis on general education, freshman preceptorials, hands-on experience, study abroad, internships, interaction with faculty, and active involvement on campus give USD a competitive edge over public universities and distance education programs.

However, 87% of faculty survey respondents agreed that USD should improve its academic rigor, compared to 57% of student respondents.

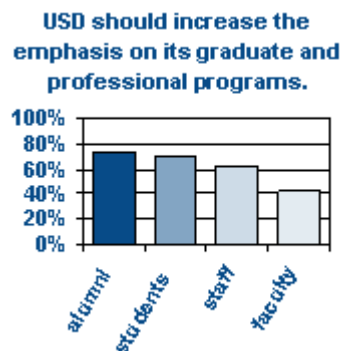


**Academic identity:** Traditionally, USD has offered educational programs in law and undergraduate liberal arts. In recent years, increased demand for professional credentialing has enabled USD to develop graduate programs targeting niche markets of local professionals. However, USD's ventures into graduate education have created questions in the minds of some faculty and staff concerning the University's academic identity. Some faculty and staff believe USD should remain a regional liberal arts university, emphasizing undergraduate education. Others strongly feel that USD has outgrown this model and should build on its traditional strengths by expanding its graduate offerings, increasing faculty research, and competing as a national doctoral university.

While some faculty are concerned that increasing expectations for research will weaken our traditional emphasis on undergraduate teaching, others recognize that faculty research at USD creates new experiential learning opportunities for students.

By involving both undergraduate and graduate students in faculty research, USD can develop more intellectually active students and enhance their prospects for further education and employment.

Over 70% of students and alumni survey respondents thought that USD should increase its emphasis on graduate and professional programs, compared to 62% of staff and 43% of faculty.



**Diversity and inclusion:** Focus group participants praised USD's ongoing commitment to diversity and emphasized that USD's quest for diversity must be multidimensional, reaching out to people of different religions, ethnicities, and socioeconomic groups. To date, USD has been quite successful in fostering religious diversity, and people of other religions feel welcome at USD. The University has a long history of reaching out to other denominations and has developed a broad interfaith following. Non-Catholic students, faculty, and staff value USD's emphasis on spirituality, ethics, and service.

Participants also noted that USD has made only small gains in changing the composition of its student, faculty, and staff bodies with respect to gender, ethnicity, and class. But participants recognized that diversity is not just a numbers game; they felt strongly that USD should increase efforts to be a more welcoming, inclusive community.

When asked about the diversity of students USD should try to recruit, 82% of survey respondents agreed that USD should recruit more students from different socioeconomic backgrounds; 71% agreed USD should recruit more minority students and international students, and 56% agreed USD should recruit more male students.

Among the respondent groups, faculty were most supportive of recruiting a diverse student body. Of the groups, students were most concerned about gender balance.



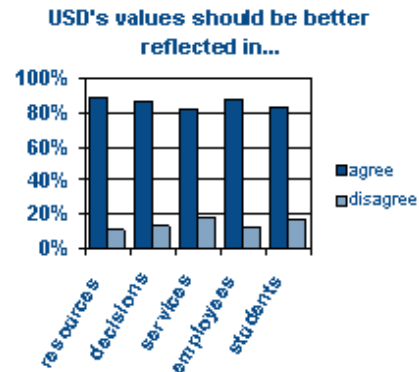
**Ethics and values:** Focus group participants felt that, as a Catholic university, USD has the opportunity—and the obligation—to integrate ethics and values into all aspects of campus life, from personal interactions to curricular content. Participants often stated that maintaining a Catholic identity implies a responsibility for living in accordance with the Church's teachings, and many expressed disappointment that USD did not always "walk the talk." The Values Institute and the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice were cited as emerging model programs, but participants felt that USD

needs to integrate its Catholic values and ethics more fully into the campus community.

Many noted that the current business scandals and the desire for greater professional integrity provide an opportunity for USD to capitalize on its strong Catholic values of ethics and social justice by integrating them into curricula at all levels.

The majority of respondents agreed that USD's values should be better reflected in:

- allocation of resources (89%)
- administrative decision-making (86%)
- services from administrative offices (82%)
- treatment of employees (87%)
- treatment of students (83%).



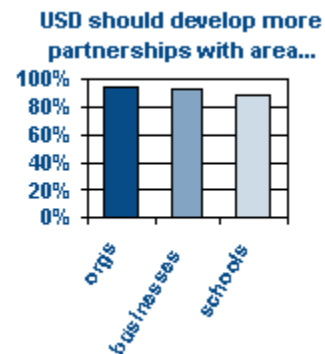
**Outreach and service:** Focus group participants and community leaders praised USD's community-service learning program and the outreach efforts of the School of Education. These programs support the University's mission, have a strong positive impact upon the community, and give our students exposure to a wider variety of learning experiences and employment possibilities.

However, many participants said that USD "needs to do more outreach" to the Linda Vista community, the city of San Diego, and the city of Tijuana. Phone interview respondents agreed that USD should form more local partnerships and would like to see USD take a leadership role in addressing local issues.

Participants also stressed that USD should take advantage of Joan B. Kroc's Institute for Peace and Justice and her generous endowment for a Peace Studies program to establish the University as a center for promoting peace through justice, a goal congruent with USD's Catholic identity and mission.

Survey respondents agreed that USD should create partnerships, particularly with area schools (88%), businesses (93%), and organizations (95%).

Outreach does not always require leaving campus; 82% of survey respondents agreed that USD should try to draw more people to campus events.

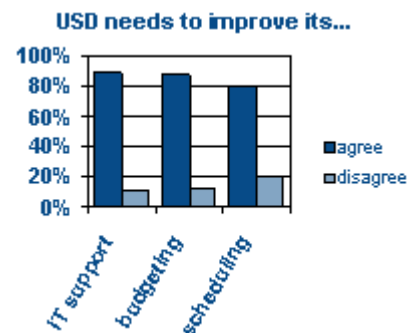


**Communication and collaboration:** Many faculty and staff expressed frustration with the lack of communication among departments and administrative offices as well as with inadequate communication from administration "down the line." They felt that policies that used to work when USD was a small Catholic college have lost their effectiveness as the University has grown. Decisions once made centrally have devolved to divisions, and the divisions do not always work together in the best interests of USD. Participants want better collaboration through sharing of resources rather than tighter central control, with more transparent decision-making processes. Divisions, departments, and offices should share resources and work together to solve problems.

Faculty and staff felt that they should be made aware of news and events on campus before reading about them in the Union-Tribune. Students felt that the offices of the Registrar, Financial Aid Services, and Student Accounts could provide better service if they were better coordinated.

Survey respondents agree that USD could benefit from better coordination of key operational functions, such as event scheduling and marketing.

Respondents agree that USD needs to improve its support for information technology (88%), its budgeting process (88%), and its coordination of campus events (80%).



**Affordability:** Rising tuition was cited repeatedly as a threat to USD's future by focus group participants who feared that

USD might become an enclave for the wealthy rather than a campus where students of different backgrounds would have opportunities to interact. They feel that as tuition escalates, USD is becoming less affordable for many of the students the University is trying to attract, and more institutional resources must be devoted to financial aid if USD intends to compete successfully with other universities for bright students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Rising tuition and reduced financial aid in a sluggish economy threaten institutional goals to become more diverse. Participants saw USD as heavily tuition dependent and recognized the need to grow the endowment to provide more flexibility in times of economic downturn.

Similarly, faculty and staff expressed concern that the cost of living in San Diego, particularly the cost of housing, would act as a deterrent to attracting and retaining high quality employees at all levels. Staff perceive USD's salaries as lagging behind those offered by other large employers in the area, and faculty perceive USD's salaries as less competitive on the national market. Housing assistance, and perhaps transitional housing, might persuade prospective employees to accept jobs at USD.

When survey respondents were asked to rank a series of eight challenges to USD, controlling tuition increases was ranked first or second by 55%, recruiting qualified faculty by 49%, and increasing financial aid by 38%.

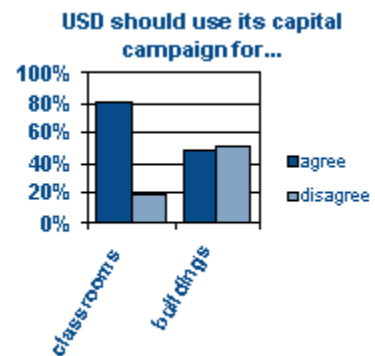
Respondents were supportive of using USD's capital campaign to raise funds to aid students; 94% agreed funds should be used to endow student scholarships, and 85% supported endowing graduate fellowships.



**Campus environment:** Focus group participants praised the beauty of USD's campus as a tremendous asset, particularly the attractive landscaping and the consistent Spanish Renaissance architecture. The beauty of the campus draws people and is a source of pride to the campus and to the Linda Vista community. Capacity for new programs and events has increased greatly with construction of the Jenny Craig Pavilion, the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, the Shiley Center for Science and Technology, and the Degheri Alumni Center. However, many faculty and staff observed that USD has added new buildings without providing adequate staff and operational funding to support them.

Participants also recognized that renovation of existing buildings has not kept pace with construction of new ones. Old classrooms, in particular, must be refurbished and made media-ready.

In addition to using the capital campaign to raise funds for financial aid, survey respondents expressed more support for using USD's capital campaign to raise funds for state-of-the-art classrooms (80%) than for building new buildings (49%).



## Using the Information

Input gathered from the focus groups, phone interviews, and Web surveys has been used to inform the Strategic Directions Steering Committee and its subcommittees for their work in updating the mission statement and crafting strategic goals that are the ultimate purpose of USD's Strategic Directions Initiative.

The Mission Statement Subcommittee worked over the course of three months to draft a one-sentence mission statement succinctly summarizing what USD is and what it does, as well as a description of the core values underlying the University's mission. The Steering Committee reviewed feedback from several sources, discussed it at length, modified the mission statement several times, and approved the draft presented to the Board of Trustees. The Board approved the mission statement on February 22, 2004.

Beginning in January, the Steering Committee and several working groups began the process of formulating strategic visions and goals for USD. A subcommittee of the Board of Trustees will be participating in this process during the month of April, with the objective of establishing strategic goals whose implementation can begin in the fall.