

Comments from Retention Forum February 10, 2006

Written comments were requested from Retention Forum attendees following the meeting. The following are the unedited comments:

- What is being developed to assess why students leave UCSC? If we want to retain students we need to review why they leave. Maybe the students of CHUCK could be trained as peer advisors to interview/dialogue when students exit the institution, or develop a confidential exit survey.
- UCSC should develop a first year experience program that educates them on academic culture, transition to college issues, resources, career/major exploration, wellness issues, etc. The core course does not address these issues. First year students need more support, but it needs to be developed institutionally with the assistance of faculty – not just at the student affairs level.
- I was please to see students in attendance – these are the people who can tell us what they want, what they need. An hour and a half presentation isn't enough time to discuss such a large issue – we're only touching the top of the iceberg; consider an all-day teaching discussion.
- Transportation: What plans are in the works to improve transportation on campus; shuttles and metro lines have been cut, students are stranded without reliable transportation.
- Admission of transfer students very “bumpy”, leading to low retention.
- I think a big part of student retention has to do with not only the reputation of the school, but the city that houses the school. Santa Cruz still has a big reputation of being a community that is very hippy-like, very drug-oriented, etc. How and/or what is UCSC doing to push our reputation in the other direction? How is the word being spread outside the community.
- What is the responsible staff doing to increase the number of classes offered at UCSC? We always hear about the university increasing the numbers of students, or trying to increase the student populations, but I have never heard a word about increasing the number of classes.
- As a white student from a middle class background I find it frustrating to not hear any efforts to retain ME. I have searched through student organizations, and have been unable to find any that I could belong to that would support my

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studies, instead of an organization that I could join if I had a particular drive to make a change in something (e.g. Rape Prevention Education.) I believe in increasing diversity in the campus community, but at the same time, I hope for support for the “not diverse” students.

- I was pleased to learn that there is a committee looking at the increase in number of students with serious psychological and psychiatric issues. Academic standing committees at colleges review many students every quarter whose academics have suffered because of these kinds of issues. We need, as a campus, a better understanding of these students’ needs, how to support them, work with them, etc.
- Is there any evidence that the freshman discovery seminars were successful in retaining freshman students? Same question: have advising clusters/proposed majors helped? There are many retention issues addressed today that need resources to be addressed, but few people in this room have influence on resource allocation.
- Thank you for bringing us together. A very productive dialogue. I agree the question of “what next?” is how to maintain an ongoing, productive discussion in which the various sectors can participate. Would the Chancellor be able to convene an ad hoc (or ongoing) representative body? One which – by her participation – would attract the participation of Deans, Department Heads, etc? – *Sayo Fujioka, SOAR*
- Lack of outreach/advocacy and communication from CEP and Academic Senate to students to fill representative positions outside and before this event.
- How does an increase in yield activity (particularly with help from the faculty and staff) increase the percent of students who really want to be here? I am a staff member who is part of a two-salary family and I can barely afford to live in Santa Cruz. I wonder if Julian’s data take into account the expense of moving to, and living in, a place as affluent as Santa Cruz. Even campus housing seem astronomical. I work with transfer students that are admitted to the university clearly unprepared for the degrees they are expected to complete within two years. How can we admit students who haven’t begun preparing themselves to complete a degree and expect them to complete that degree in two to three years? Please do not admit transfer students who are unprepared and not give them the time to complete them at the pace they need to. It’s a disservice to those students!
- This is a very important topic and well worth everyone’s time including department chairs, deans, faculty, college and department advisors, students, and all those that have to do with the budget and the power to make changes. One could look at who made up this meeting to say a) those who make policies that effect student retention – it wasn’t a priority to them – which

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states a lot, b) time and date didn't work with all folks' schedules, and c) you're preaching to the choir.

- Also, by changing the process of the declaration of major and eliminating the college, having the students fending for themselves. Won't this lack of advising in the beginning create more frustration, mission out on which general education to take, and having to stay long, put a further burden on the department advisors and frustrate the students more when department advisors have to send them back to their colleges anyway. I can see doing this new process with transfer students only.
- There are also rumors (I hope) that the college advisors position is going to be eliminated. I went to a few different meetings over the past couple of weeks and this topic came up.
- I, as a "top student" – SAT scores, GPA, etc., feel like the student voices that were heard today were the students that are already being served well by the university. We should be thinking about the students who don't have/aren't allowed into these multicultural organizations. Creation of an honors program might be a good step. Another problem I have – undergrads are consistently treated as simply dollar signs. I've considered leaving for smaller, more personal institutions many times. Example: when the registrar's office get mad at you for asking a simple question (can I get "x" form here?); when a friend attending a junior college feels like they're getting more out of their education in the way of advising, career prep, etc. – you know there's a problem with the way undergrads are constantly treated here at UCSC. I feel I deserve to be treated like a human being. Simple respect – no more, no less.
- In the necessary, positive, well-intentioned quest for "diversity" on campus, unintentional alienation of students who do not fit into the "minority" category may be occurring. Academics are perhaps still slanted toward the top socioeconomic echelons, but student life – the factor most cited as important in student retention – is severely alienating for these students. When ethnic groups (e.g. the organizations in "chuck") were created to represent students that were marginalized by the academic atmosphere at UCSC, they improved retention statistics and served their collective purpose well. Now, these very organizations have a voice in forums such as this one, reinforcing the idea that students succeed when they feel "plugged in" and that they have a voice. However, the statistics are such that the reverse is now occurring – mostly non-ethnic/minority students who have been denied entry into student organizations because of their lack of "diversity" are not staying/succeeding at UCSC in ever-growing numbers. It comes down to what we want UCSC to be – inclusive and welcoming, or exclusive and recognizing only those students who enhance ethnic "diversity."
- Thank you for moderating such an open, informative, and thought-provoking forum last Friday afternoon. The speakers, as well as the audience, were constructive, while putting forward the problems that need to be addressed if

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UCSC is to improve not only its rates of student retention and graduation but also to attract/recruit a more diverse student body. I would like to add a few more thoughts to the discussion:

- 1) I don't know if there's any way to track such a statistic, but are many of the students who leave UCSC after a year or two going on to *less expensive* non-UC institutions (e.g., CSU or even, at least for their general education requirements, the community college system) due to steep annual increases in UC fees in recent years?
- 2) Much support has been lent--as it should be--the effort to assist under-represented students in achieving academic success and nurturing their social and cultural lives at UCSC. As mentioned in the forum, students from such backgrounds are out-performing statistical expectations as a result of such support from both the campus and student-initiated organizations. If, as the figures indicate, students from more privileged backgrounds are under-performing expectations--dropping out or at least not graduating--are moves being made to address their issues, or indeed to solicit their concerns?
- 3) A blessing and a curse of this campus is its non-conformity. Students at the majority of US universities can expect a predictable emphasis (and ungodly amounts of money spent) on certain prominent sports (i.e., American football and basketball) which dominate campus life, alumni fundraising, and promotion of the campus to the general public. Although UCSC is known for its alternative image, the lack of seemingly *any* unifying student activity, the limited on-campus facilities for social life (a very rudimentary Student Union), and the lack of promotion or even knowledge of the sports at which UCSC excels (tennis, for one) could be construed by prospective and even current students as, frankly, too low-key if not downright boring.

This lack of identity is also reflected in the atmosphere of indifference to the campus of the local community. I am certainly not suggesting that UCSC attempt to emulate Stanford or Berkeley by attempting to create a major sports, fraternity/sorority-based student life, but more could be made--to students, parents, the local community, and the world beyond--of UCSC's athletic successes ... which, like it or not, is what many look for in terms of campus identity, spirit, and character. I'm sure current students-- removed from town as those who live on campus are--would also appreciate more non-academic social facilities on campus as well.