

Final Report on the Possibility Conversations

March 28, 2014

Academic Plan Committee (APC)

Introduction

Beginning in Fall 2013 at Chico State, the Academic Plan Committee (APC) was charged to lead two phases of an engagement process inspired by the book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Block, 2009). The premise of Block's book suggests that vibrant and successful communities are created by people who feel connected, committed, and prepared to take action on issues that they believe are most important to the community and the people it serves. Phase I focused on possibility conversations, and Phase II will focus on commitment and action conversations. This report offers the results of Phase I.

Phase I: Possibility Conversations

Between October and December of 2013, APC planned and conducted 61 possibility conversations. These conversations were convened not only to begin collecting information and ideas that would renew our Academic Plan, but also to revitalize our campus community. The groups who participated in the conversations represented faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community members.

Each possibility conversation group was staffed with a moderator and a scribe. The latter registered and compiled main points of the conversation into a report and submitted it to APC. By mid-December of 2013, APC collected 61 reports and these formed the original data sets with minor redactions made to protect anonymity (e.g., removing individual names or other specific information).

Data Analysis Process

Numerous stakeholders within the Chico State community participated in the data analysis process, including the Academic Plan Committee (APC), the Associated Students, and the Academic Senate in collaboration with the President's Cabinet members, the Staff Council, the Council of Academic Deans (CAD), the Council of Chairs, and the CSU, Chico California Faculty Association (CFA). Each stakeholder group read the 61 sets of data or a subset of the data and did its own meta-analysis, producing themes that they identified as emerging from the data. The APC gathered all of the meta-analyses produced by each of the groups and here offers two forms of results: textual results and graphic results.

Textual Results

It was apparent that meta-analyses of the original data sets, whether in the forms of requests, commentary, brainstorming, discussion, observations, hopes or concerns, all pointed to three overarching components of the possibility conversations that support the growth and improvement of a learning organization such as CSU, Chico. Sustaining the three overarching components, six thematic elements emerged. They are listed as follows:

Three Overarching Goals:

- I. Prepare students for success in a diverse and rapidly changing world.
- II. Build an academic community focused on our collective well-being and success.
- III. Cultivate the Chico Experience.

Six Thematic Elements

1. Support and Prepare Students for Lifelong Success: Commit to the goal of inclusive excellence for all students as we prepare them for fulfilling professional, civic and personal lives.
2. Promote Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Sustain an ethic of rigor and accountability for everyone involved in the essential activities for our students' success. Strive to cultivate professional excellence in students, staff, faculty and administrators.
3. Build Community through Connections, Relationships and Collaboration: Create and sustain the communities needed for our collective success. Foster our sense of place and history, grounded in local, and linked to global communities.
4. Commit to Faculty Renewal: Reflect collectively on the quality of faculty life in a context of rapid change. Invest in individual faculty excellence and build an academic community that supports our collective success and well-being.
5. Commit to Staff Renewal: Recognize staff collectively as essential contributors to the quality of our academic community and student success. Invest in staff excellence to support our academic community.
6. Enhance Business/Administrative Processes, Communication, and Transparency: Strengthen administrative effectiveness to support our shared priorities.

To assist richer understanding, specific descriptors were offered to further elucidate each of the six themes.

1. Support and Prepare Students for Lifelong Success: Commit to the goal of inclusive excellence for all students as we prepare them for fulfilling professional, civic and personal lives.

For example, **professional preparation** opportunities with real world activities and curriculum were associated with this theme. Requests were made for career planning and advising as well as curriculum that assisted students with preparing for the professional world of work that was grounded in the local yet linked to the global. The conversations also highlighted the importance of global knowledge, international experiences as well as second language acquisition in providing students with a clear advantage in their future careers. **Life skills** were another part of this theme which included opportunities to develop *communication* and *critical thinking skills* (e.g., writing, reading, speaking, and presenting). Multiple literacies were offered as a point of focus, such as *information*, *technological*, and *financial literacy*. Finally, **personal and social responsibility** characterized this theme with more and continued emphasis upon civic engagement, community-based research and practice, sustainability and ethical behavior. A renewed commitment to diversity was also called for.

2. Promote Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Sustain an ethic of rigor and accountability for everyone involved in the essential activities for our students' success. Strive to cultivate professional excellence in students, staff, faculty and administration.

It was evident in this theme that CSU, Chico faculty, staff, students, administrators, community stakeholders, and faculty rights advocacy groups believe in our Normal School heritage. The conversations clearly called for **demonstrated excellence in teaching**. **Curricular innovation** as well as pedagogical innovation were strongly encouraged. For example, conversations generated possibilities for a *renewal of major curriculum*, continued *demonstration of disciplinary excellence* and ways to provide opportunities for *interdisciplinary innovation*. **Pedagogical innovation** also generated enthusiasm. For example, many ideas focused on *active, hands-on learning*, requests for *innovative learning spaces* (e.g., up-to-date technology and equipment) and suggestions for *appropriate use of online resources* and instruction as a supplement to traditional instruction. In addition, pedagogical innovation was envisioned to include *immersive learning experiences for all students*. These immersive experiences could include *internships*, *study abroad*, *civic engagement*, *service learning*, *research opportunities* and *imaginative capstone experiences*. All of these ideas underscore the need to **enhance interaction with professors** which could be achieved by student and faculty *collaborative projects*. Finally, many participants suggested that we recommit to *examining clarity and purpose* of **General Education** and employ creative strategies to *measure program success* and *student achievement*.

3. Build Community through Connections, Relationships and Collaboration: Create and sustain the communities needed for our collective success. Foster our sense of place and history, grounded in local, and linked to global communities. **Mentoring** was clearly a value

that was expressed in multiple ways: *Peer mentoring* among students, *faculty and staff mentoring of students*, *faculty mentoring* to support community members and organizations, *staff mentoring* in order to support best practices as well as commit to the *continuous development of institutional leaders*. Community building and mentoring, however, require us to make relationships with each other and many conversations identified the designing and availability of ***collaborative spaces*** for mentorship to flourish. One way to consider this a possibility was to establish a *Faculty/Staff Commons* while another was to envision creative *research, teaching, and learning spaces*. These spaces could be used to invite creative mentorship and to support *interdisciplinary collaborations among faculty and students in teaching and research*.

There was clearly a call for building, supporting, and sustaining community on campus but “community” was broadly defined. In this theme, characteristic statements and brainstorming pointed to support for the *North State community* and *staying connected to alumni*. As always we remain committed to our values of *diversity* and *sustainability*.

4. Commit to Faculty Renewal: Reflect collectively on the quality of faculty life in a context of rapid change and ongoing resource challenges. Invest in individual faculty excellence and build an academic community that supports our collective success and well-being.

Creating a sustainable and quality professional life for faculty requires ***renewed attention to faculty hiring and compensation***. This emphasis on faculty renewal called for creative, new ***professional development opportunities for faculty***. An emphasis on a sustainable ***workload*** was characteristic in this theme. For example, possibilities for ***dialogue and flexibility regarding the competing demands of faculty life*** were generated in the conversations with requests for a ***review of Retention, Tenure and Promotion guidelines, support of research and creative activity*** and ***financial and technological resources in support of excellence in teaching and research***.

Clearly discussions about a sustainable workload and an emphasis on faculty renewal included assertions that ***faculty wellness*** must become a priority. Many called for faculty to make the same ***commitment to the qualities of personal and social responsibility we desire in our students***. Finally, ***rigor and accountability in faculty work*** were emphasized as common values among the discussants.

5. Commit to Staff Renewal: Recognize staff collectively as essential contributors to the quality of our academic community and student success. Invest in staff excellence to support our academic community.

Staff are essential members of the CSU, Chico community and contribute to providing and maintaining a high quality learning environment for our students. In order to honor their contributions to the university community, renewed **attention to staff hiring and compensation** emerged as a high priority. **Professional development opportunities for staff and equitable and consistent consideration of their workload** were offered as possibilities for revitalizing, renewing, and refreshing staff members; as were programs and practices that **promote staff wellness**. In addition, **rigor and accountability in staff performance** were important in this theme. In order to achieve these high goals, participants in the conversations noted that **technological tools to enable efficient and effective staff work** were required.

6. Enhance Business/Administrative Processes, Communication & Transparency: Strengthen administrative effectiveness to support our shared priorities.

This theme generated discussion points that called for **data-driven, technologically-sophisticated and streamlined business practices** in order to reduce red tape, to enhance communication, transparency in support of the mission of Academic Affairs. In addition, since administrative leadership is critical to the vibrancy of the academic community, this theme called for **professional development opportunities for administrative excellence**. Discussants emphasized the importance of **inter-divisional collaboration** to serve our academic community.

In addition, in order to anticipate organizational change and creative improvement, discussants agreed that *succession planning for administrative renewal* was critical.

A clear and unequivocal call was made for **administrative commitment to personal and social responsibility**. This includes *wise stewardship of fiscal resources*. In order to continue to maintain and nurture high quality performance from administrative leadership, discussants called for *rigor and accountability in administration*.

Infrastructure improvements were categorized within this theme because they were discussed as a physical manifestation of the community space in which the entire membership lives. There were calls for *improved physical infrastructure* including a *renewal of learning environments*.

Graphic Results

While the textual summary is meant to be thorough and comprehensive, the graphics found in the appendix of this report offer easily relatable representations of the 61 possibility conversations. They may be generative of further conversations in Phase II of the Academic Plan process.

Phase II: Commitment/Action Conversations

As the Academic Plan Committee concludes Phase I, we welcome Phase II that will lead the Chico State community to engage in the next rounds of conversations focusing on commitment and action. This process will require the same high levels of collaboration, communication, and deliberation demonstrated in Phase I.

The Academic Plan Committee recommends that conversations be convened to **generate concrete actions** inspired by the goals and themes that emerged from the possibility conversations. All stakeholders will be invited to offer **specific** actions and **commitments** that will transform our learning community.

Academic Plan Committee:

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Appendix:

Graphic Results of the Themes

The Chico Experience



administrative

student

excellence

preparation

learning

teaching

relationships

success

collaboration

connections

building

faculty

business

community

support

processes

staff

revitalize



Innovative Curriculum

Community Engagement

Pedagogical Innovation

Professional Development

The Chico Experience

Real World Experience

Students, Faculty Staff and Administration:

Globalization

Growing in the 21st Century

Sustainability

Commitment to Diversity

Inter-Disciplinary Collaboration

The Chico Experience: Working together for the future

