

# Ensuring UCI's Academic Reputation and Visibility Equal its Excellence

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Lee Bardwell (School of Biological Sciences)  
Vladimir Kefalov (School of Medicine)  
Angela Jenks (School of Social Sciences)  
Devin Shanthikumar (Paul Merage School of Business)  
Advisor: Roxane Cohen Silver

Miriam Bender (Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing)  
Young-Suk Kim (School of Education)  
Tim Rupert (Samueli School of Engineering)  
S. Ama Wray (Clair Trevor School of the Arts)

## Motivation, Charge, and Data Gathering

UCI has developed a stellar reputation as an educational institution that promotes the American Dream by providing access, opportunities, and outcomes for our undergraduate students. UCI has been highly successful in increasing undergraduate applications and reaching the local/regional community. At the same time, both ranking-based and anecdotal data suggest that UCI's academic reputation does not match its excellence. Having established a strong reputation on the educational front, we are well positioned to expand our reputation-building efforts. The charge for the group was to think deeply about the following question: *how can we leverage and invest resources to develop a coherent communication strategy so that UCI's academic reputation and visibility equal its excellence?*

Improving UCI's reputation and visibility will have real, meaningful effects for the University. These include improved rankings, faculty and graduate student recruiting and retention, development, and increased applications. Moreover, reputation can be self-reinforcing, as many of the factors which drive reputation (e.g., faculty awards, press coverage, etc.) are themselves reputation-driven.

To this end, the members gathered data from multiple sources. Members spoke with constituents across the University, including representatives from marketing/communications groups, deans and communications directors within a unit, and faculty; members also spoke with faculty at other institutions, conducted readings, and engaged in discussions. Consistent in our data was a recognition that UCI could do better in academic reputation and visibility. Below, our recommendations are organized in the following three categories: (a) concrete and fast-to-implement solutions (Easy but Essential Solutions); (b) strengthening and better connecting existing resources (Strengthen & Connect); and (c) ideas and initiatives that require greater resources for a greater impact (Stretch Ideas).

## Recommendation 1: Easy but Essential Solutions

The following recommendations leverage existing structures and resources, are relatively fast and easy, but we feel are essential for a strong communication strategy.

- Commission a series of articles or a special issue of UCI Magazine that focuses on faculty scholarship and department/center/ORU/campus programs of research.
  - Launch a scholarship excellence focus across other UCI media such as Spotlights digital media, and video. We recognize that this work is already underway, but feel it can be amplified in terms of coherence, consistency, and systematic nature in highlighting UCI's impact and prominence in scholarship and research, which is important to our academic peers and their perception of UCI.
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- Strengthen and expand partnerships with local and national media outlets. These partnerships already exist, but they can be elevated for a stronger impact.
- Build a more comprehensive searchable “expert” site for journalists looking for research faculty expertise for their stories. The current version is limited to a few schools and fields.

### **Recommendation 2: Strengthen & Connect**

We recommend broadening existing marketing and communication strategies to create more extensive visibility of our research and scholarship excellence. Three specific recommendations include:

- Enhance coordination and coherence across marketing/communications sub-groups (Marketing, Public Affairs, Media Relations) in the central administration. IN our discussions this message was consistent that a lot of exciting work happens in different units, and we feel a bigger impact can be achieved with thoughtful and systematic coordination across units.
- Establish and maintain productive communication channels between Strategic Communications & Public Affairs and different academic units across campus (schools, departments, research centers, faculty). Some communication already exists, but it can be more comprehensive, systematic and streamlined. An example is a web form, accessible through the marketing/communications webpage, in which faculty can submit their work, and on which the communications team can follow up.
- Provide training and resources to schools/departments/research centers/faculty to help create structures that allow for continual identification and amplification of scholarship excellence. This could include replicable structure for nominating faculty for prestigious awards (already partially implemented); and resources to assist faculty and departments to create platforms to highlight their ongoing scholarship successes, such as professional social media presence and websites.

### **Recommendation 3: Stretch Ideas**

Finally, we suggest that beyond strengthening existing structures and strategies to focus on UCI's scholarship excellence, this excellence can and should be considered just as much a ‘part of who we are’ as we already believe our student success to be. One way of accomplishing this is to embed research/scholarship excellence into existing UCI initiatives such as the Brilliant Future campaign.

One potential structure demonstrating UCI's culture of scholarship excellence could be an annual internationally marketed colloquia or conference that showcases UCI's research breadth and multidisciplinary excellence across our academic units, as well as our beautiful campus and spectacular geographic location. This includes inviting leading scholars to UCI to help them recognize and connect with UCI's faculty. This effort can be modeled on Illuminations or the Chancellor's Distinguished Speaker Series. A concrete focus could be a climate conference that highlights the cross disciplinary research excellence we have in climate science, relevant technologies, business cases to drive adoption, and analysis of human, societal, and cultural drivers and impacts.

**Conclusion**

UCI has done a fantastic job of cementing our reputation as a top choice for undergraduate education, and in promoting our value to donors. We feel that now is the time to leverage our existing marketing strengths to highlight UCI's outstanding interdisciplinary research scholarship and graduate program excellence. Elevating our reputation will ensure that we can recruit outstanding faculty, students, and staff to UCI for decades to come.