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To: Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Claude Steele
Vice Chancellor Scott Bidy
Vice Chancellor Harry Le Grande
Dean Anthony Cascardi
Dean Carla Hesse
Professor Brandi Cantanese
Professor Ron Cohen
Professor Abby Dernberg
Professor Glynda Hull
Professor Robert Jacobsen
Professor Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton
Professor Maura Nolan
Professor Panos Papadopoulos (alt Vice-Chair Benjamin Hermalin)

August 13, 2014

Re: Undergraduate Initiative Steering Committee,

We are moving into the next phase for the Undergraduate Initiative. We are requesting that you serve on the Undergraduate Initiative Steering Committee (UGISC). The object of the steering committee will be to refine the overall vision for undergraduate education, to develop a strategy for broad outreach to the larger campus community that will engage them in the refinement of themes and directions for the initiative, and to guide the implementation to be carried out by working groups, departments and colleges. The steering committee will be a critical vehicle for engaging students in the process and will work to deploy a strategy for broad outreach particularly to our alumni and friends, as we work to solicit greater support for our undergraduate initiatives.

The UGISC will be chaired by the two of us. We will be asking you to participate in at least two, if not three, off-site half-day retreats over the next few months and regularly scheduled bi-weekly 90-minute meetings over the next academic year. In our first meetings, we will be reviewing and synthesizing the documents developed by the planning committee and to move towards the formulation of a concrete strategy for implementing our vision across the undergraduate curriculum and experience.

Background

As was articulated in the Chancellor's inaugural address, undergraduate education is one of the three major foci for our work as an institution. "The belief that the liberal arts and sciences should be central to undergraduate education rests on a distinctively American idea, one that was originally rooted in classical and religious education. For many years, this belief has taken on the form of a commitment that our students engage fundamental human debates, dilemmas and discourses, both as the means to develop critical thinking and for the purpose of becoming active citizens of our world. ...I believe that the literary and artistic imagination is more important than ever for us to cultivate, especially given our

growing reliance on science and technology not just to design our relationship to the lived environment but also to reshape and redefine our relationships with the economy, society and even our physical bodies. And I believe that all of our students need to engage with past and present debates and discoveries in the sciences in order to engage directly with the most pressing issues of our day.”

“The arguments I have just made depend upon ensuring that all of our youth have proper access to a university education and genuine assurances about the actual affordability of college. When students graduate with debt and uncertain job prospects, it is small wonder that we are being asked to measure the literal value of a degree in the form of jobs and earnings. The liberal arts now often seem to be a luxury that only the elite can afford, and even they seem increasingly skeptical. The challenge before us, however, is as great as the future of democracy itself, the character of the public sphere, the extent of our imagination and the nature of our vision. These in truth are not luxuries, but the fundamental conditions for a good life, a just society, a productive economy, a functioning political system and a sustainable planet.

We will not be able to generate sufficient resources to preserve our university, to secure more funding from the state and greater support from our alumni and donors (and let me be clear, we need to do both), if we do not find ways to defend the importance of both our public and our intellectual mission.

We must also pay constant and comprehensive attention to our undergraduate curriculum, the centerpiece of the liberal education we offer that is one of the most important charges of the faculty and the university. We need to find ways to connect students more vitally not just to the intellectual opportunities on the campus, but to the faculty, as well as to graduate students who serve as mentors as well as teachers.

We must build on the enormous success of our freshman and sophomore seminars, our Big Ideas courses, innovative new initiatives such as the Berkeley Connect program, our extraordinary majors, the Smart Program, which involves graduate students in teaching and learning. We need to ensure that all of our students have opportunities to connect to research work in laboratories as well as libraries, in projects ranging across the full spectrum of research programs including in our local communities, to study and do research abroad just as I did.”

Steering Committee Charge

The aim for the steering committee is to develop the overall vision for undergraduate education, develop the strategy for engagement with the community and refinement of the vision, and to oversee the implementation of the vision. Critical to the effort will be the engagement with the Academic Senate and the faculties of the undergraduate colleges. Given the complexity of the task, and the centrality of the initiative to the Chancellor, we would like the UGISC to meet biweekly. Critical to the success of this initiative will be the development of

- (1) The overall vision
- (2) A clear plan for engagement of the broad campus community to refine the vision with a particular focus on outreach to students, and to alumni and friends
- (3) A strategy for working with the Senate and the colleges and departments to implement the vision

- (4) A strategy for partnering with Student Affairs, E&I and the VC Undergraduate Education to address issues involving residential life, CALSO and other crucial aspects of the undergraduate experience

The expectation is that the vision will be articulated early this fall and that the engagement plans and strategy for work with the colleges and departments will be completed early in the second semester. The UGISC may choose to form subcommittees or ad hoc working groups to address specific issues.

Steering Committee Composition

The UGISC membership is both relatively small and faculty heavy. The goal is to focus on the academic dimension of the undergraduate experience while ensuring the ability to draw in other relevant Berkeley constituencies as the need arises. Your creativity, informed perspectives and range of intellectual and academic experience will contribute to the success of this initiative.

Staff support to this effort will be provided by Nils Gilman and Cynthia Schrager. Meeting arrangements will be handled by the office of the VCUE. Please reply to Noemi Hollander (noemi@berkeley.edu) to confirm your ability to serve. Thank you for your willingness to contribute to this critical effort.

Sincerely,



Nicholas B. Dirks
Chancellor



Catherine P. Koshland
Vice-Chancellor-Undergraduate Education

Cc: Gibor Basri
Janet Broughton
Nils Gilman
Laurent Heller
Phyllis Hoffman
Dan Mogoluf
Cynthia Schrager
Andrew Szeri