

In times of great national turbulence, distrust can permeate local politics. Personal experiences at an institution can serve to exaggerate or mitigate the impression of mistrust. At this moment, given my personal experiences in several administrations at UCSC, I must confess to feeling deeply suspicious of the administration's claims about why they continue to refuse to give serious consideration to the alternative sites mentioned in the revised draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR-rev). This comment explains why.

Virtually everyone acknowledges that we need child care for staff and faculty as well as for students. We have been fighting this battle for at least 30 years. Second, virtually everyone knows that we are desperately short on beds for students, and again affordability enters the picture. The question is not IF. The question is HOW.

One seemingly good means to go forward with expensive housing projects is the P3 plan proposed by President Napolitano. We can avoid the problems of debt-ceilings. We can link with professionals who appear to have expertise in matters of construction and finance. But, as the P3 idea is a new one, we may lack expertise in business savvy and may end up with the tail wagging the dog. A short term solution to an immediate crisis may prove not only short-sighted but ultimately very costly to our campus both in financial terms and in terms of the spirit of the school.

Three Threats

Three threats to the spirit of UC Santa Cruz appear imminent in the proposed plans. First, the West Side housing project as now conceived poses a threat to UCSC's cherished college system. UCSC is the only public research university that seeks to give a collegiate experience to all its undergraduates, or at least to all its freshman. All other great research universities that also devote focused attention on how age-appropriate developmental experiences delivered in small living-learning environments affect the minds and hearts of undergraduates are in the private section. Yale, Rice, Princeton, Wesleyan, and many others come readily to mind. Great public research universities like the University of Michigan or the University of Virginia provide the living-learning environment to a small cadre of students, not to the whole student body or even to the whole freshman class. If UCSC is to retain its role in helping preserve a true democracy in the United States, it should rail against the divide between public and private higher education.

A second threat comes in the proposed destruction of the East Meadow. We have declared ourselves stewards of the land. Open land is more and more rare in Santa Cruz county. How uplifting to students, to their families, and to all from the community who visit UCSC to arrive at a breath-taking visit. How deflating to see pre-fab housing. Montesquieu had it right: our environment influences our capacities for thought and feeling.

That we should so easily abandon the principles on which the campus was founded and which have been reiterated again and again is dispiriting. And here is the greatest threat of all: there may be someone rushing to build her or his vitae by pushing for us to "solve the crisis" under

his or her watch. We have let the urgent overtake the important, and the bill will come due both sooner and later. In the near-term many donors, myself included, will turn away from the school. In the long term – say 40 years from now – the school may be crippled by new housing costs just as we are crippled today by the costs of re-building Kresge and Family Student Housing, costs that were predictable and were predicted 40 years ago.

Alternatives

The major sticking point for many opponents of the DEIR-rev is the continued refusal to take seriously alternative plans to the proposed behemoth housing on the West Side and the pre-fab modules on the East Meadow. The East Campus Infill project had been abandoned in 2009, apparently with the same sense of urgency and short-sightedness that we see again today. The north campus parking area and, yes, the caravan village, would be good places to consider building. In addition to places noted in the DEIR -rev, there are additional sites to consider or reconsider such as the buffer zone next to Hagar, the plot that now contains the condemned and currently un-useable University House, the area next to Rachel Carson College tennis courts, the land to be used for the second phase of Ranch View (where the 39 buildings could be built on an accelerated schedule, leased to Family and Student Housing families, and then sold to faculty), and locations in-town.

Using such alternatives could preserve our values and our nature and could have some unexpected advantages. One main advantage might be – a more affordable and more child-centric day care arrangement than is envisioned now. Another advantage might be enhanced town-gown relations.

Why such short shift to the advantages?

Proponents of the P3 plan claim that the alternative would be exorbitantly expensive. But figures proving their point seem to be hard to find. I am not on the UCSC Foundation Board, but my friends who are on the Board exhibit some frustration at what appears to be obfuscation on the part of the administration.

Non-board members like myself have also been blocked. Before ill health forced me to take a medical leave from my duties, I attended all the public information meetings that occurred on campus when I was not in class. The meetings were a lesson in frustration. Consultants and officials presented charts and photos and did not leave time for real questions. When someone managed to slip in a real, pointed question, the answers were disappointing. Take one specific instance. The consultant exhibited an image of how the East Meadow complex would appear from the intersection of Hagar Drive and the road to the lower quarry; but he was forced to admit that the viewpoint was one inch off the groups, not 60 or 70 or 80 inches as might occur to a person walk or in a car. Squirrels might be very happy, but such deception (intentional or not) added little credence to the account.

Additional cynicism

My personal experiences in various roles at UC Santa Cruz has informed my view point about the processes by which we have come to this unfortunate pass. I disclosed them in the hope that you will put my views in context.

In 1998, I came to the campus as a Full Professor. The next year I made the mistake of accepting an invitation into the cabinet of Chancellor MRC Greenwood. I reported directly to the Executive Vice Chancellor (EVC) John Simpson in the newly created role of Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Immediately I could see how people's personal agendas and relationships had serious and often negative ramifications for the larger community. The personal relationship between Linda Goff and MRC Greenwood meant that the EVC was excluded from some important discussions and decisions. It also facilitated Greenwood's plan to weaken the college system (over which Goff stood) in her attempt to get UCSC admitted to the AAU. These shenanigans – and similar battles between Student Affairs and the Business Administrative Services -- were not apparent to those outside the cabinet; but the effects were. My frustrations led to my resignation after 4 months in office.

Later, I served as Vice Chair and then Chair of the Academic Senate. I was on the podium with Chancellor Denice Denton at her investiture, November 4, 2005, sitting next to President Dynes as he texted the announcement to the news media of the resignation of MRC Greenwood due to improper behavior at the Office of the President. The stories mentioning UCSC that appeared on November 5 spoke more of the improper dealings of MRC Greenwood (concerning failure to disclose her associations with Goff) than of Denton. If the Denton administration had not been doomed from that moment, it became doomed as the Chancellor was more and more isolated. Her depression and suicide on June 24, 2006 thankfully occurred off campus; but a pall was cast.

From 2010-2016 I had the great honor to serve as Provost of Cowell College. In that role I could again see how one or two strong voices in the central administration at UCSC might hold sway over others. Chancellor George Blumenthal, whom I have counted as a friend and admired as a leader, has many fine attributes. But he shuns discord and will seek to avoid having anyone in his team meet with public embarrassment. Many times such a stance is optimal. Other times, it is not. It seems to me that George Blumenthal's unfortunate comments about the East Meadow being a Cow Patch are symptomatic of how he has removed himself from any down-and-dirty battles that might be occurring within his administration. If such battles were occurring, it is also obvious that some additional factors would make them hard to resolve: a) a still relatively new EVC whose main focus is not on this matter but on her Strategic Academic Plan; and b) an organizational chart where there is no Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and where the Planning and Budget department is lateral to, neither subsumed under nor subsuming, the unit for Business Administration.

Too Late?

Is it too late to turn the tide? I hope not. I am inspired by how one brave physician – with the help of many others – brought the town of Detroit to admit that it had made a huge mistake when it switched water sources. The original idea to make the switch seemed a good one; but as data showing its dire consequences poured in, resistance built to admitting the problem. Then, one day, when the information simply overwhelmed those seeking to hide from embarrassment, the tide changed. We at UCSC have embarked on a path to build a child care center and to augment student housing. We need these facilities as badly as Detroit needed affordable water. But let us not poison ourselves in the process. Let's slow down and reconsider the alternative sites, using real and verifiable figures.

Thank you for your attention.

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