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October 29, 2002

The Honorable Dede Alpert
Chair, Joint Committee to Develop
a Master Plan for Education
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Alpert:

I am writing to provide you with the University's comments on "The California Master Plan for Education," your committee's final report providing recommendations for a new Master Plan for all of California education, pre-kindergarten through university. As the culmination of more than three years of work, the report sets out an ambitious agenda for educational improvement in the state. The report's goal of ensuring that the state provide necessary schooling and support services to ensure that California's students can "keep up" rather than needing to "catch up" is something that we wholeheartedly endorse. In particular, UC is very supportive of recommendations on improving access of K-12 students to rigorous academic preparation and on ensuring that underserved students have the resources to succeed in more challenging curricula.

I want to thank you and members of the Joint Committee for amending some of the key recommendations and language in the body of the report to address the issues of highest priority to the University. Most importantly, the report now reaffirms the state's historic guarantee of postsecondary access to UC and CSU for all California students who achieve eligibility by being in either the top one-eighth (UC) or the top one-third (CSU) of the statewide high school graduating class. Many consider this guarantee, along with the provision for universal access to the community colleges, as the heart of the existing Master Plan for Higher Education. At a time when resources are limited and the demand for college is increasing dramatically, it is important that California continue this promise for the coming generation of college students.

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We also want to thank you for the changes that ensure that California's unique and historical differences in missions among its public colleges and universities be considered in analyzing possible modifications to current higher education funding practices. The report now reflects more accurately the complexity of higher education funding in a state as large as California and the potential problems of higher education funding models that do not address this complexity. We also appreciate that the final report recognizes that additional state investment in research targeted at addressing California's critical issues needs to be allocated in a manner consistent with the missions of the public higher education segments. Such an investment is one way the University can maintain and enhance its tradition of service to the state through faculty research focused on the needs and challenges facing California.

The University supports the report's goal of enhancing collaboration among the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educational sectors. We look forward to cooperating in areas such as articulation of curricula and assessments and in improving community college transfer. We are also appreciative that the final report maintains the California Postsecondary Education Commission as the entity charged with coordination, planning, and analysis for higher education.

With these areas of mutual agreement underscored, the final report still includes some areas of concern to members of the University community, including Regents and representatives of the Academic Senate. Most of these are issues that require academic judgments crucial to the quality of the University, which is why policy in these areas typically is delegated to the faculty. This is true not just of the University of California, but also of universities in general. Thus, the following recommendations raise concerns, most of which were detailed in my July 2nd letter and attachment to you in response to an earlier draft of the report:

- adopting a single ratio as the "appropriate balance" of permanent/tenure-track and temporary/non-tenure track faculty [Rec. 9]. Universities need flexibility to respond to changing circumstances such as rapid enrollment growth or budgetary deficits.
- providing "pro-rata" compensation for temporary/non-tenure-track faculty who perform functions usually reserved for permanent/tenure-track faculty [Rec. 9.3]. At UC there are few functions reserved exclusively for permanent faculty. Thus, we are unclear as to the intent of this recommendation. Moreover, the University's faculty compensation policy needs to recognize the qualitative differences that scholarship brings to teaching.

- eliminating additional weight for honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses in GPA calculations [Rec. 12.1]. UC faculty are reviewing UC's current practice of giving extra weight for honors and AP courses precisely because of concerns similar to those identified in your report. However, a recommendation to eliminate it entirely is premature and overly prescriptive for a state-level Master Plan. Such weighting was designed to encourage students to take the most challenging classes.
- giving *equal* weight to objective and qualitative personal characteristics in admissions decisions [Rec. 12.2]. UC's newly-adopted comprehensive review policy in admissions aims to achieve a similar goal of evaluating potential students individually in the context of opportunities available and challenges faced. However, using multiple measures in this way could be undercut by a requirement to "equally" weight specific sets of characteristics.
- establishing a transfer associate's degree that would guarantee admission to *any campus* of UC or CSU [Rec. 23.3]. UC is eager to work with colleagues in the other institutions to develop such a degree, but extensive faculty consultation would be required to address divergent major and GPA requirements among the various institutions accepting this degree. Any admission guarantee would have to apply to the system in general rather than a specific campus.
- developing accountability indicators "across common academic content areas" [Rec. 43]. The final report also has new text [p. 65] that suggests developing a statewide assessment instrument to measure a common body of knowledge "represented by the general education requirements that all undergraduate students are expected to complete." UC alone has over 700 different degree programs. Diversity in the content of the general education requirements across and even within different university campuses in California is highly desirable.

In addition, new areas of concern appeared in the final report that were not included in prior drafts:

- creating a state fee policy that would (1) make a distinction between changes in instructional and non-instructional costs and (2) limit fee increases to changes in per capita family income [text on p.130]. The State long ago moved away from the distinction between categories of cost in setting fees and any cap on the level of fee increases must be linked to the amount of State support provided to the colleges and universities charging the fees.

- giving the new California Education Commission responsibility for “directing” intersegmental programs and “coordinating” outreach activities [Rec. 39.1]. The operational and programmatic aspects of higher education should reside in the educational institutions themselves. A commission should focus on policy, planning, and analysis rather than program management.
- recommending changes to the segmental mission statements from the existing Master Plan for Higher Education, including rewording the University’s research mission and adding joint upper division instruction to the Community Colleges’ mission [Recs. 34 & 36]. The current differentiation of functions in the Master Plan for Higher Education as embodied in the mission statements has served the state exceedingly well and should not be altered without extensive deliberation and discussion.

These last recommendations were not made public prior to their appearance in the final report despite the substantive changes they make to key aspects of the existing Master Plan for Higher Education. In addition, given the positive nature of earlier negotiations with the Committee on similar issues, I was surprised by both the tone and content of the new language included in the final report that seems to undercut the progress made in those areas. Passages on the budget process (p. 125) and the Partnership agreements (p. 86-87), along with the characterization of UC’s constitutional status being an impediment to accountability (p. 85-86) do not, I believe, accurately describe the University’s responsiveness to the state or our commitment to public service. I would have preferred, and believe it would have been more beneficial, to have had a discussion on these issues before their inclusion in the final report.

I recognize that the Master Plan report is a document that responds to multiple perspectives and that its implementation will be an evolutionary process. At the same time, I want to underscore two points that were contained in language that UC forwarded to the committee but were not included in the final report. First, not all of the Master Plan recommendations in the final report require or are appropriate for statutory change -- many are within the purview of the faculty or the governing boards of the educational entities and can be implemented by those bodies. Second, we believe it is important that the State and the higher education institutions continue to adhere to the key provisions of the existing Master Plan for Higher Education that are not included nor recommended for alteration in your report. While we support a Master Plan for all of education, we do not want to lose key aspects of the Master Plan for *Higher* Education that has served California so well since 1960.

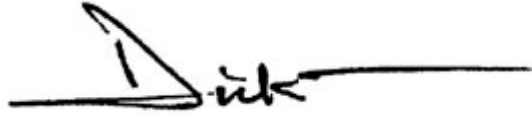
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As always, I appreciate your consideration of our views. Your support of the University is much appreciated. I look forward to further discussion of the issues I have noted and to progress in areas of mutual agreement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard C. Atkinson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Richard C. Atkinson
President

cc: Members of the Joint Committee
Provost King
Senior Vice President Darling
Assistant Vice President Arditti