

## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

### Mid-Semester Evaluation

#### **Defining “excellence”**

How does Operational Excellence define “excellence”? How will we know when we are excellent? Will we be excellent when our operations are flat, clustered and lean, or will we be excellent when our operations actually serve the research, teaching and service mission of the university?

#### **Suggested revision of mission statement for High Performance Culture Team of Op Ex**

CURRENT: The high-performance culture team is working to transform Berkeley’s performance culture to match its academic excellence.

SUGGESTED: The high-performance culture team is working to transform Berkeley’s **operations so that these serve optimally and match in quality** the university’s academic excellence.

#### **Academics *are* the house**

When the idea of hiring Bain and Company was introduced at the Division Meeting of the Academic Senate in Fall 2009, everyone was quick to say that Operational Excellence would not touch “the academic side of the house.”

That’s the wrong framing. At a university of Berkeley’s caliber, academics *are* the house. Anything besides academics is either: a) supporting infrastructure, or b) auxiliary services. So our supporting operations--the focus of OE--must be framed as more than simply aiming to “match” or be "as good as" our research and teaching. These services must be designed to *serve* our research and teaching mission. In addition, there must be structural incentives and metrics at every level to make sure that they do. Otherwise we will have a university of two cultures that are fundamentally at odds: one about efficiency, rules, clusters, leanness and flatness, the bottom line; the other about winning Nobel Prizes, Guggenheims, high NRC rankings, book prizes, etc. You can't get the high academic rankings (by attracting and keeping top faculty who earn these accolades) unless the operational structure actually *serves* the academic mission. How can service to this mission be structured into every level of our campus operations?

#### **Performing our public character**

On the Mission Statement page for Operational Excellence, there is a graphic image that shows high on a list of priorities the following: “Public character maintained by continuing to expand access.” This is a narrow framing. Our public character should be manifest in every sphere of our operations not just admissions. How has Berkeley maintained its “greatness” academically despite a state funding base that has spectacularly eroded during the past three decades? Answer: *So many of our fine staff and faculty believe in our public mission and are willing to make considerable sacrifices personally and professionally in order to work on behalf of that mission.* How can OE best acknowledge, value, build upon and enhance this defining ethos of our institution?

Berkeley’s greatness has historically relied on a lot of folks who actually believe in our teaching, research and service mission, whether or not the structural organization rewards them or encourages them for doing so. Anecdote. Scene 1: A Berkeley faculty member interviews for a job at Stanford. Every detail of the interview process—from communication with the candidate, to scheduling and

travel arrangements—is handled by the departmental administrator. Scene 2: A Berkeley department is conducting a faculty search. Every detail of the interview process—from sorting and labeling candidate files, to making ground transportation arrangements and dinner reservations—is handled by the faculty member who is chairing the search. Question: When the faculty member in Scene 2 is making considerably less money and has worse benefits at Berkeley than if she worked at a private institution, why would she choose to stay here? Answer: Very often the answer to such questions is that the employee believes in and is committed to our public mission. Hence it is essential that our operations at every level express and affirm our public character.

One of the best ways to undermine our historic culture of academic excellence as a public institution is to transform basic services that should be *common goods* into private goods. A public university has got to have some notion of a public infrastructure that is provided to all, rather than a crazy patchwork of fee-for-service charges for fundamental services.

### **“Great” and “excellent” are adjectives. What do they modify?**

The prominence of the concept of “excellence” within Operational Excellence along with reflections on Berkeley’s “greatness” in recent writings by our administration suggest we are beginning to see these qualities as destinations.<sup>1</sup> However, “excellent” and “great” describe *how* one does something. These are adjectives. What do they modify? Shakespeare was unquestionably one of the greatest playwrights the world has ever seen. Yet it is unlikely that “greatness” alone was his overriding ambition. Same with Albert Einstein in science and Nelson Mandela as a leader. Ambition, competitiveness, and self-confidence, as well as, yes, vanity and hubris are often qualities of highly successful people. But to be great in the realms of knowledge production and leadership, one needs to aim for a whole lot more. “Excellence” as a goal unmoored from any reference to *that in which a person or institution excels* is vapid. This is a recipe for becoming second class.

### **Organic vs. mechanical models**

If we were to crudely and rather arbitrarily lop off a significant portion of a tree’s roots, it’s quite likely that tree would then consume less water. It’s also highly likely that the tree would suffer, become vulnerable to pests, and eventually die. There are other more productive ways to save water, like drip irrigation. To think that water “saved” by cutting off a tree’s roots can then simply be “added” to the leaves is ridiculous. As Berkeley tries to squeeze savings out of vital underlying infrastructure, it may not be so easy to then simply “add” that money to the classroom.

When OE analyzes our operations by making graph and charts, it may well appear that our operations are inanimate structures or widgets that can be simply moved around. But in actuality Berkeley’s greatness relies on living, breathing human beings and organic structures with long histories. Deal with this living organism with care. Much rides on the outcome of this endeavor--not just for Berkeley, but also for public education nationally since we are the flagship campus of the “California Idea” of public higher education, a model much admired and emulated throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Breslauer, “What Made Berkeley Great? The Sources Of Berkeley’s Sustained Academic Excellence,” Center for Studies in Higher Education, Research & Occasional Paper Series: 3.11, January 2011, <http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/publications.php?id=377>

<sup>2</sup> John Aubrey Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education: 1850 to the 1960 Master Plan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).