[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:00:36

All right, good

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:00:54

afternoon, everyone. Thank you for taking the time to participate in today's Vision Seminar. As a part of UCR's search for its next Dean of the Bournes College of Engineering. My name is Tanya Adams. I'm the Director of Human Resources and Executive Support, or Executive searches, and I am pleased to support this important search.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:00:54

We are delighted to welcome Dr. Athena Marcapulo. Dr. Marcapulo currently serves as a professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at UC Irvine.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:05

Please be advised that we have provided Dr. Marco Pullo with a prompt for the Vision Seminar, and she'll spend about 25 minutes or so discussing the following topics.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:14

The key opportunities and challenges facing higher education over the next several years, the specific opportunities and challenges she anticipates for the Bournes College of Engineering and her vision for BCOE and how she would work to achieve that vision.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:30

At the conclusion of Dr. Marco Poulu's presentation, we'll open up the session for questions. And with that, I'll hand it over.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:42

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming, especially on a Friday afternoon. I'm what stands between you and

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:58

the weekend.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:58

This is actually the end of my visit here. I've been here since yesterday morning and drinking from a fire hose of information.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:01:58

So thank you for participating and for engaging. And it's my honor to be here and be considered for the position. So I have been asked to answer two sets of questions. First, to tell you a little bit about me and my background and the interest in the position, and second, about the opportunities and challenges in general.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:02:18

For BCOE and the vision forward. So let me start with some information about me and apologies to those that have already heard me throughout the visit. So I come from Greece, from a town called Kalamata, where the olives and olive oil come from.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:02:35

And then I moved to Athens at a young age, where I stayed until I finished the Athens Polytechnic or NTUA.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:02:42

Um, and then, uh, like many students from the UA followed the canonical path to come to the US for graduate school. I landed at Stanford in 96. That was the peak of commercial internet coming of age, and I… my area was, uh, I studied computer networks.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:03:01

After graduation, I stayed in the Bay Area and worked in a few companies, a research lab, Sprint ATL, and then a small startup at the time, Arista Networks, that is now a giant in internet switches.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:03:13

And I joined UCI 20 years ago, where I have been since as a faculty with some small breaks for a sabbatical in Europe and to commercialize one of the technologies

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:03:31

we created. Up to 2019.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:03:32

I was minding my own business and being a productive faculty, at which point I became a full professor, and I took significantly more responsibility, both on the academic leadership side and on the research side.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:03:48

So, um, I served as a department chair for three years, and then as associate dean for graduate studies for the School of Engineering for three years, and more recently as a director of CalIT2, which is a UC-wide institute.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:04:04

At the same time, I led two interdisciplinary research centers. One was externally funded, and I will talk more about it in the second one is funding internally by an endowment within UCI. I also want to mention that these times coincide with some external challenges. I became department chair when COVID hit.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:04:26

And then I became an associate dean for graduate studies when unionization happened. And then I became instant director where the funding landscape goes upset.

So this being said, I did enjoy all these roles tremendously. I find them rewarding and meaningful.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:04:42

And in the approach of that, I realized I actually do like to work with groups of people and bring them together to achieve a common goal. And that's part of the reason why I'm standing here today.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:04:53

Um, so let me tell you a little more about this role that I mentioned, because this, I believe, directly relate to the position and some of the lessons learned and experiences are transferable or informative for the position.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:05:04

So on the research side, I led an NSF frontier center on privacy. 10 million, six institutions, 10 faculty led by UCI. The topic was privacy and data transparency. It was, uh, and the aspect… the idea was how do we protect end users with interactive technologies.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:05:27

from having the data collected. And the interdisciplinary aspect was with policy and law. So the interface with data regulation and privacy protections. I'm very proud we want to accomplish through this project, and we created a sub-community within PETS, which is the Privacy and Housing Technology community, that has its own, um.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:05:46

confidence now. Moving forward and in addition, we did many outreach activities. Every summer we run summer programs where we recruit students from high schools and community colleges, and we provide a combination of a technical hands-on experience and career development to help the students come to UCI for undergraduate or graduate school.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:06:11

As this project wrapped up, and as AI came to focus, I started thinking more about the interactions of users with agents and with AI, and what does this mean for their privacy and data collection.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:06:22

Uh, in addition, AI, as you all know, comes with many more concerns about safety, in addition to privacy, security, explainability in different aspects of safety. So I put together a different team, this time located at UCI and funded by the endowment that I mentioned from the Samueli Foundation.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:06:41

Two, um, study, uh, AI safety using a sociotechnical approach. They used to this call, uh, it's one of the E-plus institutes of our school. It's the A-plus Society of Student AI, and it's interdisciplinary in that it brings together, um, uh, the School of Engineering together with Social Sciences.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:06:57

and the arts. So, um, a recent example of these collaborations are a collaboration with the social sciences to work with cities, including the city of Riverside, to help them better deploy AI chatbots for their citizens, and the collaboration with the School of Arts.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:07:14

To create installations that convey the least risks of AI safety to the public.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:07:22

Through both of these efforts, I have been thinking a lot about the question that NSF usually asks when they award these projects, why is the whole more than the sum of the parts? Why should these budgets be given to this collaborative efforts as opposed to be split and given proportional to the participants? And that's the value of collaboration. That's the value of interdisciplinarity.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:07:45

And I have been thinking a lot about how to operationalize or how to incentivize these collaborations.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:07:54

I believe that this question is applicable not only to research, large interdisciplinary research efforts, but it's also applicable to many aspects of academic life. How do we make the whole more than the sum of the parts?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:08:06

With sparkly culture, and it's partly structure. So we need to think of what are the strategic goals of our units, and then align resources and incentives behind them and allocate resources in a way that is transparent and data driven.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:08:20

And behind.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:08:22

This, there's always people, there are the individual faculty, staff, students, and community partners that we need to support and engage. And in my experience, people in academia are idealistic people. They usually step up and do above and beyond the goal of duty.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:08:37

If they believe in the mission, and if they feel incentivized, valued, and that they have a meaningful way to contribute to.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:08:45

On the academic side, I mentioned I was a department chair for three years. Our department was the largest in the school by all size metrics, except research expenditures maybe. But despite that happening during COVID, I had a set of priorities

that I managed to accomplish. One of the set of priorities had to do with external visibility recognition.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:09:06

I believe at the time that our ranking did not reflect the quality of our department, and I am since department rankings are completely reputation-based, I engage the communication campaign to make our work known to other department chairs by joining the department chair association, revamping our seminar series.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:09:29

Uh, and launching a communication campaign. At the end of that, we saw an improvement on department… in our two programs by 16 and 12 points, respectively. That may be a coincidence, maybe not, because it didn't happen before or after. I call that the, um, uh.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:09:44

Bridging the gap between the outside perception and our reality, and then after that, I told my faculty, we need to improve our reality as well. I streamlined a number of internal processes that I'm listing here, but I'm not going to go through one by one. And my other major focus was graduate students.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:10:00

Because graduate students are the heart of what we do in an R1 institution. It's students that we mentor, but it's also what drives our research.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:10:08

So part of it was establishing community for the graduate students. I created many student groups, most notably the gigs, the graduate student association, that today is a very active one and is running many career development events and creates community with our alumni.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:10:25

And I also put a lot of thought on the funding of our graduate students. At the time I was advocating for multi-year funding offers for our graduate students, because we were doing that anyway, but we were not advertising at front, so that put us at a disadvantage when competing across other schools.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:10:40

I put a lot of effort in data tracking and quantitative analysis. And finally, we did put these guarantees in place.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:10:48

But then unionization hit, and because I had spent all this time on graduate student funding, I was asked to step up and become Associate Dean for graduate and professional studies. In that role, I overshow all the graduate programs of the school, and I spend a lot of time in implementing the UAW contracts.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:11:08

And I'm very proud that we managed to navigate that, although we're the school on campus with the largest number of PhD students, DSRs, um, with at least number of grievances.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:11:20

I did a number of other things, including restructuring the professional programs, um, um, and streamlining fellowships. But another major effort of mine continued to be the graduate student development while they were with us, and how do we place them afterwards? So I created a program that was called PFF.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:11:40

preparing future faculty program that I ran for two years, once a month, when we took students in the middle of their PhD, third and fourth year, that they were promising students, and we trained them of how to position themselves to apply for faculty positions afterwards. With good results at, uh, in placement after what many people involved faculty positions.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:11:59

Um, and then I established an NSF GRFP training program where we took our students, well, identified the eligible students and encouraged them to apply, and we gave them hands-on training how to be competitive in that process. I established our studying student awards that they still continue, and I sponsor SWE, Society of Women Engineers and YCIS.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:12:20

societies and career development events.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:12:26

Most recently, I am I shift my focus back to research leadership. This is Galated 2 is an institute that is one of four California Science Information and Innovation created by governor Gray Davis back in 2020.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:12:46

Kaleid 2 is in Southern California and includes three campuses, San Diego, UCI, and recently Riverside. And its structure reports to UCOP, to the Vice President for Research, and it's a structure to receive funding.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:13:01

More towards innovation, workforce development, and industry-facing activities of the UCs, as opposed to enhance the mission of the UCs. Every campus has one, and that exposed me to processes and opportunities that they are UC-wide. And also tighten my collaboration with Riverside and learn more about your school and campus through that.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:13:23

Example activities in the first couple of years were around engaging with a local industry innovation ecosystem in Orange County, and creating programs that match students to industry through workforce development programs.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:13:38

I also put some effort on AI to upgrade our infrastructure in Caledity 2 and across the campus through proposals and, uh, and, um, investments in infrastructure.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:13:56

So I believe this experience has prepared me to a large extent for the role I'm considered for. But I also would like to acknowledge that these are difficult times for higher education in general.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:14:09

For all universities, including the UC, and including this campus.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:14:15

There are a set of challenges that they are, um, maybe unnecessary, and they're policy-related, like the disruption in our international student pipeline, uh, due to visa restrictions and uncertainty that details the students from joining us, or the change in the funding landscape that has changed the way we operate.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:14:37

There are also budget constraints. We operate. I don't need to explain that. You know that we have over years of cuts, we continue to have decreased and decreased income and increased costs without the state support increasing.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:14:52

These are important, and we need to deal with them, but they may not be as fundamental in some other problems that they are signs of our time, like the advent of AI that revolutionizes how we do research and education.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:15:07

And also, the questions increasingly posed about what is the value of higher education. As a matter of somebody who applies, as you speak to college, that's a very personal question. What is the value of higher education? What is the return on investment for individuals and for the society as a whole?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:15:23

And we also need to grapple with the societal implications of engineering research. Sometimes we are the solution, but sometimes we are the problem when it comes to environment, when it comes to how online information is disseminated.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:15:37

So this challenge apply to across higher education, but they are felt more intensely in our institutions and including — and it is a perfect storm.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:15:56

They apply to BCOE as well. But I believe that the college is well positioned to not only navigate, but also thrive by adapting through the new conditions.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:16:10

So some assets that I can see from what I can tell from the outside and from the limited discussions I had with stakeholders so far, there's already a lot of things to tap into and leverage here.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:16:22

In times where people are asking what's the value of higher education, that's a self-evident question here at Riverside. We know what is… why that is necessary.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:16:34

You already have domestic student pipelines that will to lean on harder and leverage even more.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:16:42

Um, in terms of AI, you have already been already thinking about… you have already in-house expertise, and you have been already trying to unify efforts across campus. That's going to be an asset going forward.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:16:57

Um, you also have expertise in history in problems related to environment and that is always going to be relevant.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:17:07

You have new initiatives, I understand partly started by the new chancellor in manufacturing.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:17:16

um, you have a strong school of sinas that can help through collaborations, compete in grants related to ag tech.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:17:25

And there is the upcoming park in Oasis that is an opportunity to engage with industry, to bring industry, be present and engaged with the campus and to foster innovation.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:17:41

As well as regional stakeholders. So these are all assets and expertise that the school should build… leverage and should build upon further.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:17:50

And, uh, and I think it can… I'm standing here because I believe the school is well positioned to address this challenge and move to the next chapter.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:18:01

Our mission matters. Us. Academia is the reason why many of us are here for because we love doing research and education in this environment. The University of California is the crown jewel of the state and of public universities in the US, so it's worth stepping up in every one of us doing our role, and to defense and advance it.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:18:21

The challenge that we face are also opportunities, especially for schools like BCOE, engineering can be part of the solution and has a say in many of the developments happening now. So it's an opportunity to adapt and evolve. The schools that do that will get ahead.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:18:36

And the students that don't… the schools that don't adapt, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:18:41

They will have a harder time.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:18:43

So I think there is a path forward, and I do enjoy bringing people together to go after these bigger questions of an education, and the biggest and societal questions of our time.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:18:55

So, as I mentioned, I believe BCOE is already well positioned.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:19:01

to attack these problems. And it also has a lot of talent. You guys are at least a part of BCOE that I am familiar with. It's very well known outside and well respected. You have a lot of talent that we can tap into and mobilize.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:19:20

So this is all good. But how exactly are we going to go about our mission, which is research, education, and engaging with partners to achieve our mission. Then the research enterprise side, which is at the heart of our ones.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:19:37

Two years ago, it was… the way the funding, the federal funding operated got disrupted and the goal of cancell relationship grounds, a lot of discussions about cutting research funding.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:19:52

Here, it's me in September 2025, joining CRA, the Computer Research Association, to advocate to Congress about not to cut the NSF budget.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:20:03

It turns out that the budget was not cut. The Congress is generally supportive of research funding. The federal funding levels are actually the same. And the good news for BCOE is that engineering is within the funding priorities. AI, quantum.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:20:19

materials. So, uh, these are the good news.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:20:25

The more complicated news is that the way that the funds are purposed has changed. There is more focus on translation than in our fundamental research, and there is more emphasis on industry, partners, and defense partners. And it's also the way that the grants are, or the calls are administered have changed in scale, process and speed.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:20:46

So I would like to share some examples of opportunities that I personally engaged in the last year as a PI, co-PI, or as an institute director trying to support other people in the institute to apply for.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:03

Um,

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:04

and, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:07

As examples of process more than as example of subject matter.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:12

So, there was this opportunity of AI Forge, which was a partnership between DARPA, NSF, and CAISI. It's fundamentally AI research. It's a lot of money, but channeled through a third-party entity, not through the usual channels.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:28

Should we even be eligible to apply for this, you need to be part of a forum, um, and you need to present your capability as an institution to be included in the forum.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:39

The Colgore had very limited time. And I put together the whole campus to list our capabilities in AI and infrastructure, in education activities, in research, in partners, and show that we as a campus, we have a capability to be part of that.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:21:58

As a result of the response to this RFI, we're now part of this forum, and we get the information about applying every six months.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:22:06

I also put a team together, and we applied for the first grant.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:22:11

And, um, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:22:14

We made it… I will tell you more about that. Another opportunity that is relevant to many people is Venice FX Labs. This is a very large part of the NSF budget. And it is, so it's worth going after. It is peculiar in the way that the wage structure requires the entity to transition outside the university after the first year.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:22:35

These poses a challenge, because we don't have the structure to do that. What does it mean? Research outside the university? Does it mean that the faculty needs to quit? Does it need to be a relief of absence? Does it need to… that we need to partner with an outside entity?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:22:51

So what I learned from this, and for the second opportunity, I did not submit myself as API, but I supported faculty within Caledity 2 that wanted to apply for it. So I was trying to figure out what is the structure to facilitate that.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:23:04

What I learned from these exercises are that our current way of going about grants, handling limited submissions and so on, is not sufficient and it needs updates. It needs to be quicker, the limited submission needs to be… we need to be ready when these things come at a quick pace.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:23:19

I also learned that it's worth going after it and being the arena. Here it is with a team that I put together for one of the efforts. We made it from 300 people to the 15 that pitch in person. We didn't get at the end, but we all agreed it was a good experience, and now we know how to do it next time.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:23:38

already. Okay. Okay. I also learned that there is a lot of a lot of funds invested in facing towards industry.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:23:52

But Deep has more funding now that the core programs, and there are opportunities to jointly fund grants with industry.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:24:01

And there are workforce and infrastructure facing grants that they are structured around hubs and around partnerships between NSF, regional resources, and fundraising for philanthropy and from the industry.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:24:16

And these are statewide opportunities, and that we participated in, and I believe UCR is a partner in one of those.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:24:24

And AI is everywhere, not only as a topic on its own, but crosscutting across different disciplines. So I mentioned two calls that I had direct experience with. XLabs covers not only AI, but also robotics, quantum systems, sensing and imaging. And the Genesis mission should have something.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:24:43

For everyone in engineering. But again, we need to adapt our research development to be able to compete there. Partnership opportunities were always important, uh,

because that's how impact comes about, but they are even more important now, because we need these partnerships to even be able to apply for these opportunities.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:25:02

So we need to leverage our regional partners, our UC and lab partners and statewide opportunities.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:25:18

And in education, that also need to be adapted. UCI already has the domestic pipelines that you can rely upon. The curriculum needs to be adapted.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:25:32

We can leverage funding for workforce development, and we can leverage alumni and opportunities from the industry, innovation and economic development ecosystem.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:25:46

And in closing, I want to summarize how I think about the role of the dean in all this. We are in the UC, and the UC is governed by shared governance. The dean is not the CEO of a company. It is a steward in the college.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:26:03

And everything is a partnership. This being said, the dean has a responsibility to lead in certain aspects.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:26:12

So I see the role as being aware of the opportunities around us and informing the college to go to the right direction.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:26:18

Um, and then helping sharpen the focus through strategic planning and through shared governance.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:26:28

It is also the responsibility of the dean to support the efforts with resources and the budget behind the strategic goals. Somebody has said that the strategic plan is only as good as the budget that supports it, because without the budget.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:26:45

The strategic plan remains words. So, the second step after identifying the focus is to support it with budget and resources and processes.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:26:56

Another responsibility of the deed is to tell the story of the college to the outside world. And that has impact in rankings and ability to attract students, inability to attract partners. And I have touched upon the details of these cross sections earlier.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:27:14

One particular thing that I feel strongly about is the revamp of the proposal development support, so we can enable our FICLU to compete in this new world.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:27:25

And finally, behind everything is always people, as I said earlier, that, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:27:33

they… they need to believe in the mission and come together to achieve those goals. I'm told that I'm almost over time, so I will stop here, and I will take questions and discussion. Thank you.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:27:50

Thank you so much, Dr. Marcapulo, for that. All right, so we'll open up the session for questions. If you have a question, please raise your hand and a member of our team will come to you with a microphone. We kindly ask that you state your name and maybe your department before asking your questions.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:28:11

All right.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:28:29

Thanks, Athena. Great talk. I was just curious whether you had some thoughts on maybe AI helping in some of

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:28:40

the things

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:28:40

that you want to accomplish, right? Like so creating some automated pipelines, some of the things that might.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:28:41

Might actually kind of help you through the last slide that you basically laid out.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:28:50

Okay, so you mean about AI not as a research topic and not as an education, but in improving the efficiency of the operations, right? Exactly. Yeah, this is happening anyway, everywhere.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:29:02

Um, so if things can be… can be automated in a way that makes sense and just makes them more efficient and allows for the time of the people to go to more meaningful things, that should be done.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:29:20

in our campus that the OIT is taking initiatives at the campus level to do that, and I don't know if at Riverside that's already happening.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:29:31

Um, where, uh, things like budget preparations or things like logistical nature can be accelerated through AI. Of course, this come with.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:29:47

They have to be done to be done carefully, um, and also BCOE can lead some of these pilots, it still needs approval and coordination and compliance from the campus level, right? And it has also has been done carefully.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:04

You know, so it's a yes, but a careful yes, and it's where the world is going anyway. And in a time of limited resources, we should be expediting what can be expedited and use the time of the people who have more wisely.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:24

Thank you. This is Ahmed Lawy, professor of Computer Science. So thanks a lot for the great talk and vision. You highlighted

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:44

the big

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:44

grants, right? So you said like, okay, this is a good opportunity for us. I think I agree like this can really be a good opportunity. And my question is, as a dean, what would you do to help us get more of these? What kind of support?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:46

The college can provide to faculty so that you can get more of these big funds. Yeah.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:52

So, it's the… is this thing that I'm saying here?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:30:55

So, um, the proposal development support. I'm sure you have things in place, and from what I heard you do. You have people to help you with the budgets and proportion. But you also need people with a PhD level to help with proposal.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:31:11

writing, and to get the different partners together. These are large airflow grants. They are not business as usual. I know many of you have experience with it, but this can make all the difference about making this tight deadlines or not. Also, bringing forward, knowing the opportunities that are available.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:31:28

The landscape is changing so fast that sometimes people cannot keep up with what is out there, and sometimes their opportunities are hidden behind, um, for example, the AI Forge I mentioned. Unless you are a member of that forum, you don't know what the opportunities are out.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:31:43

And this is outsourced through a third-party company called Riverside Research. It's not through Fastlane, it's not through… so there is a… there should be support to let you know about opportunities, to help you catch up with these timelines.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:31:59

To invest in infrastructure that may be an asset going forward. For example, you may have that's discipline specific, but let's say you may need to have some local GPU cluster to participate in a larger effort.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:32:15

That infrastructure should be… it's an investment for future grants.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:32:21

And of course, communications to publicize, uh, to publicize your successes.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:32:29

But it is a necessity. It's not just a preference because that's how the grants are structured now. So it has to be an investment in that direction.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:32:42

And I would say infrastructure also may vary per field.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:32:48

test beds or research staff support to maintain data sets or run labs that themselves form infrastructure for future… for future submissions.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:05

Questions?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:14

Hi, Christian Shelton, computer science.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:19

You mentioned earlier sort of this institute that had to get

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:25

moved. Are you outside of.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:26

outside of Uci in this case, right after a year, I can't remember which the program was AI. It wasn't AI forge. It was something else. Yes, XLabs. Xlabs. Thank you. What is your experience, or what are your thoughts on these sort of not quite in, not quite out.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:43

research opportunities, and how to forge them in the UC system that has its own set of.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:48

rules about those sorts of things.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:52

Yeah. Um.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:33:54

So

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:34:09

the XLabs are very interesting, because they have opportunities for all engineering. And the amount of money is one third of the budget, so it's really worth figuring out. Their intent is to move the research outside the university.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:34:11

The universities are allowed to apply SPIs for the first 9 months of the year, but then after that, they need to transition the research to an outside entity.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:34:21

So, uh, and the researchers need to join that entity. So that can be thought in a few ways. It can be thought as the faculty taking a leap of options, which or the postdoc organizations taking a leap of action, which starts to look like commercialization.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:34:37

Another way is to partner with an outside nonprofit, and that's what we did, what I did to help these teams move forward. We partnered with a local non-profit, which was a donor of the school, but also had this entity that was relevant to the subject matter.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:34:55

Um, and we applied with them. So we don't have a transition after, uh, with MS API, so we didn't have to transition. The faculty at, uh, but just some of the researchers. And then, uh, university takes can get a subcontract. I think these are all quick fixes in the short run.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:35:13

That I was willing to engage in to participate, but I think in the longer run, we need more, uh, more structure in place. I believe, uh, so that Barbara has been thinking about how to go more systematically about it, how to create a structure that is a non-profit outside the university, but still university-friendly, like the…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:35:32

Jiti and I may be in Georgia Tech, that can be the vehicle for launching different X-Labs going forward. So, um, I don't think there's a perfect answer yet.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:35:42

There's this short-term solutions and more generally, if that type of initiative is going to stay, which it may.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:35:50

We need to figure out the more permanent structure of who are these outside entities that partner with a university to continue this research, even if we serve as subcontractors.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:10

Hi, Nan Peng Yu from electrical and computer engineering department. So it's wonderful to

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:25

see that you've taken concrete steps and laid out

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:25

a vision to improve ranking for electrical and computer engineering, electrical engineering, computer science at UC Irvine.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:26

Um, so what do you see as the potential for PCOE after, you know, your previous interaction with the faculty, as far as.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:35

your two days of experience meeting all the chairs, center directors, and faculty, do you have sort of a vision for the college where it's going to go in the next 5 to 10 years? You're talking

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:49

in terms of ranking or in terms of direction?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:51

directions, ranking, and impact.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:36:57

Yes to everything. All right. Okay. Okay, since you started, since you started the question with ranking, let me start with that. I actually do think this is a low-hanging fruit in the BCOE. I do think that this, uh.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:37:15

There is a gap between the… what the Rankins reflect and the reality of the quality of the work here, and whoever the next dean is, that is a very low-hanging fruit. They should go for it. Um, the department-level ranking is, um, reputational-based completely, so it can be done with the things that I mentioned.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:37:32

And I do think it will pay off. The school-level rankings is a more complicated formula. It has a reputational piece across the deans, a reputational piece across employers, it has a quantitative piece, which there is dollars. It has other quantitative things, like the faculty to student-to-faculty ratio and citations. Each one of those.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:37:52

If left unoptimized, it's a missed opportunity. I think even in those… for example, the reputational piece can be handled similarly. The industry piece, you can follow up with the people that you recommend, and make sure they submit the recommendations.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:38:09

Where is this funding? How do you report it? If you do nothing, the way overhead flows, it may be usually underreported. The citations. My understanding is the citations piece is quite good in UCR. It takes some effort to make sure that the libraries.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:38:27

take certain steps for that to be discovered. So, each one of the species can be optimized. So I do think there's a low-hanging fruit to have a…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:38:36

To bridge that gap, which can have a secondary effect on other things, like attracting students or attracting partnerships.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:38:43

But this is more… I mean, it's quite obvious to me, so I know it's one of the attractions, and it's worth going after. The second piece of the… of your question was the…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:38:56

Where should the school go in general? Okay, that's a big question, and it would be, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:39:01

And as I said repeatedly throughout my visit, and I'm really not trying to dodge the question, this is a question that should be answered collectively through strategic planning. You cannot do everything in with limited resources and people. We need to all agree what are the core competencies of the college.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:39:18

And then double down on them, and even evolve them to adjust to the new era. So that I will not answer immediately. But I did, I knew already some strengths.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:39:32

Um, but I learned more through my visit.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:39:44

So you have strength in AI, in robotics, in an environment, in potential in manufacturing, in materials, and opportunities to grow. So these are all strengths that need to be leveraged.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:00

But it has to be in a principal way. It will be premature of me to call it on Earth.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:07

Seminal talk. And it's also not because it's also because the college needs to engage in order to deliver afterwards. And agree on why we put resources behind these initiatives.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:21

When we do.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:35

Associate of BCOE for Research and Graduate Education.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:40

Um,

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:42

so I'm glad you stopped at this slide, actually.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:43

So

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:52

selling the value of higher

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:52

education. I want to

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:52

ask about that. So we're doing something right, or we have the resources to do

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:52

things right for undergrad.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:53

As you're saying, the number one in social mobility, and there's a lot of things that we're doing right.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:40:58

How do we sell, especially in this environment, the value of even higher education, graduate school?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:41:05

especially to domestic students, because, as you also very well, you know, indicated their domestic student pipelines.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:41:14

That seems to be our hope. So how do we do that?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:41:21

I mean, graduate students are the heart of R1. That's what… why we're in R1 and not in just the teaching institution.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:41:33

I don't think we need to sell it to students. I think the interest is there. We need to…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:41:39

To remove the barriers for that to materialize. The international students still need to come here. They don't need to sell it to them, it just has it has become difficult for them to come. And the domestic students that are qualified, they're still interested. We may not have the funds to support them.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:41:55

The PhD numbers, at least where I stand from there, they are not decreasing. The, um, applications are decreasing internationally, the faculty are more cautious and make less offer, but the yield is higher, so the RPCD numbers are not significantly lower. I don't know if that's correct for BCOE, is it?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:42:12

I may be off here, but in general, the trend is not that students do not want to do PhD.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:42:24

Yeah, but these are two different questions. So do we convince students to do PhD? I don't think we need to do convincing there. We just need ways to support the PhD program. And then you have already pipelines. You have your BS plus MS pipeline that recruits, right? You have your…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:42:41

partnership with CSUs. Uh, we'll need to lean on these domestic pipelines for some time, and maybe combine it with funding models with industry to upskill their.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:42:58

their workforce. So it's not a matter of… I don't think it's a matter of selling the value of graduate education. This being said, we are competing with industry these days on faculty. We have many faculty that live and join industry for higher salaries and where the action and computational resources are.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:43:14

And for talent. I do believe, and I think people in this room will agree in the value of higher education. If we empty the pipeline of talent, that will have a catastrophic effect on future.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:43:30

leadership of the US in high tech and economic development. So it is a short-term crisis, but in the long run, it is here to stay.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:43:48

Let me go to the last slide, because otherwise I distract you.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:43:57

from computer science.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:02

Being at UCI, you faced some of the problems we

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:08

have here.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:09

For example, you know, there are many other uses

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:13

around us that are actually very good.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:16

So what? How did you manage this? Let's say, to be able to attract students that they didn't go to UCLA, they came to Uci, or they didn't go to San Diego.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:27

They came to UCI are things that you can use from there, here, as well, right? Because this is…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:33

A problem we have here also. There are so many good universities around us, and it's difficult sometimes to compete.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:43

I mean, that's everybody has this problem. It's all relative. And, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:44:52

At the PhD level, the advisor has a major role to play. So that's why the yields are still high, because it's a… you recruit people for your group. So mobilizing the faculty and their own pipelines from their home institution, so on, works.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:45:08

Um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:45:09

Before the unionization, I had put a lot of effort to put multi-year funding guarantees in place because I did the homework and most of the UCs were doing multi-year funding guarantees. So as an applicant, when you see I will have a four-year guarantee from one place and not from the other, while the other place is doing it in practice, just out of concern and doesn't advertise it. It puts us in the advantage.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:45:30

I can no longer advocate for that now under the current landscape, but that was actually one tool.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:45:38

Communication is spread in the world. Like, once you have created good pipelines on, uh, uh, to good universities, let's say in Europe, in Asia, like, where students have come through and had… they recruit, uh, you have the pipeline and you recruit more.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:45:51

So, in the PhD program, I'm actually optimistic, uh, because it's faculty-driven, it's a community you have built. Undergraduate, it's a different beast.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:46:03

Um, and I don't understand well enough your constraints yet to have an opinion. But I am assuming that, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:46:12

Outreach from high schools, transfer from community colleges, all these things. These are people I like to stay locally, so that we should be able to create good pipelines and maintain, um.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:46:23

Maintain numbers.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:46:33

In combination with all the efforts for spreading the word about the good work of the dining side, which translates eventually to ranking. So communication piece is not just, it is essential.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:46:46

for everything we do.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:46:57

Alice from computer science. Sorry, I had another meeting. I came late. Maybe some of these things may have

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:13

already been

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:13

covered, but I would also like to know what would be two or three things that you can see in our campus that will get you excited to join us.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:17

Well, I'm already excited, otherwise I wouldn't have applied, and I wouldn't have put myself through today. I know some about your, um, your, um, um.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:28

College for the last 20 years, and I… it's not the secret, Michael, you were the PI in the first grant I ever got, so I learned a lot about grant writing from you. I… I know and appreciate the quality of the faculty and students that come out of your college.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:43

I learned a lot during my visit from the… about activities in the rest of the college that also are an asset.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:52

Um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:53

I don't know everything yet. There's much more to learn.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:47:58

The main thing I'm looking for is for an attitude and enthusiasm of the faculty to go places and do bigger things. So I'm not applying for these jobs just because I want to manage processes. I want to achieve something, so I want to see the mood and the, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:48:17

culture for doing that. That's the main thing. And difficulties and resource constraints exist everywhere, and it's all relative. The grass is always green on the other side. I do think it's a good time to to be in engineering.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:48:33

And to believe in your mission and go after bigger things.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:48:46

Salmanase from ECE. Thank you for nice

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:01

presentation and all the questions and answers on the point of enthusiasm, maybe

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:01
related. Do we have any specific direction or areas that you think we can expand in, or.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:02
UC as the.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:05
as a new frontier for engineering.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:07
You

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:09
mean in topics? Sure.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:10
What's

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:13
that?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:13
Yeah.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:14
No,

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:29

I mean, like, excitement. What's exciting for engineering and moving forward? Yeah.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:29

So again, I can ask you. Yeah. This has to come through a collective process like it will be it will be.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:31

Not that I think for the dean to come in and say, this is what you work on, because you cannot tell faculty what to do. Faculty are not managed. They lead the evolution of their fields, right?

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:49:44

Okay, so AI is an obvious one, and it's a cross-cutting. It's not even a field on its own, and it needs to be integrated across fields. The impact of engineering to environment may not be as popular in these days.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:01

In the funding landscape, but this is a problem that is here to stay. So the strength you have there is important. Um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:12

Um, partnership with medicine is a new frontier. Engineering is more and more getting involved. You have a small but understand… well-positioned bioengineering department in the school. So, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:28

These are some obvious things in engineering and health engineering and environment, engineering and society, as it affects the online world through AI and other means.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:39

You have strength in security, which is one way to affect the online.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:45

World.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:46

But again, this has to come through a strategic process.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:50:51

It cannot be a top-down thing. It has a whole college needs to buy into it, and the directions need to be agreed upon. Some can be in-depth, some can be cross-cutting. It is not the right thing for me to give you a unique answer now.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:51:12

In terms of processes, other than content, I think Riverside is well positioned to be part of partnerships across UC.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:51:23

And across the state. Many of the opportunities that I see coming are cross-QC and cross-state, and it would have an advantage as a part of our collaboration.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:51:38

I've been in many many calls for proposals where we would like Riverside to be a part of it. So I think that's an asset.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:51:45

And more and more of these efforts are around hubs and around statewide regional and statewide initiatives.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:51:55

One of them is about, um…

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:52:00

I mentioned one, I went quickly through that. I mentioned one NSF opportunity called AI Hubs, which is about building AI infrastructure in regions and across the state.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:52:14

So Riverside has several operational advantages if they… if we decide to participate in this. And it's something that we should consider. It's a growth opportunity as well.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:52:29

Other questions

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:52:45

All right. All right. Well, I want to thank Dr. Marco for her presentation and for everyone's questions.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:52:57

final thoughts for this group.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:52:59

So thank you so much for engaging and for considering me for the position. I enjoyed learning more about the college and the campus.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:53:06

And I'm excited about the future of engineering in general and your college in particular. I think you are well positioned, and thank you for engaging.

[Dr. Athina Markopoulou] 14:53:21

Thank you everyone for your time. As a reminder, you can provide your feedback via the candidate feedback survey found on the Executive searches site. Thanks.