

“Green Paper” for Academic Planning

ENROLLMENT, PROGRAMS & SCHOOLS

Leeva Chung, Tim Keane, Tim McCarty, Kristin Moran,
Chell Roberts, Dustin Sharp, Shannon Starkey

Academic planning is intended to outline a strategic vision for Academic Affairs, and our team is specifically charged with considering the relationship between programs/degrees offered and enrollment. The 2024 Strategic plan provides an outline describing the ways in which USD can stand out as a leader in contemporary Catholic higher education. To further develop the pathways in the strategic plan, our team poses the following framing questions:

- How can new and existing academic programs provide incentives for students to make USD their ultimate choice?
- What strategies should be used at the undergraduate and graduate level to increase the likelihood that students will choose to attend USD?
- How might USD's organizational structure be modified to improve the academic experience?

To begin to answer these questions, it is imperative that we increase transparency at all levels related to recruitment and selection of USD students. Academic units should partner with enrollment management throughout the enrollment process, not just to provide “welcome” speeches to finalize the “yes.” An enrollment strategy should consider the impact of recruitment for specific programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. We are cognizant of the changing demographics that will impact enrollment and are confident that what we propose is in line with that forecasting. Any effective strategic enrollment plan must account for the conditions that impact decision making for students and their families in the current environment. When possible, USD needs to respond to these external factors by offering a clear vision that reinforces the value of a USD education.

We want to emphasize that the goal for enrollment growth should be focused on the external market of potential students. For USD to effectively compete as a R2 comprehensive university with a strong undergraduate liberal arts foundation, we need to set our sights on recruiting the top students at all levels by offering programs that align with our mission and that are attentive to the needs and interests of our students. Our undergraduate programs continue to draw top students and our academic profile continues to rise. Graduate programs have found success in recruiting ethically minded, conscientious students who are attracted to the mission driven focus of the professional schools.

As we move to a budget model that has the potential to increase internal competition between units, we recommend that the strategic plan include safeguards that reduce the tendency to incentivize competition for currently enrolled students. The strategic plan should outline how admissions may play a role in admitting students by school or program interest to help ensure the student demand can be met at the unit level.

ENROLLMENT

Undergraduate enrollment management

For the 2021 admissions cycle, USD, like other selective universities, has had an increase in the numbers of undergraduate applications, indicating that our undergraduate programs and experiences are strong and in line with national trends. The USD brand/reputation has remained appealing in spite of the pandemic and popular discourse about the “value” of higher education. As such, it is imperative that USD delivers on its promises to provide a holistic education grounded in the liberal arts. Data show that among our undergraduate alumni, their liberal arts focused education is what resonates with them post graduation. The “Liberal Arts for the 21st Century” pathway from the strategic plan resonated with 42% of alumni and parents (GroupSolver Consulting, 2018). It appears that rather than trying to innovate our way out of liberal arts we should highlight the benefit of a holistic education by emphasizing integrated, interdisciplinary opportunities as a way to promote what distinguishes USD.

Graduate Programs

USD’s graduate population has experienced substantial growth over the last decade without a corresponding university-wide strategy to accommodate it. There is no one person who coordinates or is responsible for graduate enrollment, and each graduate school is largely an island unto itself, resulting in the inefficiencies and redundancies across graduate enrollment management and student support structures. In terms of the student experience, graduate students tend to feel far less like members of a broader USD community that welcomes and caters to them than they do students of their respective graduate program.

Going forward, university wide structures and strategy to enhance increases in enrollments and onboard new programs (and therefore increase revenues), and facilitate collaboration across programs, are largely absent. Insofar as increases in graduate enrollment may be hoped to compensate for a shrinking pool of traditional college-aged students, failure to think more strategically about graduate programs and the graduate experience at USD represents at best a lost opportunity. Even with better strategy and institutional support, there are additional challenges to USD’s ability to compete in the competitive marketplace of graduate school education. In particular, limitations in USD’s ability to provide scholarship assistance create a challenge in our ability to grow the size of graduation programs while maintaining quality.

At the same time, growth in the graduate student population raises hard questions about USD’s culture and institutional identity. While many faculty and staff would like to see USD grow into its shoes as a *university*, and one that has recently crossed into R2 territory, others continue to believe that, at its heart, USD is essentially a large liberal arts *college*, with a primary mission to serve undergraduates. This latter view may overlook the extent to which graduate programs, including professional programs, contribute to a broader liberal arts ethic at USD.

Ultimately, this points to the need for a discussion about the ideal balance between graduate and undergraduate students at USD, honoring USD’s identity as a liberal arts institution, while

acknowledging the reality of a changing demographic landscape and market for more professionally oriented graduate programs. It also points to the need for a more deliberate, university-wide strategic plan for managing and supporting graduate enrollment going forward.

We recommend that USD:

- Maintain current target enrollment numbers for undergraduates while increasing diversity and student achievement.
- Become a Hispanic Serving Institution.
- Increase collaboration between undergraduate serving units and graduate serving units (esp. SOLES & Nursing) to create pathways for undergraduate students to pursue careers in high-demand fields like education and nursing.
- Increase options for students to pursue combined degrees. Bachelors to Masters pathways and combined graduate degrees that build on MBA/JD, JD/MA (Kroc) and others.
- Increase institutional support for graduate programs, including admissions, financial aid, student services and other infrastructure that would alleviate duplicate efforts that are currently housed within units.

Pending questions:

- Should we consider capping enrollment for various units so that they can better meet demand?
- Should we manage enrollment through student interest - if we are strategic about program development, should student admissions match those goals?

Prioritize Becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution

It is clear that USD intends to pursue becoming an Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) as Provost Baker has convened a task force, chaired by Steve Pultz, in Spring 2021 to investigate this opportunity. As a primarily white institution that has made intentional efforts to diversify its student population at both the undergraduate and graduate level, USD has the capacity to move in this direction. In fact, given the demographic trends of the United States, particularly in California and the Southwest, USD will likely become a Hispanic Serving Institution without any intentional planning. Currently, the percentage of people identifying as Hispanic in San Diego County is 30% and in California it is 40%. If USD continues to increase the percentage of Hispanic students without an academic plan to serve students who identify as Latinx, we will lose a tremendous opportunity to be a leader in Catholic higher education. We must leverage our location and use our mission to guide academic planning in a way that leads to the recruitment and success of students and faculty from Latinx communities.

It should be noted that the HSI designation does not parallel the development and missions of HBCUs which were created to serve a specific underserved population. HBCUs developed with the mission to serve students who were excluded from elite institutions. The “Hispanic Serving Institution” designation is solely based on student attendance and once the threshold is met,

schools can access federal funding, but it never required universities to actually change or attend to their mission in relation to the population of Latinx students.

The HSI designation was incorporated into policy in 1992 after many years of advocacy to ensure that the universities and colleges that were enrolling Hispanic students were receiving the financial resources necessary to support students. As such, the intention of the HSI designation was to provide resources to underfunded universities that were enrolling high percentages of Latinx students. Many of the early institutions to receive the designation did have programs that were relevant to the student population, such as Chicano Studies, and were situated in areas with large Hispanic populations. To position ourselves as a Hispanic Serving Institution, USD needs to reflect on the fact that as a primarily white institution, we need to increase our attention to DEI initiatives across campus to create a campus climate that supports, embraces and listens to students and faculty who identify as Latinx. We cannot continue our current practices and rely on admissions to recruit -- we need to identify the various areas where we can move toward improving the way we serve students.

To begin, units should provide financial support to programs that are currently committed to serving Latinx students. At the undergraduate level, the College enrolls 23.6%, Business enrolls 21.2% and Engineering enrolls 19.3% Hispanic students. The 4-year graduation rate for this group is 76.1% and at year 6, the percentage who have graduated is 80.8%. The degree completion rate is better than the undergraduate average. There are equal to or more than 25% Latinx students in the following programs: Behavioral Neuroscience (27.9%), Biochemistry (25.4%), Ethnic Studies (35%), International Business (25.4%), International Relations (32.2%), Mechanical Engineering (24.9%), Music (25%), Political Science (26.8%), Sociology (32.5%), Spanish (50%), Theology and Religious (36.4%).

The percentage of Latinx students at the graduate level is not quite as high as the undergraduate level, but there are clearly programs that have attracted students who identify as Latinx. According to our IRP data, the following are the percentages of Hispanic students in Graduate and Professional schools: Law = 7.9%, Graduate Engineering = 18.8%, Graduate Business = 22.1%, SOLES = 28.4%, Nursing = 16.1% and Kroc = 25.7%.

It is important to note that the percentage of enrolled students necessary to achieve HSI status is an average for the University as a whole, but individual programs and/or units may consider modifications to existing curriculum or adding programs that would be attractive to this student population. For example, could a "health equities" program compliment a pre-health student? Could a Spanish-language journalism certificate help students to gain access to more media jobs? Once enrolled at USD, it is important to ensure that all are supported with focused initiatives for Latinx students. In addition, increased support for current student organizations, such as Mecha, can be a way to increase a sense of belonging. It is also well supported by the literature that students thrive when they see themselves reflected in the faculty and staff with whom they work. Cluster hires can provide a cohort support system that increases retention of BIPOC faculty. Specifically, the current diversity postdoc hiring cycle in the College will bring a

cluster of a minimum of 3 faculty who advance the perspectives of African Americans and the next cycle can focus on Latinx perspectives.

Recommendations:

- Create access points for Latinx students with programming designed to reflect and include the community.
- Increase the number of faculty who advance the perspectives of Latinx students.
- Improve student resources for Latinx students to increase their sense of belonging.

Pending Questions:

- How will admissions collaborate with academic units to recruit and retain Latinx students?
- What financial resources become available once designated as a HSI and how will they be allocated?

PROGRAMS

Interdisciplinary Collaborations and Initiatives

In line with activating opportunities to bring students to USD who are motivated by innovative programs that promote in depth learning and interdisciplinary thinking, it is important that USD works to remove the structural barriers that limit collaboration between units at all levels. Our team is thinking at the “program” level so the ideas are broad in concept, but should connect to enrollment strategies that promote a liberal arts approach to undergraduate education and a mission focused strategy at the graduate level.

As a comprehensive university, it is clear that the educational goals differ at the undergraduate level where we want to encourage students to become intellectual omnivores from the graduate level and professional education that needs to provide a depth of knowledge with a more focused approach. One opportunity that is available to our students that has not been fully realized is the opportunity for undergraduate students to learn from graduate students. Furthermore, graduate students have not been fully integrated into the campus community and tend to stay tied to their specific graduate school so more opportunities for collaboration and pathways into graduate programs for current undergraduates may be a way to build enrollment.

One example of a potential area for growth and collaboration across units is in facilitating undergraduates in pursuing a vocation in elementary or secondary education. At the present time, undergraduates who are certain of their intent to become elementary school teachers can major in Liberal Studies, but per the explicit recommendations of the program, “Students are urged to declare the Liberal Studies major early in the program to ensure efficient progress through the degree. [...] In order to complete credential requirements successfully, students should apply to the undergraduate teaching credential program in the second semester of the sophomore year.” This is an excellent program for students who arrive with a commitment to a teaching vocation, but USD does not provide much in the way of support or resources for

students in other majors who begin thinking seriously about their careers in their Junior or Senior years, nor does it provide a clear pathway for those students who are interested in secondary education.

Developing pathways from within majors in the College of Arts & Sciences, Business, and Engineering could be a great service to our students, and create novel opportunities for collaboration across the units, along the lines of the recommendations above:

Accelerated BA/MA or Dual Degree program: The School of Leadership & Education Sciences currently offers a 24 month MEd in Curriculum and Instruction with credential eligibility. This appears to be an opportunity for the development of something like a BA/MA that would prepare our students to enter into a teaching career as a competitive applicant within 5 years.

Student driven and designed education (individualized major and/or minor and level of intensity): Students could be encouraged to design a creative path through their major in order to facilitate an eventual career in elementary or secondary education.

Faculty driven and designed education, an interdisciplinary combination of majors and minors. Within the undergraduate majors and units, faculty could be encouraged to develop primary or secondary education tracks tailored to their students' needs and the norms of their departments and disciplines.

Project Based Learning for undergraduate and graduate programs. Teacher education is an ideal space in which to encourage project-based and other forms of experiential learning. These could be student-driven within an individualized program or facilitated by faculty within departments or as inter-departmental collaborations, perhaps along the lines of the Honors Program.

Another example of programming that is integrative is interdisciplinary minors that are growing the College. Currently there are 10 minors that cross departments with one more (Africana Studies) launching in Fall 2021. Biomedical Ethics, a minor that emphasizes the connection to the liberal arts for primarily pre-health students is a good example of how USD can facilitate creative collaborations to meet the changing needs of our students. In the past three years, the growth in Biomedical ethics has been 428% (n=74 in Fall 2020). The Performing Arts Entrepreneurship minor is a collaboration between School of Business and the College that would benefit from a stronger incentive model to ensure participation from faculty to attract more students. The total number of students enrolled in interdisciplinary minors in the College jumped from 41 students in Fall 2010 to 176 students in 2020.

Recommendations:

- Offer opportunities for undergraduate students to create an individualized major and/or minor that provides flexibility for creative thinking.
- More project based learning across majors.

- Create opportunities for graduate students to mentor/teach undergraduates.
- Encourage integration and collaboration among faculty across disciplines and schools.

Pending Questions:

- What reward structure (financial and evaluative) is necessary to encourage faculty to collaborate?
- How can we overcome protectionist disciplinary attitudes that impede collaboration?

SCHOOLS

Role of Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) within the academic context

Over the past several years USD has recognized a growing audience that desires to learn in an online format at both the graduate and undergraduate level. These students are nontraditional students, older students, full time employees, or have conditions that make it difficult for them to learn in a face to face environment. PCE internal capability allows the USD community to expand offerings to these audiences that focus on USD's mission and values without the need to engage external consultants and companies that provide services at a higher cost. As such, PCE is partnering with other USD academic units to develop new online offerings.

As USD moves to a new budget model focused on responsibility centered management (RCM), PCE provides units the ability to participate in the development of new offerings that are not only consistent with USD mission and values, but that also enhance the financial stability of their units.

Currently, the Division of Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) is a hybrid university unit with three primary functions:

1. Provide service to the university in the development, marketing and administration of online degrees and certificates. (These degrees and certificates are owned by the other units.)
2. Serve as an academic unit that offers online degree programs that uniquely fit PCE and not desired by the other units.
3. Develop and offer short courses (non-degree program or credit bearing). Examples of these offerings include courses that prepare students to take professional tests and certifications, short courses for skills development that are vocational in nature and are not offered by other academic units, and short courses desired by the community. PCE partners with for profit organizations to provide this service.

PCE is currently the most rapidly expanding sector of the University, and yet it is perhaps the least well-understood sector by the USD community, especially the faculty. As the University adapts to the novel challenges of a post-Covid world, it seems entirely likely that the forces and incentives that have produced the rapid growth in PCE will not only persist, but likely intensify. For these reasons, it is essential that the University as a whole take stock of the current structures, practices, and goals of PCE in order to ensure its alignment and integration with the vision and mission of the University.

Of particular concern at the present is the rapid growth in partnerships with for-profit educational enterprises. USD PCE currently offers six certificate programs and two tech bootcamp programs featuring curriculum and instruction outsourced to for-profit enterprises such as Salesforce, Facebook, Green Flower, Asana, and Fullstack Academy. The curriculum for these programs is neither designed nor delivered by members of the USD community, nor is there a process in place for this curriculum to be subjected to oversight by USD faculty. These practices raise questions about reputational effects on USD, the quality of instruction being offered, and the alignment with the mission of the University.

The current approval process for courses that are not part of any degree program includes vetting courses through PCE faculty, the Deans most aligned with the content, and with internal pedagogical experts. The Deans council reviews any new offerings and these are routed through the Provost's office and the Board of Trustees if required.

Recommendations:

- Consider whether there should be a different organizational structure for PCE as a way to separate the academic programs that are degree granting from the certificate and skill based professional development programs.
 - Perhaps parsing PCE's function as a support unit equivalent to ITS and its function as a source of continuing education programming.
 - Ensure that degree granting programs have sufficient faculty review and oversight.
- Investigate the reputational effects of the structure and rapid growth of PCE.
 - Consider a more formal and transparent distinction between PCE and the larger university (e.g. "USD Extension School" designation, etc.)
 - Evaluate how USD's reputation is affected by the rapidly growing reliance on for-profit educational institutions to provide curriculum and instruction.
- Develop transparent policies for maintaining sufficient oversight for skills-based certificate programs.

Pending Questions:

- How might the financial opportunities through PCE be leveraged to promote or support other academic units?
- How can PCE be promoted to the wider community?

Taken together, the recommendations outlined above are intended to create opportunities for USD to capitalize on its current strengths while reducing barriers to truly collaborative initiatives that attract and retain top students from ethnically and economically diverse backgrounds. The 2024 Strategic Plan provides clear guidelines for the institutional priorities and any enrollment strategy should be informed by intentional program development that aligns with the mission of the University.

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