

Academic Futures: A Summary of Responses from Campus on the Draft Report

Note: All comments submitted to the website and all response pieces drafted by members of the campus community will be forwarded along with the final Academic Futures report. We offer the following as a quick overview of those ideas and of the comments heard at the numerous town halls held over the past month. As the deadline for response papers was 5:00 on Friday, September 28 and the AF Report must be submitted on October 1, it was only possible to provide a guide to the responses. This document is provided so that those who do not have the time to read all 41 responses can have a sense of our community's response. This document was prepared on behalf of the committee by Emily CoBabe-Ammann and Jeff Cox

Introduction

On September 1, the Academic Futures Committee presented its draft report to campus. Over the last month, through Town Halls, short Response Papers and comments posted on the [Academic Futures website](#), we have worked to collect campus reactions, opinions and suggestions for the Academic Futures process. These responses are considered to be part of the submission of the final AF report. The campus and its leadership will take these reactions and responses into account as it considers the report itself.

With the exception of factual errors and clarifications, few changes have been made to the Committee's Report for its final submission. (The only major change was to move towards the front of the report the section on supporting the campus community to highlight its foundational role in the overall recommendations.) Instead, we have briefly summarized the campus comments in this companion document. This summary is not an exhaustive list of recommendations; rather it is designed to provide a quick overview of the key themes and topics that have emerged in the last month. We strongly encourage readers to look at the campus Response Papers accompanying this report, where our community, once again, invested their time to share their ideas and reactions to support the Academic Futures process going forward.

General Campus Reaction to the Academic Futures Report

Whether through conversation or as part of the written record, the reaction to Academic Futures has been overwhelmingly positive. Our community applauded the ambition, intent and level of detail of the work. Only very rarely did input imply an unwillingness to engage in the Academic Futures process and its follow-on work. As one response put it, *"There is a tone of generosity and graciousness and concern for all that is a joy to see in Academic Futures, along with a lot of wonderful suggestions"*. **That is not to say that there are not strong suggestions for improvements, additional ideas for implementing the report's recommendations, and objections to portions of the committee's findings.**

The Academic Futures process itself, with its emphasis on campus engagement and transparency, was highlighted as an important component of the Academic Futures effort, lending credibility to the effort and creating support across the campus. The Academic Futures Report and its process is seen by many as creating a campus mandate for leadership to act. On such response: *"We applaud the Report and encourage our campus leadership to implement it rapidly and effectively"*.

Overall, campus liked the *level* of the recommendations in the Report, pitched to be actionable and with concrete first steps. Our colleagues understood and appreciated the project model of the report, sitting between a strategic plan and a nuts-and-bolts conversation around

implementation. That, again, is not to say that campus agreed with everything presented in the Report. Sometimes criticisms were the result of authentic disagreement with the Committee; other times it was the result of ambiguity of what the implications of recommendations could be going forward. At times, the report was simply not clear or used misleading language; in those cases, we have tried to fix the wording to provide clarity. The campus provided hundreds of suggestions for improvement and highlighted critical areas of concern within the ideas and projects presented, many of which are presented below.

Throughout the month, we often heard significant concern expressed regarding leadership's willingness to act authentically and meaningfully. This represents, we believe, a critical juncture for campus leadership to demonstrate that, with campus now engaged, they can move forward in a timely, effective and recognizable way. As the committee states in the preface to its report, it believes that this process has provided the campus and its leadership with a mandate to move forward on these ideas.

The Public University

The reaffirmation of CU Boulder as a public university with its commitment to public engagement and scholarship, support for the liberal arts (by which we mean the range of traditional disciplines in the humanities, natural sciences, arts and social sciences), and affordability represents, in the eyes of our colleagues, the single most important idea within the Academic Futures report, resonating throughout our community.

With regard to public engagement and scholarship, we were reminded by a number of responses that we already have organizations on campus that do this work (e.g., CU Engage, Office of Outreach and Engagement, Center for Communication and Democratic Engagement, Metro Lab, CEDaR, Engineers without Borders, etc.) and that these communities of practice can support the entire campus as we move down this important path. Many of the comments we received helped build a more nuanced picture of what this should mean for our university, including:

- An explicit affirmation of the importance of academic freedom, open discussion, constructive disagreement, and student resilience to the future of CU. This includes rewarding CU Boulder scholars (faculty, researchers, students) who make their research freely available through disciplinary or institutional repositories as supported by the university's Open Access policy, encouraging the use (and development) of open source textbooks and other resources, and developing evaluative processes to recognize research outputs of alternative scholarship.
- A commitment to value and reward open and alternative forms of scholarship, especially in annual review and tenure/promotion processes. This includes recognition of those on campus, including in our libraries, who already work to support and develop infrastructure to enable access to scholarship as a public good.
- A recognition that frameworks for creating a coherent and coordinated approach to campus-level outreach and engagement already exist, which could be highlighted, it is urged by, for example, seeking the Carnegie Foundation's Elective Community Engagement Classification.

For many on campus, though not all, the continued commitment to the liberal arts and to the importance of the humanities was a critical statement. Responses often focused on the recognition that this framework developed critical thinking skills for our students that prepared them for a lifetime of learning and participating in society.

The theme of affordability and accountability to our students was interwoven throughout our conversations, highlighting the need to keep this at the forefront of our conversations

Lastly, we heard how innovation can help move CU/Boulder towards being a “cutting edge” public University. Responses point out that we have innovation occurring across campus at all levels which we need to recognize, celebrate and elevate. We have coordinated efforts to support innovation, including the Research and Innovation Office, that need to be expanded and supported.

Supporting and Sustaining Our Community

“CU has an opportunity to be a national leader by understanding the need to encourage and respect all these relatively under-rewarded colleagues, and we look forward to working with the university’s leadership to accomplish that goal.”

Across the board, the theme of supporting our community received overwhelming support. Many respondents provide critical details on how to do that work, outlining challenges and pathways for success on everything from childcare and housing to unifying the east and west parts of campus into a coherent research and teaching whole.

Mentoring and professional development was an area of enthusiastic discussion. Many groups on campus have already been working on creating opportunities for their people, with various levels of support and coordination. Some units have developed comprehensive approaches to this effort, offering important models for campus. As an example, the libraries have developed a formal mentoring program for their faculty, appointed a task force exploring how to provide mentoring for their staff, developed robust orientation procedures, and added a category into their tenure/promotion guidelines to recognize digital scholarship and other digital research outputs.

Finding effective professional pathways for our teaching faculty also emerged with great regularity. Many feel that, in order to remain competitive among leading R1 universities, and to achieve “T1” status, CU must attract and retain high quality teaching faculty. This, in turn, requires CU to be explicit in recognizing the value of a talented, diverse and committed teaching faculty corps (i.e., instructors and senior instructors). Several suggested that CU create professorial teaching titles that also provide a clear career trajectory for teaching faculty at CU.

Project 1: Student-Centered campus

The re-affirmation of CU Boulder as a student-centered campus clearly resonated across campus, with its emphasis on teaching excellence. Many pointed out that central to this tenet is a clear understanding, based on educational research, of what teaching excellence means and how it is measured – and then including that in the framework of annual review and promotion and tenure. In addition, some went farther, calling for departments to be held accountable for their undergraduate and graduate student success, incentivizing a true student-centered approach, using our institutional departmental data to ground truth the efforts.

Student advising emerged as consistent theme, often revolving around the tension between a distributed approach to advising versus a more centralized approach. There is considerable support for a University-wide exploratory advising plan along with an integrated first year program, inclusive of orientation activities and a CU-101 course to fully integrate new students into the University community. Some suggest then a transition to more discipline-based advising as students advance. Many pointed to the high caseloads as a challenge for advising staff, a lack of a coherent community of practice for sharing best practices, and the need for more opportunities for professional development.

Unified student experiences were well received by the community, though thoughts on what those experiences looked like varied widely. Giving students many opportunities to

“productively fail” and develop a growth mindset, spread through a set of common educational experiences, was an idea that emerged several times. Many parts of campus found the idea of a common curriculum daunting; some feel they already have it. Several groups emphasized the importance of explicitly including both student teaching experiences (like the successful LA program) and community engagement opportunities in this framework.

The Academic Futures report supported the work of the Foundations of Excellence and its first-year experiences. Parts of the community felt that, in this discussion, the report overlooked the important roll that the RAPs instructors play in this effort - advising, teaching, and connecting students to the CU community. Other groups also play critical roles, including the libraries as they support transfer students, who include such overlapping groups as nontraditional students, commuter students, veteran students, international students, and first generation students.

Teaching and Learning Center: There is a recognition that we have already done a tremendous amount of groundwork, as a campus, to move in this direction. Many have already built strong, active partnerships of pedagogical collaboration and design across disciplines. Several suggested that any Center or framework needed to include outcomes assessment and support for faculty, helping the campus to move beyond the FCQs as a metric for teaching.

Not everyone is convinced of that centralization of these efforts was the right approach. While a Center could allow for tighter interactions among those housed there, it could, some felt, negatively impact existing relationships and collaborations that teaching and learning units have built. Some suggested that a hybrid model, essentially a coordinated hub-and-spoke model, might serve the campus better, with a small *hub* as a clearinghouse for communication and coordination among the distributed groups.

Project 2: Interdisciplinarity

No one argued against the importance of embracing interdisciplinarity as part of our core efforts at CU Boulder, but how we get there is another story. On the research side, response pieces and comments at town halls pointed out that the reconfigured Research and Innovation Office (RIO) already plays the role envisioned in the report. RIO convenes interdisciplinary groups around emerging research areas through Research Blitzes, convening groups on emergent themes (quantum research, computation biology, sustainability); it provides faculty development (e.g., PI Academy) and identifies external funding opportunities. Additionally, RIO has intentionally identified additional opportunities to support faculty in the arts and humanities. Several groups also identified the important role of the research institutes in interdisciplinary research across campus, though several called for a clearer administrative infrastructure, including a Vice Chancellor with responsibility for the institutes. The libraries also have work in this space, particularly their partnership with Research Computing in the Center for Research Data and Digital Scholarship (CRDDS).

There was a strong suggestion that the interdisciplinary section should have included a reference to the creative work on campus more directly. There are islands and neighborhoods of activity (i.e., our disciplinary silos), but not yet a strong sense of a larger artistic community, nor are there structures and mechanisms to powerfully harness this collective nexus.

On the education side, there is strong agreement that the campus needs to do more to facilitate interdisciplinary education. Many faculty were enamored by the prospect of ‘owning’ their fourth course, as a first step in this direction. It was also clear that, at the unit level, this proposal creates challenges, particularly where this is not excessive TTT teaching capacity or where accreditation has created a highly conscripted curriculum. It is clear that more work would need to be done to avoid unintended consequences.

Interdisciplinarity was also embraced by the operational side of the campus, which highlighted opportunities to allow for more strategic decision-making with available resources,

optimal use of research funds and startup packages, better lab space utilization, and minimizing infrastructure needs.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the interdisciplinary discussion was the discussion around ATLAS. ATLAS is recognized by faculty across campus as an innovative and successful program that many felt should not be interfered with. ATLAS faculty were also clear that they not consulted in the drafting of a white paper on ATLAS submitted as part of the Academic Futures process last year and that they did not feel sufficiently included in the AF process. Their faculty ask that the Provost affirm ATLAS as an asset and support its evolution. But it is also clear that the ATLAS footprint overlaps with other entities on campus, suggesting that campus-level leadership should bring together and guide the necessary conversations and decision-making process to clarify roles and areas of emphasis.

Project 3: Internationalization

There is agreement that internationalization should be fundamental to our education and research enterprise, supporting our international students and faculty, offering global opportunities for our students, and facilitating and support international research and education. It is a topic that the campus has looked at numerous times. It is clear that we have made some progress, with dedicated (often grass roots) faculty and staff working in this area. In addition, we have begun to develop a cadre of leaders supporting internationalization, including the new Director of International Student Academic Success; we have seen an expansion of the International Student and Scholar Services, increases in Education Abroad opportunities, and new positions of Director of International Programs in both Engineering and Law. However, it is also clear that gaps still exist, including but not limited to the need for a campus strategy in developing global partnerships, more robust support for faculty seeking international connections, a centralized database of global research connections, alumni, and current international research, and a point person or team to support faculty and staff travelling abroad. In addition, being an engaging place for international students means providing campus information, websites and materials in languages other than English.

Colleagues point out that one area that the report did not emphasize was the study of non-US cultures. A truly internationalized campus would provide students with a deep knowledge of at least one other culture and language. CU Boulder has many existing programs that allow students to learn about non-US cultures, and, it is argued, the campus should support these programs and expand opportunities for students to study non-US cultures and languages. The campus should incentivize the study of non-US cultures through the expansion of campus-wide language requirements.

Project 4: Technology in Education, Online and Distance

While there was general support for integrating online and distance education, as well as technology, more fully into the education mission of the university, many wanted to ensure that the Academic Futures process took full advantage of the existing expertise and infrastructures on campus. The lack of explicit mention of the work of Continuing Education in this realm was called out, as well as the lack of highlighting other centers of excellent work. Here again, there was tension between distributed versus centralized models, though the notion of networked and coordinated efforts put forward by the Committee was largely well received upon discussion. There was a recommendation that an “e-school” or “online center of excellence” be developed that would be the home for fully online certificate and degree programs, and attract new student populations, nontraditional students, and lifelong learners. Many supported the recommendation to count online courses to be “part of faculty and staff normal teaching loads.”

Governance

As an update to the Academic Futures report, the Boulder Faculty Assembly Executive Committee has endorsed the Academic Futures recommendation that a Task Force be formed to further consider ways to improve the structure and process of effective faculty governance through the Boulder Faculty Assembly, and at various levels of governance.