

College of Letters and Sciences Visioning Plan
March 11, 2016

The College of Letters and Sciences (L&S) is the vital intellectual and educational heart of the University of California, Davis. The diverse fields embraced by L&S are highly curiosity-driven, enabling us to stimulate the academic journey of every UC Davis student and to enrich the scholarly environment as a whole.

L&S is at the core of our undergraduate educational mission. As the university's largest college, we have a teaching mission that reaches all undergraduate students across UC Davis by offering the vast majority of general education courses. We also serve as the home college for a majority of undergraduates at our university. Yet the mission of L&S reaches beyond undergraduate education. L&S features nationally and internationally ranked departments and research programs producing cutting edge research across virtually all fields of scholarly inquiry. These departments and programs are also home to many of the university's graduate programs, thereby making L&S central to graduate education at UC Davis. L&S integrates the intellectual and educational life of the college for all of its major stakeholders—undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty—to better serve the university's missions of research, teaching, and service to the public.

The vision of L&S is guided by these principal considerations:

- UC Davis' mission as a public land grant university
- Our strengths as the educational and research core of a comprehensive research university
- The need to unify L&S not only in a "top down" fashion with a central administrative structure, but even more importantly from the "bottom up" by involving faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates in the research and educational programs of L&S

The Mission of UC Davis as a Public Land Grant University

The vision of L&S is guided by the overarching role of UC Davis as a public land grant university with a mission to serve the people of California and the United States. Originating in the 1862 Morrill Act, which created incentives for states to establish universities, land grant colleges were initially created to foster agricultural and mechanical sciences and create outreach programs. But their mission was greatly expanded to create full-scale public universities serving a rapidly expanding undergraduate population with diverse educational goals. The history of land grant universities thus parallels the history of UC Davis, with its origins as an agricultural research station and its emergence over the past half century as a comprehensive research university with L&S increasingly central to the university's mission.

The system of higher education in the United States includes an unparalleled variety of institutions encompassing community colleges, small liberal arts colleges, private and public universities primarily devoted to undergraduate education, and comprehensive research universities. While there is considerable overlap among the activities of these various institutions, a comprehensive research university such as UC Davis has unique strengths that must inform its own particular vision of its mission. With comprehensive research and educational programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels, UC Davis provides its faculty and students with tremendous opportunities to discover and learn about our world and ourselves and then to use that knowledge to serve our community, a community that is increasingly global in reach.

In our service to the people of California and the United States, UC Davis serves an exceptionally diverse student population. Notably, UC Davis includes an impressively large number of students who are the first in their families to attend college as well as an increasing number of international students.

The diversity of the students we serve poses us with challenges but also gives us opportunities for building a multicultural and inclusive community at UC Davis. We embrace our mission of providing an education that prepares our students to enter society and the work force as informed citizens and productive members of society.

Building on the Strengths of a Comprehensive Research University

Our vision is to integrate and strengthen the core aspects of L&S's mission in a way that builds on our strengths as a comprehensive research university.

One strength of a comprehensive research university such as UC Davis is the capacity to integrate research and teaching to a degree that is not possible in other types of educational institutions, and L&S should capitalize on this asset. The integration of research and teaching can occur at the level of the individual faculty member, for example by involving graduate as well as undergraduate students in research. In this regard it is impressive that 38% of undergraduates at UC Davis conduct or participate in research. L&S should enhance opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in original research and creative activities. Alternatively, the integration of research and teaching can involve several faculty members and their students in collaborative or interdisciplinary research and teaching. Advances in knowledge across the spectrum of academic research over the past decade or more have created a potentially difficult situation: on the one hand, much scholarly research has necessarily crossed traditional disciplinary boundaries, broadening the scope of how we think about and teach our areas of research; on the other hand, scholarship has become increasingly specialized, requiring ever more focus in our research but thereby threatening to isolate us. The College of L&S provides the opportunity to turn this potential problem into a strength by capitalizing on the deep specializations of academic researchers while at the same time encouraging the sharing of knowledge across boundaries in ways that enrich our research and teaching by building a unified community within the college.

The Need to Unify the College's Communities from the "Bottom Up"

We recognize and respect the fact that L&S, as with the university as a whole, includes a number of different constituencies, and has an impact on many more. In his *The Uses of the University* (1963), former UC Chancellor Clark Kerr argued that what he termed the "multiversity" had grown to replace the "uni-versity" of the past: "The multiversity is an inconsistent institution. It is not one community but several—the community of the undergraduate and the community of the graduate; the community of the humanist, the community of the social scientist, and the community of the scientist; the communities of the professional schools; the community of all the nonacademic personnel; the community of the administrators." In thinking about the vision for L&S, we must consider the principal communities contained within a comprehensive research university—undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, staff, and administrators—and how to best serve their various needs and aims.

A starting point in envisioning what L&S should therefore be is to recognize that the unity and coherence of the college cannot be achieved "top down" by a single college administration. Rather, this unity must as much as possible be realized from the "bottom up" if undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty are to identify as members of the college.

The unity of the College of L&S creates the conditions for a more coherent and cooperative community of faculty and students across different disciplines. Administrative unification alone cannot create this community without the active participation of its diverse members and constituencies. Likewise, the administrative, research, and educational activities made possible by a unified L&S college are considerable, but are unlikely to serve every constituent's needs and goals. And the unified college serves to vitalize those activities appropriately done at a more local level. Humanist scholars and

educators have different needs than quantitative social scientists, and natural scientists have still different needs. The structure of L&S reflects and recognizes both those areas where we have united goals-- hence a unified college-- and those areas where our needs and norms differ-- hence the continued existence of different divisions for the humanities and arts, social sciences, and mathematics and physical sciences within L&S.

The diversity of communities contained within L&S and UC Davis as a whole is the source of many of its strengths. Cohesion among the departments and divisions of L&S is what gives greater coherence to the aims of these various communities and their ability to achieve their aims while still respecting the diversity of their goals and needs. The unity of L&S must come from and include the communities who are principally responsible for achieving the mission of the university and college with regard to research, teaching, and public service: faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. In short, the intellectual community of L&S arises from a “bottom up” approach to integrating our missions of research, teaching, and public service.

Liberal Arts Education in a Comprehensive Research University: Integrating Research and Teaching

Central to L&S is an undergraduate education that takes students on an academic journey by exposing them to a vibrant, broad-based liberal arts education at the highest level of excellence. L&S offers the vast majority of general education courses to undergraduates across UC Davis, but, more importantly, these same courses serve as the foundation for the impressive array of majors and programs within L&S where students can explore knowledge and deepen their understanding. Yet L&S is not a college focused primarily or exclusively on providing a liberal arts education to undergraduates. We must provide such an education to our students in such a way that takes advantage of being a comprehensive research university. L&S creates common communities for faculty to integrate research and teaching across disciplinary boundaries in order to enrich the intellectual life in the college for all of its members-- faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates—and for the larger community.

Faculty members within L&S are engaged in two primary activities, teaching and scholarly research or creative activity, both of which contribute to the mission of the university in serving the public. The College of L&S provides the opportunity to capitalize on the deep specialization of academic researchers while encouraging the sharing of knowledge across boundaries in ways that enrich our research and teaching. Two paths toward further enhancing this goal would be the creation of:

- L&S Institute for Transformative Studies
- Cluster Courses across L&S

These proposals can potentially be integrated, for example by housing cluster courses in the proposed Institute, and in a separate “Big Idea” proposal we have proposed that they be integrated, but for the present purposes these two proposals can be discussed separately.

L&S Institute for Transformative Studies

The L&S Institute for Transformative Studies embodies a vision of L&S as an entity whose research and pedagogical impact can and should be substantially larger than the sum of its parts. Located in L&S but serving the entire university, the Institute would bring together a diverse group of faculty and students from across the college as well as collaborators from our other colleges within UC Davis and schools across the nation and the world. Bringing scholars and students together would strengthen our connections to one another and increase our visibility to

the global scholarly community by creating and pursuing collaborations and positive spillovers that none of them could produce on their own.

The Institute would be distinct from institutions with similar-sounding names like Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, Stanford's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, or Berlin's Wissenschaftskolleg. We envision an Institute that is both more inclusive and more innovative than these institutions.

As for inclusivity, we want the Institute to include scholars at all career stages, from both inside UC Davis and from other institutions, and to integrate graduate and undergraduate students into its activities. Visiting scholars and artists would be a central component of the Institute, and rather than sporadically intermingling with local faculty they would participate in the Institute's projects, and would then function as our "ambassadors" upon returning to their home countries and institutions.

As for innovation, we want the Institute to be where research and pedagogical initiatives *emerge* and incubate, not where they go to be completed. The Institute would be a space where the curiosity-based intellectual work of all the arts and sciences can be accelerated by seeding, every year, a variety of new projects that L&S faculty and students articulate across divisional lines or in one specific field in collaboration with scholars from other parts of the country and the world. The distinctly global dimension of the Institute's activities reflects a commitment to pursuing and maintaining diversity while simultaneously instilling a much-needed international perspective into our students' lives. The Institute would pursue these goals not only through the makeup of its researchers, but also by creating an intellectual environment that is welcoming to visitors from around the world and facilitates their interaction with our diverse student body.

Among the activities or programs we envision for the Institute would be residential fellowships for faculty conducting individual research or creative activities as well as team fellowships for interdisciplinary or collaborative research among UC Davis faculty and visiting scholars and artists, as well as postdoctoral fellows and graduate students. Another component would be curricular development, including lectures by Institute fellows, summer school programs, and short-term master classes, and development of the cluster courses we envision.

Cluster Courses

Our second major proposal is to create "cluster" courses for undergraduates that involve faculty and graduate students from across the three academic divisions in L&S (and beyond) in order to integrate the experience of teaching and learning of faculty and students within a more unified community. The unification of L&S under a single dean should reduce the disincentives and administrative obstacles that have tended in the past to prevent such innovative cross-disciplinary teaching collaborations. Such an educational program might also be integrated within the research institute we envision, but as already noted could also function in parallel.

Cluster courses would bring together faculty from different disciplines across L&S to learn from one another, and could involve graduate students as teaching fellows to further their own academic growth and pedagogical experience. These courses would give undergraduates a learning experience that allows them to see connections across disciplines to broaden their intellectual horizons. We believe that such courses would involve faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates in a way that would give them a more integrated academic experience and provide the "bottom up" sense of belonging to a more unified community within the college.

A number of universities have programs of interdisciplinary courses for undergraduates, but we point in particular to UCLA as a potential model. (See <http://www.ugeducation.ucla.edu/uei/clusters.htm>) UCLA has developed about ten different cluster courses on different topics (food safety, the evolution of the cosmos, the 1960s, etc.). These are year-long courses involving faculty from different academic disciplines, with students attending two quarters of lecture format courses and then taking a seminar in the third quarter. The course sequence is designed to satisfy a number of GE distributional and other requirements, as well as the advanced writing requirements through the seminar in particular. Developing year-long cluster courses in L&S would be quite challenging, but also potentially extremely rewarding for all participants. Another model that would be easier to develop, which could also serve as the starting point for more ambitious year-long courses, would be to have quarter-long courses, for example with two lectures per week by faculty from various disciplines and then a seminar once per week led by the faculty members and graduate student teaching fellows. Whatever the specific model developed, such cluster courses have the goal of capitalizing on the wide range of research done by faculty in L&S in different disciplines to educate our students to think across boundaries. Since we envision faculty from across different disciplines coming together and developing these courses in a “bottom up” way, in keeping with our vision of how to integrate the various constituencies within L&S, the content of these courses would depend on faculty interest. For example, we might imagine a course on climate change bringing together a natural scientist from earth and planetary sciences, a social scientist from economics or political science, and a humanist from American studies or one of the cultural studies departments.

Finally, if properly structured and in particular with a robust seminar component that provides an environment where students can improve their writing and communication skills under close supervision by faculty and teaching fellows, these cluster courses would give our students a much increased opportunity for small class educational experience so vital for their development as students. Various initiatives over the years at UC Davis and in L&S have been proposed to improve the writing and communication skills of our students, but they have had limited success for various reasons including resource constraints and the imperatives of teaching a large undergraduate population, including an increasing number of students who come to UC Davis with inadequate preparation. We see the cluster courses as one potential way to address the pressing need for increased attention to developing students’ writing skills.

Conclusion

We have outlined a vision of a strong and unified College of L&S that builds on and enhances our existing strengths as part of a comprehensive research university with a mission of public service. Our proposals for the Institute for Transformative Studies and the cluster courses will create an integrated approach to research and teaching that will distinguish us from other similar colleges in the UC system and beyond, thereby increasing the visibility of our entire campus, and further catalyze the rise of UC Davis as one of the leading universities in the nation and the world. All of the communities within L&S look forward to working with our leadership to make this vision a reality.