

## STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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### **Leading points for the Student Experience Aspect of the Academic Plan**

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- I. USD's Unique Community: *USD is working to be an inclusive university that supports students of all backgrounds in their education to expand their horizons and professional opportunities.*
- II. Centralized Learning Resources: *USD can improve the support students receive throughout their time at USD by providing them resources for learning skills and academic success.*
- III. USD's Cross-Disciplinary Liberal Arts Backbone: *We seek to strengthen USD's identity as a liberal arts university with interdisciplinary approaches at all levels of education offered.*
- IV. Items for Future Consideration

### **I. USD's Unique Community: USD is working towards being an inclusive university that supports students in their education to expand horizons.**

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USD seeks to embody its core values of inclusive community to provide supportive physical, spiritual, emotional, social and cultural development. We seek to create communities for all of our student populations in order to maximize their holistic educational horizons and professional futures. This is a multi-faceted, intersectional equity issue across colleges.

As a campus, we recognize that our collective goals to outreach in terms of admissions and recruiting has brought in a diverse population of students (though we will continue with these efforts). At all levels of education, we realize that we do not always fully reach our goals to holistically support all of our student demographics once they are admitted. As studies show that future demographics will include students from increasingly varied backgrounds, we strive to serve and honor the vast array of experience our students bring to campus.

*University support and rituals:* Fostering inclusive rituals and traditions that seek to recognize the inequality that has been historically built into the higher education system in general and how this greater history has influenced USD's campus in ways that we wish to change in the future.

Student academic belonging is a crucial piece that is interrelated but distinct from social belonging and a sense of social belonging and campus community. Today's students are impacted by a variety of wellness concerns that require support so that they can be successful at USD. The issues that impact our students and their sense of social belonging are vast and complex. To name a few examples, students experience:

- food scarcity
- housing insecurity (for economic and / or emotional reasons)
- first-generation undergraduate and graduate populations
- DACAmented, undocumented students, and their families
- economic, racial and political refugees
- technology access discrepancies (emphasized during remote learning)
- health care scarcity (including historical health risks, access failures and vaccine scarcity)
- health risks to students who are essential workers (from health care to retail)
- wellness concerns (exacerbated currently by the pandemic)

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Because students face hardships during their time at USD, we need to make sure students know that there is support available to them and to make these support systems more robust.

### *Campus wide: Community Building* [Goals 1 and 2 in the Strategic Plan]

- Improve logistic services such as OneStop (such as current Provost level projects)
- Fostering a sense of community at USD--belonging, traditions, spirit, etc—articulating and educating explicitly for anti-racism and equity.
- making USD's campus welcoming for undergraduate and graduate BIPOC students (specifically working with AWARE groups following USD black faculty stated priorities)

### *Undergraduate level:*

- Reimagine the student onboarding process during their first year to increase personal contact, educate them on how to design their educational experience, on the value of liberal arts, and practices that set them up for success.
  - Add articulating the value of the liberal arts into the Connect and Passport programs.
  - COVID has enabled the first year onboarding process to be reimaged in various ways that includes remote resources that can be accessed before arriving to USD.
  - A summer session like the 2020 “Pandemic Times” course prepares students for academics as well as creates a sense of community before they arrive on campus.
- Guide students through undergraduate research and teach them the possibilities of undergraduate research.
- Continue the work of the Transfer Student Task force to assist the transfer process and welcoming to the USD social and academic community. The transfer student onboarding process is particularly complex and important for improving equity and diversity.
- Foster spaces for (physical and metaphorical) traditionally underrepresented (BIPOC, non-traditional, etc.) students and assisting in transitions to campus (including to remote learning). This will require us to pay close attention to the shifting contexts internally and externally.
- As USD seeks to be designated a Hispanic Serving Institution, these support networks will need to be deepened.

### *Graduate level:*

- Graduate programs have sought to be more inclusive with a vast array of successful tactics. For example, several programs have eliminated GMATs or reduced volunteer hours. Others (such as Nursing) have worked to make their cohorts reflective of the demographics in the San Diego region.
- External circumstances influence decisions to enter graduate education and these unique scenarios will reveal new needs for tactics and support. One example is that, during the pandemic, students have urgently needed technological support to learn new tools that have far exceeded the current abilities and available hours of ITS.
- External circumstances require robust data collecting, marketing and ways to reach out to students.
- Consider what aspects (if any) there might be a common graduate student experience.

*Student voices:* It's imperative to have a space for students to voice needs and concerns that can be addressed at the university level and across colleges. Support and resources for student groups that create communities for BIPOC students—including resources for student groups that perceive resistance from USD administration on their efforts.

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*Faculty input:* To make informed decisions, we'll need to seek faculty (especially BIPOC faculty) input on reported needs for student support and community building. In this effort, we also seek to increase resources for faculty who provide formal and informal support to BIPOC student populations.

### ***II. Centralized Learning Resources: USD can improve the support students receive throughout their time at USD by providing them resources for learning skills and academic success.***

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We propose creating a more centralized structure for academic support that would make it easier for students to access. When students have inevitable educational gaps in undergraduate and graduate populations, they are currently served in a piecemeal fashion through a separate entities, such as the Writing Center and the Spanish Writing Center (CAS), the SOLES Graduate Writing Center, the Math Resource Center (CAS), and The Language Tutoring Center (CAS). The current model we have makes it challenging for students to access the robust resources we do have and, in turn, lessens the sense of academic belonging and community in student populations.

The current remote learning due to the pandemic has emphasized the impact of knowledge, access, technology, wellness, and support gaps across campus. A more centralized resourced learning center would focus on increasing educational equity and encourage a sense of academic belonging. A center for learning resources focuses on educating USD student populations on the best practices for maximizing learning, bridging knowledge gaps, and performing undergraduate and graduate research. For example, experts on learning theories (in consultation with SOLES) could teach students how to best succeed in interdisciplinary ways and how to identify and bridge gaps in their knowledge. The aim is to empower students in their own learning process and support them in becoming empowered lifelong learners.

Learning resource goals in general:

- Set the academic tone for incoming students
- Help students to know what to expect coming into USD's graduate and undergraduate programs
- Educate, support and encourage undergraduate research
- Coordinate multi-faceted efforts for academic support on campus
- Resources for learning hiccups—including non-prime hours technology support
- Foster learning and research opportunities
- Provide structures for graduate and undergraduates to take advantage of research opportunities
- Cultivate lifelong learning skills
- Support experiential learning

Specific for Undergraduates and Graduates

- *Undergraduate:* centralized support for learning how to learn, for bridging knowledge gaps, easing transitions and supporting undergraduate research.
- *Graduate:* centralized support for returning to school from the professional world, underrepresented population support, gaining new technological student-facing IT support in a more comprehensive way that includes after hour support.

There are many programs and initiatives on campus that engage in related access for minority and first-generations students in place now. For example, Student Support Services, the Summer Bridge Program, initiatives in SOLES and the Disability and Learning Difference Research Center have helped increase access for first generation and minority students and learning differences. The increased

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resources for student academic support would seek to enhance—not replace or take over—current entities.

The Center for Educational Excellence is for our expert faculty to fine-tune and deepen their pedagogical expertise and high-impact learning practices. A clearinghouse or center for resourced learning would focus on student support rather than faculty’s practices. The CEE’s efforts would be strengthened by having a centralized learning resource that would focus on teaching students the sciences of learning and would allow faculty and advisors to integrate this resource into their work.

### **III. USD’s Cross-Disciplinary Liberal Arts Backbone: *We seek to strengthen USD’s identity as liberal arts university with interdisciplinary approaches at all levels of education.***

The liberal arts approach should allow us to respond (*response-able*) to ever-changing global contexts and urgent questions for humanity. We are not able to respond nimbly to create new programs, certificates, or collaborate across colleges to use our collective strengths [aligns with Strategic Plan’s 6 Pathways].

One key point for improving USD’s version of a liberal arts university is to create a greater sense of academic community across colleges to prevent silos of disciplinary and cultivate student networking across the schools. We hope to lessen the siloed experience of both graduate and undergraduate education. USD has excellent programs and majors that work in an interdisciplinary manner. For example, the Law School’s Master of Laws (LLM) allows students to design an interdisciplinary course of study suited for their individual goals. In CAS, the Interdisciplinary Humanities major is another example of flexible learning plans designed by the students. However, working on more nimble means of being response-able will deepen the liberal arts backbone of the university.

Providing blueprints for creating cross/trans/interdisciplinary programs and/or certificates and helping students become response-able. (Example: The first- year Pandemic Times summer seminar but at all program levels.)

- Increase faculty collaboration across schools and disciplines--capitalizing on faculty strengths across campus for the benefit of students.
- Explore ideas such as short “mastery workshops” on topics related to justice, peace, sustainability, etc (idea from ENGR) that students could use to show their preparation for uncertain futures. Collaborations across schools, such as the 2020 “Pandemic Times” course, are challenging to bring together currently.
- Ideas to foster and build upon transdisciplinary certificate programs and/or dual program degrees. (The academic plan Team on Teaching and Learning Team is explicitly working on this.)

Though the Academic Plan Team on Teaching and Learning is working to increase graduate and undergraduate interaction and to increase opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning, our team considers the response-able aspect of USD educational student experience as an essential aspect.

#### *Items for future consideration:*

1. It’s imperative to align our goals explicitly with the work of USD Black Faculty Groups and the AWARE committees to shift aspects of USD culture that do not support our core values for social justice and inclusivity.

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2. Examine how a centralized learning center or clearinghouse could enhance efforts to cultivate student learning across campus and make approaching our current centers and initiatives more accessible.
3. Incorporate input from each school's students at the graduate at undergraduate level about what could have improved their experience and met their needs at USD.

### *Bibliography*

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#### Liberal Arts Education:

- [Career-Aligned Major Isn't Enough](#)
- [\(Ethical\) Artificial Intelligence Institute Colby College \*Liberal Arts\*](#)