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Isla Vista Strategies

In a written report presented to the UC Santa Barbara Foundation Board of Trustees in November, a special committee charged with advising the university on issues facing the Isla Vista community outlined several goals, recommendations and action items.

Over the past five months, the UC Santa Barbara Foundation Trustees' Advisory Committee on Isla Vista Strategies, operating independently of the University, has studied Isla Vista — the good and the not so good — and its relationship to UCSB and the larger Santa Barbara area. Chaired by Duncan Mellichamp, professor emeritus in the Department of Chemical Engineering and a trustee himself, the committee's goal was to develop mid- and long-term recommendations that enhance safety and security and improve the culture and quality of life for students in Isla Vista and the Isla Vista community as a whole.

"I am indebted to our dedicated Trustees for the time and energy they devote to our University and the Isla Vista community, and for their timely report and thoughtful recommendations," said UC Santa Barbara Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "I would also like to express my sincere appreciation for the leadership and support from UC Office of the President, and for the valuable input from our students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and all stakeholders in the community. We will continue to build on the strong foundation we have developed together and the initiatives that have been put in place, especially during the past intensive half-year."

These initiatives — and many others in the works — are outlined in two letters that Chancellor Yang distributed to the campus in September. They can be found at [Isla Vista Safety Progress Report](#) and at [Chancellor’s Coordinating Committee on Isla Vista](#).

Among the initiatives is the Chancellor’s Coordinating Committee on Isla Vista, co-chaired by David Marshall, UCSB executive vice chancellor, and Kum-Kum Bhavnani, professor of sociology and chair of the UCSB Academic Senate.

“The Chancellor’s Coordinating Committee on Isla Vista looks forward to reviewing the analysis and recommendations contained in this important report,” said Marshall. “In addition to underlining many of the key areas on which UCSB must continue to focus, it emphasizes the need for collaboration and cooperation with our partners outside of UCSB. I am grateful for the enormous amount of work and thought that went into this report, which will add to our momentum as we move forward to seize this opportunity to improve the Isla Vista community.”

Collaboration is Key

The Trustees’ Advisory Committee on Isla Vista Strategies functions entirely separately from the university. However, as Marcy Carsey, chair of the UC Santa Barbara Foundation Board, noted, “While the Foundation Trustees are not a governing board, we felt we could bring together our unique and collective experiences in business and community-building to support the campus and provide leadership for the University.”

UCSB’s role in the process was one of information provider, similar to that of other stakeholders. In its analysis, the committee focused on five key areas — governance, safety, support services, communications and the physical environment — and factored in the social, architectural, demographic and geographic elements that make Isla Vista the unique community it is.

The findings and recommendations presented in the report result from a collaborative effort that involved more than 125 meetings with representatives from UCSB faculty, administrators, staff and student groups, the County of Santa Barbara, the City of Goleta, Santa Barbara City College, Isla Vista property owners, Isla Vista residents, community members and business owners. In addition, the committee called on four outside consulting firms that specialize in areas related to the scope of the report.

“The report fundamentally addresses two issues,” said Mellichamp. “First, there needs to be an effective governing mechanism in Isla Vista to provide a safe and congenial environment — that has to be the top priority— and, second, the campus needs to develop an administrative structure that is equipped to address the challenges of Isla Vista. The Isla Vista Redevelopment Agency, which operated until 2012, had a public advisory committee. After it was gone, many latent problems in I.V. got out of hand.”

While the committee consisted solely of members of the board of trustees, non-trustees participated in the process through eight working groups. “We consulted with outside experts and brought aboard many individuals from the community who made the groups functional,” Mellichamp said. “It’s the work group approach that led directly to the recommendations.”

Self-Governance

In the area of governance, the committee set as a goal the development of a form of self-governance for Isla Vista that can provide necessary infrastructure and services and promote the safety and wellbeing of its residents. The committee recommends that a legislated community services/municipal improvement district be formed in Isla Vista with authority over infrastructure, utilities, police services, parks and recreation, cultural facilities, fire, security and roads.

“Isla Vista is one of, if not the largest urban communities in the State of California not within the boundaries of a city,” said Trustee Mark Linehan, president and chief executive officer of Wynmark Company. “As a result, the lack of urban governance continues to result in inadequate representation, insufficient public services and a lack of infrastructure, which exacerbates the concerns regarding the security and welfare of the residents of this college community.”

Safety First

Regarding safety and security in Isla Vista, the committee recommends strengthening community policing, integrating the information systems of crime data and establishing an Isla Vista neighborhood restorative justice court and a dedicated deputy district attorney. “With so many UC Santa Barbara students residing in Isla Vista, the vitality, safety and welfare of the Isla Vista community is of paramount importance not only to UCSB, but to the adjacent cities of Goleta and Santa Barbara,” Linehan continued.

The Trustees' Committee also suggested stricter enforcement of existing laws, regulations and ordinances; improving the physical environment for safety and health; and establishing a Joint Safety & Security Task Force composed of representatives from Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, UC Santa Barbara Police Department, California Highway Patrol, the District Attorney, UC Santa Barbara Student Affairs, Graduate Student Association, UCSB Associated Students, Santa Barbara City College and community residents to actively address safety and security issues in Isla Vista.

Urban Planning

To enhance Isla Vista as a livable urban community, the committee recommends creating a "town" with services and amenities that reflect a viable environment; diversifying the age of the population to include mature adults and families; and expanding the mission of the UCSB Community Housing Authority to include responsibility for all UCSB/Isla Vista development strategies. Additionally, the committee supports a reduction in the over-occupancy of existing units and addressing substandard housing conditions through a variety of means, both public and private; enforcing existing codes and developing new codes and ordinances to control density, parking, noise and nuisance activities; and developing lease standards for privately owned property that mandate acceptable use and behavior.

Community Services

Creating a dynamic and diverse intellectual environment is critical to Isla Vista's wellbeing, according to the committee. Achieving that involves working with current Isla Vista businesses and encouraging new business ventures, and designing activities and programmed events within Isla Vista, including collaborations with Santa Barbara City College. Establishing a community center in Isla Vista as well as community-oriented programming that serves all constituencies, and creating a new Isla Vista academic events programming committee are also high on the committee's list.

The Student Factor

Students play a key role in effecting positive change in Isla Vista-related issues, and the committee includes them in suggesting lasting solutions. Among its recommendations are a reexamination of the rights and responsibilities of UCSB students, as iterated in campus regulations; revising the student code of conduct to

eliminate the distinction between on- and off-campus infractions; and working through students to change the party culture of Isla Vista.

The committee also called on Santa Barbara City College students, as well as non-student residents, to participate in and contribute to efforts to effect positive change in Isla Vista.

The University's Role

With some 10,000 UCSB students making Isla Vista their home, the seaside community enclave is an integral component of university life. To enhance and communicate the overall excellence of UCSB — and the university's ability to administer programs involving Isla Vista — the committee makes a number of recommendations. Among them are showcasing UCSB's accomplishments and achievements to offset the campus's social reputation; creating an internal UCSB "Oversight for Isla Vista" committee composed of administrators, faculty members and students interested in community development; and creating a stakeholders group to work jointly — Associated Students, faculty and administration, local residents, businesses, SBCC, and the County of Santa Barbara — on Isla Vista governance issues.

"The time for UC Santa Barbara, the County of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara City College, and the residents and stakeholders of Isla Vista to act is now," the committee noted in the report's conclusion. "Long-sustaining changes in Isla Vista require all parties to work collaboratively." To that end, the committee recommends the establishment of an Isla Vista Stakeholder Work Group.

"It will take an enormous amount of heavy lifting from both the local stakeholders and government officials along with UC Santa Barbara," said Linehan. "It is imperative and urgent those who have the ability, step up and make Isla Vista the great community it has the potential to be."

Added Academic Senate Chair Bhavnani: "This detailed report is a critical step in ensuring that Isla Vista develops into the college town that we all want for it. There are short- and mid-term recommendations in here that are very insightful. Further, the long term recommendation of shifting Isla Vista student cultures — through more faculty and graduate student involvement than at present — is an exciting possibility."

The complete report can be found at [A Call for Action: Report of the UC Santa Barbara Foundation Trustees' Advisory Committee on Isla Vista Strategies](#).

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.