UC Transformation Project Development Committee
Meeting Minutes – 7/22/2011

In attendance: Spencer Moore, Mei Chang **(UH FP&C)**; Keith Kowalka, Micah Kenfield, Lawrence Daniel, Cheryl Grew-Gillen **(University Centers)**; Jared Gogets, Andrew Michael **(The New UC)**; Mike Harding, Craig Premjee **(SGA)**; Rich Bamburak, Paul Knell **(WTW)**; Marie Hoke, John Smith, Jeff Chittenden **(WHR)**; Guy Cooke **(Tellepsen)**

The meeting began with a discussion and history of the University Center Transformation Project. Key points of this conversation were:

- In early 2008 the University Center did a master plan for what a transformed University Center could be.
    - Plan ultimately led to four options being offered to the student body via a survey sent out in October 2008
        - Option A was a base renovation of only the MEP/HVAC systems (total project cost (TPC): $40 million)
        - Option B was everything in option A, plus light refinishing of existing spaces and enclosure of the UC Arbor (TPC: $71 million)
        - Option C was a *transformation* of the existing UC, moving 55% of existing spaces around (including placing student organizations on the second floor of the UC) as well as renovating all MEP/HVAC systems (TPC: $100 million)
        - Option D was the highest cost option, providing everything in C plus an addition with a second ballroom, the bookstore, and a theater (TPC: $120+ million)
    - Option C both had the highest level of support at 71% and became the option sent to a student referendum
    - A student referendum to increase the UC Fee to $160 ($125 increase over current fee) was set before the student body, and students overwhelmingly supported it, 77% in favor.
- The next year, in fall 2009, a meeting with Dr. Carlucci (VP/VC Administration and Finance) led to two key shifts in the UC Transformation Project
    - The decision was made to create at least one addition to the University Center to move high-cost infrastructure repairs out of the building to mitigate risk and reduce total project cost
    - As a result of this move, as well as dips in the market, the UC Fee could be raised in two traunches of $50 fee increases, capping the UC Fee at only $135 instead of the original $160
- Ultimately, after Board of Regents approvals, the total project cost will not exceed $80 million.

The next topic of conversation was the nature of the student organization space in the transformed University Center.

- As UH moves toward a residential campus, having organizations in a first floor location is necessary to become an anchor of student life.
- A key priority for this space is enhancing the informal interactions between students. By creating common shared space and fewer "siloed" offices, student organizations will ideally interact better with each other and with the student body.
- This space will also ideally have Cougar Card access afterhours so authorized students can enter and leave the building at any time their organization needs access.
- Lastly, this space needs to have a strong connection to the UC Underground to fit in better as a part of the UC Complex.

The group discussed ways to make the University Center as a whole a more attractive "destination", first running through current issues:

- Food service is currently the primary draw to the building
- The current layout of the arbor almost encourages students to do nothing but cut through it on their way to class
- There is a current lack of attractive lounge space in the building
- The exterior of the building looks "like a bomb shelter".

The UC Satellite, though smaller, better captures an active, high-energy environment for the student body. Some ways to make the UC more of a destination could be:

- Adding more of a homey/warm feel to some spaces
- More work areas / outlet-intense lounge spaces for students to study between classes
- Adding UH-centric design components, through art, architecture, finishes, and fixtures (like the double-Ts embedded in the floor at Texas Tech's union, or the campus history wall at IUPUI) that make it clear this building is UH-centric

The following points were discussed regarding dining in the transformed UC:

- A "Food Court" feel for dining in the University Center is preferred to cafeteria-style like the RFOC or Fresh Food Company
- Dining in the building can still remain centralized in one "corridor" (like it primarily is now) instead of being decentralized without negatively impacting the building's sense of community (much like the Texas Tech model)
- One or two late evening options is a high priority from the student perspective
- Seating for dining should occur throughout the building; care should be taken to avoid a "sea of tables" effect
- In addition to supporting in-house catering in the UC East Addition, there should be more "catering kitchen" space for outside groups to utilize when hosting events in the UC.

Other discussion points at this meeting:

- A 400-seat theater is a high priority addition to the UC since currently there are really no meeting spaces sized between the Cougar Den (capacity 200) and Houston Room (capacity 800-1200); a theater would also accommodate performances like concerts and step shows readily
- A second ballroom would also help alleviate the current space concern, and is a high-priority add-alternate (though less important than updating the exterior skin of the UC)
- The green space on the southern side of the UC could be converted into entrances if needed

Next steps for the project include validating current program budget, beginning focus groups in the fall semester after a concept is developed, and sending a survey to the student body. Meeting was adjourned with the next meeting date being set for Wednesday, August 10th.