Hawks <u>A</u>ttending to <u>C</u>hanges in <u>E</u>ducation – Hawks ACE the 21st Century

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<u>**Executive Summary:**</u> We propose addressing the question of what it means to be a twenty-first century university through interdisciplinary conversations focused on our changing context and our student needs. The university as an institution and concept began a millennia ago, and has had a long and hallowed history, but is often slow to change. In the twenty-first century, we need to be agile as an institution, quick to think and act on our feet, and to change with the times. This includes responding to student needs, changes in demographics, changes in technology, climate change, and general adaptability to the future; what this translates into in practical terms is that our students need to be nimble and adaptable to a future that involves career shifts, have practical skills in training and imagining solutions to emerging problems, be able to devise strategies to tackle challenges of the day, and reconcile with changing technology and community needs. The university as it operated through most of its history, especially in the twentieth century, is a changing institution given the emergence of open access educational materials, online universities, changing markets, global competition, and multi-tasking adult students who need applied skills along with a well-rounded liberal arts education. The goal of the ***Hawks ACE the 21st Century*** QEP is to define our grand purpose and distinctiveness in order to focus on institutional enhancement to adapt to the changes and use our resources to strengthen the strategic themes of educational achievement, inclusive culture and university identity. These goals will be reached through innovative collaboration; the QEP will address all 4 themes, and strengthen our students, community, and university .

Topic and Rationale: By focusing on our identity and purpose as a 21st Century university moving forward, we are future-oriented, and will enhance student learning at UHCL. The tiered approach to such a broad vision can be as follows:

- Accessibility - Technology needs and adaptability – by innovating with technology in the classroom, student learning will be strengthened because virtual and remote teaching will improve. Coordinated tech innovation along with creative thinking across the disciplines will yield in quality **educational achievement** for students.

- Student research – this work will be done with student input in the classroom and research/internship experiences and community engagement beyond the classroom.

- Dexterity during crises – strategizing on how to teach, support research, and sustain our university community during uncertain times and ensuing crises can also strengthen student learning and continued progress toward degree completion.

- Purpose – in defining our **university identity**, and our role and purpose in the future, students will provide input and articulate their own aims and aspirations with a university degree; such a collective outlining of purpose will enhance their learning experience at UHCL since they are part of collectively authoring the script for future generations, marking such efforts as part of our **inclusive culture** which engages in **innovation through collaboration**.

     The *Hawks ACE the 21st Century* QEP will allow for interdisciplinary groups of faculty and staff to work with students: in the classroom, in student life, and in involving the community. Through classroom projects, guest lectures, service learning, films, writing projects, art competitions, science experiments and more, we can promote the exploration of our many

cultural identities and promote civic engagement to better understand the demands of our future scholars and the community at large.

Changing annual themes would intersect and build upon each other over time. We propose that the first year's theme be Anti-Racism and Social Justice including a focus on changing demographics. This theme can address UHCL as an HSI as well as the diversity of the university, the region, and the nation, including race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, and other topics. UHCL could choose to use the changing theme each year to encourage the engagement of all students, staff, faculty and alumni (e.g., university submission of ideas; voting on the theme; big reveal parties each year for the new theme). The next year, the theme could be sustainability. In addition to many domains where sustainability can be discussed/addressed, by addressing climate change and how climate change has differential impacts on different communities it would build upon the Year 1 theme of Anti-Racism and Social Justice. With a theme like this, students can engage in discussions, projects, and other forms of learning and dialogue on the topics of environmental, economic, and cultural sustainability, asking what it means for the future of UHCL and the broader community. The next year's focus could be changing technologies, addressing how technology can enhance, or detract, from different experiences in educational and workplace settings. It would also incorporate consideration of who has access to technologies as well as what it means to engage with sustainable technologies, building upon and incorporating Year 1 and 2 themes.

Hawks ACE the 21st Century will focus on maintaining the best parts of UHCL and encouraging transformation in the domains where there is opportunity to better meet the needs of our students, faculty and staff, and society. UHCL has, from its inception, been a remarkable institution committed to meeting the needs of our region and to helping to transform the future

(e.g. partnerships with NASA, the TDCJ Program, among others). While the institution has continued to build student-centered opportunities for growth and advancement, the next QEP represents an opportunity to intentionally focus on our interdisciplinarity, on our agility, and on our commitment to our diverse student body.

In short, Hawks ACE the 21st Century is about building an umbrella under which we can choose a specialized area of focus annually, while working with students to build a foundational portfolio of skills. Through programming, curricular innovations, co-curricular activities, and community wide events,we will facilitate student's depth and breadth of knowledge and skills while working to respond to the changing demands of society. The areas of focus should address current societal forces impacting overall well-being and global demands.

Literature Review: The nature of education is changing. The foundation of higher education, indeed, the University in the 21st Century is a dynamic and shifting ground, with changes to higher education happening both internally and externally. Externally, fluctuating economies, societal and technological changes, and public recognition of the value of a college degree are all factors influencing higher education (Rhodes, 2019). Internally, the cost of pursuing an education, transitions away from earning credits tied to classroom time toward the demonstration of competency and expertise, the need to ensure that High Impact Practices (HIP's) are accessible to all students, and a concentration on the extended pathway of the student all require a dynamic institution that is responsive to the community it serves and the community that surrounds it (Rhodes, 2019).

Hiring managers and executives indicate that graduates should demonstrate proficiency in oral and written communication, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, working effectively in teams and independently, and the real-world application of skills and knowledge (American

Association of Colleges and Universities, 2018). The ability to medicate conflict and to utilize personal agency to contribute to the betterment of community are becoming more prominent among desirable learning outcomes as rote memorization of facts will no longer meet student or society needs (Organization for Economic Co-cooperation and Development, 2018 & National Research Council, 2012). These skills and characteristics belong to no single discipline or major and yet they are developed when in the liberal arts classroom, when active in the STEM lab, and when present and engaged in the co-curricular activities of the university. Administrators, faculty, and staff in the university are working to ensure that the outcome of their efforts is a fully educated community that is ready to thrive in the life and work of the 21st Century. This opens for consideration the roles faculty play as scholars and teachers and the way we approach our dynamic and diverse students as learners (Ramaley, 2014). The challenge manifesting in and outside the classroom is to identify the most appropriate strategies to help students (traditional and nontraditional) to build the capacity to shift to meet a workplace demand that is reinvented almost annually, and to forge paths within occupations that might not yet exist in society (Dede, 2020). Shaping the development of engaged learners who can review complicated phenomenon and discern how to respond, who can listen and attend to others, and who are capable of situating themselves in a complex world with the ability to see the connections around them which will lead to responsible and creative actions is a challenge that no 'major' alone can facilitate (Cronon, 1998 & Ramaley, 2014). The truly innovative 21st Century University will offer a transformational curriculum that utilizes inventive approaches to enable learners to build knowledge, values, and skills via formal instruction, application in real-world environments (paid or unpaid), and the experiences of daily life, with an awareness of how their personal and professional contexts influence the learners' needs (Dede & Richards, 2020).

The reputation and influence of the 21st Century University will be created through quantifiable impacts on the overall cultural, social, economic, and physical health and well-being of the people and environment at both immediate and global levels (Ramaley, 2014). The work of the university is no longer a singular commitment of generating knowledge for knowledge's sake. The focus now is on helping an increasingly diverse group of students prepare for professional advancement, for entry into a new field, and for opportunity in areas of new growth such as technology and health (Whitaker, 2018).

Political, environmental and economic instability are at the root of unpredictable changes in work and society. This pace of change places the role of education and the 21st Century University squarely in the position of being a mechanism for capacity building (Dede & Richards, 2020). The evolving nature of technology and its use inside and outside of the classroom along with open access materials has contributed to the expansion of access to information, people, and process at a global scale. The digitization of the economy and of education is unmatched in our history and there is recent research to show that the complex changes taking place in social, technological, and economic systems can lead to psychological stresses if people are not supported with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage these fluctuations interpersonally and intrapersonally (World Economic Forum, 2019). A synergistic digital economy (Dede & Richards, 2020) demands that learners have in their toolbox a diversity of skills and exposure to content and ways of making meaning that are transferable among the many domains of their lives.

Changes to the world in which the 21st Century University operates, require a change in the approach within that university. As our 2018-2019 Year in Review indicates, UHCL fearlessly embraces change and celebrates innovation. The ability to foster the skills of critical

thinking, problem-solving, communication and building social connections is required. And UHCL, as a prime example of the 21st Century University, is prepared for this work. In partnership across academic and co-curricular divisions, UHCL has the responsibility and the capacity to assist students in the development of these very skills which will help students to make meaning of the turbulence happening in the world around them, socially, politically, economically, and structurally. The ability to navigate such a dynamic society and thrive professionally and personally are the very ways to build a more educated and more engaged public.

Connection to UHCL Mission and Goals: Hawks ACE the 21st Century is a QEP theme aligned with the Vision, Mission, and Values of our university. This QEP theme is set up within a broad conceptual framework and aims to give maximum room for constituent voices of students, staff, and faculty. With annual targeted themes, this QEP will connect to the university mission by addressing the diversity of our student body, enhancing the student experience through high quality student-centered ways. Additionally, ACE will support the ability for students to become adept in the competitive workplaces of 21st century, and make meaningful contributions to their community.

President Blake has ushered in a new era of innovation and energy in her leadership, and through the Balanced Scorecard Institute, set up a collaborative structure of involving all teams of the university to work together toward the current strategic theme, "Impact 2025 and Beyond." Bringing together the mission, vision, and values through the four strategic themes of educational achievement, inclusive culture, innovation through collaboration and university identity, President Blake shares the strategic objectives and map to reach these goals in the next five-year period. These objectives are deeply aligned with our university's eight core values, all

of them also foundational to the ACE thematic which, too, is learner-focused, values

transformation, innovation, diversity and inclusion, resilience, service, integrity, and

sustainability.

ACE endeavors for a profound level of mindfulness as an institution, a strategy that will

yield the trust of its students and community members and reflected in its agility and nimbleness

to move with the times. If we can draw on our current moment when we are wrestling with new

debilitations (COVID-19 pandemic) and old illnesses (systemic racism brought to the surface by

the murder of Houston-native, George Floyd), then we know that to respond to the gravity of the

challenges facing our city, nation, and planet, our institution needs to make a concerted effort to

not simply survive the ebbs and flow of time, but overcome and grow stronger, more

compassionate, and attuned to the needs of our community. Our students bring with them

microcosms of all that we read in the local and national headlines, people beleaguered with

family pressures, responsibilities, working lives, strengths, challenges and dreams to succeed in

reaching their desired educational achievement, our first strategic theme. In focusing each year

around a chosen theme, ACE ties in the ongoing Balanced Scorecard implementation of

initiatives, and really brings home the work done to further UHCL mission and its goals.

Since 'Diversity' is the cornerstone of mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives of our

university, we propose to begin **Year One** by focusing on **Anti-Racism and Social Justice, a**

theme that furthers the core values of diversity and inclusion. Such an endeavor also speaks to

the one of the new Four Pillars of Student Engagement rolling out in fall of 2020, namely "Social

Responsibility and Advocacy." Borrowing from the language of the four pillars that will

inculcate in students to strive for justice, advocate for positive social change, the work of anti-

racism will raise awareness in our campus community and strengthen social responsibility, one of the core learning objectives for first year general education courses.

Program Goals: Hawks ACE the 21st Century seeks to prepare students for a rapidly changing future. Students will need to be adaptable to changing circumstances, requiring flexibility in how they interact with diverse populations, environmental pressures, technological advances, and societal needs. By emphasizing UHCL's identity as an institution that ***Attends to Changes in Education***, we will be 1) better prepared to assist our students under changing circumstances, and 2) better preparing our students to adapt to a multitude of environments (social or physical). Specifically, program goals include:

a) Increase awareness of changing demographics both at UHCL and in the US, and the implications of these changes in education, the workplace, and society.

b) Increase awareness of environmental pressures and how these impact different populations, in Houston, in the US, and in the global community.

c) Increase awareness of technological changes, including how these changes affect different populations, alter educational contexts, and can contribute to, or help alleviate, systemic inequalities.

Student Learning Outcomes: The specific student learning outcomes would shift slightly to correspond with the specific theme of each year, but all would address social justice and adaptability. SLOs include:

1) Knowledge of changing demographics in Houston and the US. Close study of systems of racial, socio-economic, gendered, and other forms of inequalities within the region, and solutions toward shifting patterns and promoting justice.

2) Ability to demonstrate awareness and appreciation of experiences and cultural practices/beliefs of different communities.

3) Ability to identify environmental changes and how these changes might affect different populations.

4) Ability to identify changing technologies, and how these new technologies might alter education and functioning in society.

5) Discuss how shifts in technology could impact different populations, as well as identify ways in which those changes might increase or decrease systemic inequalities.

6) Build the capacity to problem-solve when faced with complicated and new situations and information.

Target Student Population: Hawks ACE the 21st Century is designed to be targeted to all students of UHCL: undergraduates, graduates, international, domestic, first time in college, transfer, and more. The diversity of our student body is a strength of UHCL and the proposal is designed to serve and reach them all. The proposed ACE theme for QEP responds to many strengths and unique aspects of UHCL's students, a population that in many ways reflects the greater Houston region and the multiple ways communities contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political strength of the region. The student body is increasingly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity and includes a large percentage of first-generation students, parents, working students, and veterans. The ACE theme engages this unique student body in recognizing its creativity, knowledge, and experiences while promoting discussion and skills-building workshops around strategic themes that are connected to their lives.

In the Fall of 2012, 45% of UHCL students (graduate and undergraduate) were White. Seven years later, in the Fall of 2019, 37% of students were Hispanic, 9% Black, 8% Asian, 37%

White, and 5% international. The growing number of Latinx students is especially evident at the

undergraduate level, increasing from 29% in the Fall of 2010 to 43% in the Fall of 2019. In many

ways, the diversity of the UHCL student body reflects the demographic changes to Harris

County and the greater Houston region. Harris County transitioned from a city that was mostly

Anglo (69%) in 1970, to a county that, by 2017, was 43% Hispanic, 30% Anglo, 20% African

American, and 7 % Asian due to migration from within and outside the U.S. (Center for

Houston's Future 2019).

UHCL students do not fit the model of what has been assumed to be "traditional" college

students. A total of 40% of UHCL students, including graduate and undergraduates, are first

generation (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, First Generation Enrollment by College). Close

to two-thirds of the students are female (62%) while one-third 38% are male. The average age of

students is 27 for undergraduates and 32 for graduate students (UHCL Fall 2019 Snapshot).

Approximately ten percent of UHCL students are "military affiliated" (Craft 2019).

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, students face a rapidly changing world

with multiple challenges including a global pandemic, climate change, new technologies, and

record unemployment rates, among many others. In this context, many of our students face

specific structural barriers such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia. To give one

example, Black Americans and Latinxs are disproportionately dying of Covid-19 due to

structural racism. (Wallis, 2020)). In her book *Becoming Hispanic Serving Institutions*, Gina

Ann Garcia presents a series of concrete recommendations to "reframe practice at HSIs"

(2019:116). Of note for this QEP proposal is the recommendation to: "Provide curricula and

programs that are grounded in justice and equity" (117). Garcia notes the importance of

addressing multiple cultural histories in an intersectional understanding of racial justice as well

as inequalities based in gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Equally important is showing ways to "disrupt the injustices" students may experience in their lives (p. 117).

In order to remain relevant, students, faculty, and staff can be active in working together to discuss contemporary challenges and possibilities of removing barriers and connecting to local and regional communities for social change. Scholars such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire write of teaching and learning as processes of liberation through dialogue. The engaged pedagogy described by hooks values student experience and teaching as creating a shared space to transgress boundaries of race, class, and gender. In this QEP proposal , the classroom –which includes activities in and outside the classroom and the university itself -- becomes a space where students can be empowered through understanding themselves, their context, and their world and learning to critically assess inequalities in their own and other societies and how to create transformative change to promote justice.

Potential Activities:

Curriculum Adjustments (provided with linkages to the CETL)

- Innovative technology within the classroom. During the COVID-19 pandemic many faculty are exploring various tools for teaching online but many of these could also be implemented during in-person courses. Greater integration of various forms of technology in the classroom would be for the benefit of engagement and accessibility of students.
- Using the theme for the year as a guide for examining the course structure and content, making necessary changes to course structure and content to integrate the content and principles of the theme. For instance, during year one with a theme of Anti-Racism , faculty would be asked to examine their courses with a consideration for how white supremacy informs the structure and content of the course, making necessary changes to offer a course that is inclusive of our student body, perspectives, and challenges white supremacy. During a year with the theme of sustainability, faculty would be asked to consider how their specific

disciplines examine questions of sustainability, and how their teaching practices contribute to sustainability.

- Development of new courses within a discipline (such as special topics seminars), interdisciplinary minors associated with the theme, or certificates in content areas to enhance employability.

Faculty Development

- Professional Development workshops, seminars, and/or trainings for faculty relevant to the specific theme for the year. For instance, with an anti-racist and social justice theme for year one it would be critical for faculty to participate in anti-racism trainings

- Collaboration with the Center for Faculty Development and CETL by creating faculty communities related to the theme for the year, allowing small groups of faculty to engage in conversations about the theme and how to integrate the theme into their pedagogical approach and course content.

- A focus on a theme of sustainability could function with trainings and programming in partnership with the Institute of Human and Interplanetary Sustainability. The theme of sustainability could be connected to the theme of anti-racism in addressing environmental racism (an issue in Houston) and the ways climate change is connected to migration and other issues.

- Across all years, trainings for innovative technology and how to utilize such technology in courses. Including exploring the usage of open-source materials for courses and investment in best practices.

Student Engagement & Development

- Collaboration between faculty, student organizations associated with the theme for the year, and the offices within the Division of Student Affairs (e.g., SDEI, SL&I, ONSP, DoS) by planning campus events, such as film showings, community projects, or lectures associated with the theme.

- Establish a relationship with The Common Reader, encouraging those faculty, staff, and students associated with the common reader to suggest themes for each year of the QEP and selecting a book related to the theme for the common reader.

- Developing programming with the Office of Strategic Partnerships focused on the annual theme to connect students, faculty and staff to our community and corporate partners for service activities and learning opportunities.
- Coordinating study abroad and study away programs that are focused on each year's themes.
- Explicit connection of programming within the Four Pillars of Student Leadership within the Division of Student Affairs with the Hawks Ace the 21st Century theme each year. Involving students, staff, faculty and community members.

Campus Wide Events

- A year-long lecture series involving campus members (e.g., faculty), community members, and national or international speakers being invited to campus to discuss topics relevant to the theme for the year.
- Interdisciplinary student research groups, mentored by faculty, working on a research project to address a question or issue related to the theme for the year, resulting in a final product such as a presentation of a proposal, presented to the UHCL community.
- Research funding reserved for student-faculty research projects related to the theme for the year, with the projects presented in a symposium at the annual student research conference.

Possible Assessment

Assessment will be conducted via direct and indirect measures of both the Program Goals and the Student Learning Outcomes. All measures are not outlined herein, as to have accurate assessment of outcomes, each assessment would need to be tailored to the topic of the QEP Year. However, some sample assessment activities and measures are listed here for consideration. It is recognized that the team who leads the QEP will also have a hand in helping to develop the assessment plan and ensuring that it is connected in appropriate and meaningful ways to the theme for the year. Sample Assessments (direct and indirect) may include but are not limited to:

- Conducting surveys with students at the start of each academic year and then again at the end of the academic year. For instance, during year 1 on anti-racism we could use validated measures of prejudice and awareness of different social groups and perspectives. These

surveys could be deployed using BlackBoard, discussed in courses, encouraged by faculty, and promoted by the Division of Student Affairs. (Direct Measure);

- In keeping with the move toward the 21st century university and embracing of technology, Hawks Ace the 21st Century could utilize an app to deploy surveys to all who participate in events and programming for the QEP. The application could use geolocating software and already available technology to detect who attends the events and then prompt the attendees on their smartphones to complete a survey focused on outcomes, learning, and understanding of the event. Such a project could also potentially employ a team of faculty and students from across majors at the university to develop and deploy the technology and application. (Direct Measure);

- Instructors who teach courses that are formally linked to the QEP Theme (or who have assignments that are linked to the QEP) would be identified and would utilize a direct measure of student learning by identifying an appropriate assignment to serve as the mechanism to evaluate the student learning outcome. Training and preparation for this could be developed and facilitated by the QEP Leadership Team (QLT) and the CETL. (Direct Measure);

- Assessing faculty who have been trained in the QEP via the QLT and the CETL can be done with surveys and/or focus groups. (Direct Measure);

- Assessing and tracking data related to participation rates, attendance at activities and events, and the change over time. (Indirect Measure);

- Assessing student success outcomes such as: retention rates, enrollment in QEP Aligned classes, graduation rates, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and more are feasible indirect measures of Student Success.

- While these are merely a few ideas of potential assessment methods, there are many options for how best to proceed. The key is that the measures be valid and reliable and that we have a multi-method approach to assessing student learning and program outcomes. These methods and processes will be developed by the QLT with an understanding of the resources and supports available and with awareness of each Yearly Theme for Hawks Ace the 21st Century.

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