

UC tactics on growth lambasted

Report says better oversight needed

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UCSC Growth 112-07
The way the University of California system goes about expanding its campuses is unfair to the communities that host campuses, according to a state report released Thursday.

According to the state's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office, campus growth plans like the one approved in September for UC Santa Cruz lack

public accountability, clarity and standardization. The claims echo long-running complaints from residents of Santa Cruz and other college towns.

The report's authors say UC officials have an obligation to further engage the host communities and that better legislative oversight would help avoid the town-gown tension that in San-

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ta Cruz has prompted a host of outstanding lawsuits over UCSC growth.

"UC hasn't recognized its duty to mitigate its impacts on local communities when it grows," said Oakland attorney Stephan Volker, who represents Santa Cruz neighborhood groups and praised the report's findings.

Thursday's report has no direct authority over university officials.

Assemblyman John Laird, D-Santa Cruz, requested the Legislative Analyst's Office report in 2005. In response to its release, Laird called for a joint hearing between the Assembly education budget subcommittee and the higher education committee to explore the findings.

UCSC officials said the report underplayed their outreach efforts.

Among the report's findings:

■ UC growth plans lack clarity in the way they address and interpret environmental laws surrounding construction.

■ No UC campus has a long-term agreement for paying its fair share, though UC campuses do work with host communities to pay for environmental impacts.

■ State legislators play too small a role in the approval of UC's development plans and monitoring of environmental mitigation measures.

■ UC officials base future enrollment needs on outdated enrollment projections.

■ Projected enrollment growth is based on increases in graduate and professional programs, not graduating high school seniors, whose numbers are expected to decline.

The University of California, a state-controlled entity, is exempt from local-land use laws and zoning controls. It must, however, follow the California Environmental Quality Act, which regulates all major construction.

The report makes several recommendations to make UC more accountable for its growth plans.

For example, the report proposes steps that require the university to justify why it needs to grow to the size it proposes. The report also says university officials need to standardize the way it encour-

ages public participation through workshops.

Who pays for growth's environmental impacts, the most contentious issue between campuses and host communities, should be settled early on, before growth plans are approved, by obligating UC campuses to negotiate "fair share" cash contributions with local governments, the report says. The Legislature could withhold funding for expansion until those agreements are in place, according to the report.

Laird said he had hoped the report would arrive before UC Regents certified UCSC's plans. Since it did not, he said the report could be too late to have any local impact.

UCSC is planning to add 4,500 students and 3.8 million square feet of construction by 2020.

UCSC spokesman Jim Burns said the report understated how public the planning process was in Santa Cruz, but said members of the campus community were pleased to take part in the study.

To research the report, titled "A Review of UC's Long Range Development Planning Process," analysts included UCSC in its three-campus tour last summer, traveling to Davis and Riverside, as well. They spoke with campus planners, administrators, government leaders and neighborhood activists.

The next campus set to renew its growth plan is UCLA by 2010. UCSC's plan charts campus expansion through 2020.

State Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, said the need for reforming UC's planning operations indicates a more systemic problem at the University of California.

"I think the LAO's report further underscores what I have been saying now for the past year about reforming the way in which UC operates," Maldonado said. "I called for full disclosure and greater transparency and increased accountability (regarding executive compensation abuses.) I don't see any reason why these three principles should not also apply to the manner in which the UC system and the individual campuses develop their long-range development plans."

The Legislative Analyst's Office full report can be viewed at www.lao.ca.gov/

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