

Emeritus & Retired Faculty & Staff Association

To: President Richard Carvajal

Fr: Marshelle Thobaben, Professor Emerita, President of Humboldt-ERFSA

Re: Humboldt-ERFSA Executive Committee's Recommended Recruitment and Retention Strategies: Summary of Feedback

Date: August 11, 2026, Meeting

Recruitment Strategies

Clarify Recruitment Goals

A recurring question is whether the university's primary objective is simply to increase overall enrollment or to strategically recruit students into specific academic programs. Because different programs attract different student populations, they may require distinct recruitment strategies. Establishing and communicating clear recruitment priorities would help guide campus-wide efforts.

Benchmark Successful CSU Campuses

Suggestions including examining the practices of CSU campuses that have experienced stronger enrollment success, such as San José State, Cal State East Bay, and Chico State. Understanding what these campuses are doing differently—and adapting successful strategies where appropriate—could strengthen Cal Poly Humboldt's recruitment efforts.

Emphasize Humboldt's Distinctive Strengths

Other suggestions emphasized that recruitment should focus on what makes Cal Poly Humboldt unique among CSU campuses. Suggested areas of emphasis include:

- Nationally recognized and specialized academic programs.
- Small class sizes and personalized instruction.
- Opportunities for undergraduate research and close faculty mentorship.
- Academic programs and courses unavailable at other CSU campuses.
- Access to the redwoods, outdoor recreation, and hands-on learning.
- A strong sense of community and student-faculty/staff relationships.

Develop a comparison chart highlighting these distinctive features alongside those of other CSU campuses to better communicate Humboldt's competitive advantages.

Improve Marketing and Public Perception

Concern was expressed that negative publicity has affected and influenced the perceptions of prospective students and their families. Frequently mentioned issues included:

- The lasting impact of the David Josiah Lawson tragedy.

- Student protests.
- Accessibility-related litigation.
- Reports of students experiencing housing insecurity /refusing to allow students to sleep in their car/van on campus two weeks before finals.
- Public safety concerns.
- Closure of KHSU & football program.
- Limited availability of student employment.
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining faculty due to low lecturer salaries and limited tenure-track opportunities.

Suggestion is that the university should proactively highlight positive developments while addressing concerns transparently to improve public confidence.

Present an Honest Picture of Campus Life

Helping prospective students understand Humboldt's distinctive environment before they commit. While the campus offers exceptional natural beauty, close faculty relationships, and a supportive community, prospective students should also be aware of factors such as:

- Its rural location and geographic isolation.
- A cool, rainy climate.
- Limited healthcare, transportation, retail, housing, and nightlife options.
- Extensive walking across hilly campus terrain.

Setting realistic expectations may improve student fit and long-term retention.

Retention Strategies

Strengthen Student Support Services

The most frequently cited retention concern was the need for additional staffing in student support offices, particularly Financial Aid. Respondents noted that:

- Financial Aid staff are highly dedicated but significantly understaffed; vacant positions often remain unfilled.
- Delays in financial aid and scholarship processing can discourage both prospective and continuing students.

Increasing staffing in these high-demand offices was identified as a top priority.

Continue Investing in Student Success Programs and the *Frontline Staff* Who Deliver Them

Feedback praised campus efforts to support students through programs such as:

- Supplemental Instruction.
- Learning Center.
- Student Life.
- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- Cultural Centers.
- Disability Resource Center.

These programs play an essential role in student persistence and should continue to receive institutional support and adequate staffing.

Support Campus-Wide Community Building

Emphasized that retention depends on creating an inclusive campus culture where students feel

connected, welcomed and supported. Programs such as Campus/Community Dialogue on Race and Supplemental Instruction were highlighted as valuable activities that should receive stable institutional funding.

Expand Academic Opportunities

Encourage students to pursue additional minors or complementary academic pathways that enhance career preparation while potentially increasing enrollment in existing programs.

Student Experience

The university is not the right fit for every student because of its rural location, climate, and limited local amenities. However, many of Humboldt's defining strengths, including:

- Meaningful relationships with professors and staff.
- Small classes and individualized learning.
- Exceptional opportunities in environmental and natural resource fields.
- Outdoor recreation, including surfing, hiking, and the redwoods.
- Strong community atmosphere and lasting friendships.

Key Themes

Across the responses, several consistent themes emerged:

- Clearly define recruitment priorities and tailor strategies to the needs of individual academic programs.
- Promote Cal Poly Humboldt's unique educational experience and competitive advantages.
- Learn from successful recruitment practices at other CSU campuses.
- Strengthening marketing efforts while proactively addressing negative public perceptions.
- Invest in student support services, particularly Financial Aid, Learning Center/Supplemental Instruction.
- Continue strengthening housing, financial aid, and student success initiatives.
- Foster an inclusive, supportive campus community that helps students thrive.
- Set realistic expectations about campus life so students who enroll are more likely to succeed and remain at the university.