

## **UC Merced**

### **AIARU: Panel 2 - Organization and Structure of the Modern Research University**

#### **Title**

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**Academic Innovation and the American Research University  
Symposium**

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**Panel #2: Organization and Structure of the Modern Research  
University**

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**UC MERCED VICE  
CHANCELLOR FOR  
RESEARCH AND  
DEAN OF THE  
GRADUATE  
DIVISION,  
SAM TRAINA, PH.D.**

Very brief, I realize I'm between you and lunch, and that's not a good place to be. Let me just start by saying that coming to Merced has been a very interesting experience for me. I came from a very, very large--one of the largest probably most monolithic public universities in the country that spanned every possible discipline one could imagine. In many ways, it's like a combination of a UC [University of California] and a CSU [California State University] campus. Heavily silo-ed, I believe that there are 29 different colleges at that institution. And people always ask me--my work has always been very interdisciplinary--and people have always asked me, you know, how did you do what you did?

And I said, I just do what I wanted to do. I didn't, I didn't ask permission and I rarely had to ask forgiveness but I asked forgiveness when it was needed. And when I came to Merced, the concept of a new place with a clean slate and all this great potential interdisciplinary was, was quite intriguing, and I'm not a social scientist so...but I am a scientist and I did watch the experiment happen. And I observed that we love to put ourselves in

boxes. It's human nature. We like to be in boxes. And I don't think it matters what we call the boxes except for the sake of providing legitimacy and marketing. I do clearly see the value in that. But we are not comfortable if we're not in boxes.

So then what makes a great university and what is the role of structure? I do believe that what makes a great university is the faculty. And I always fall back to the old adage that a university, particularly a research university, is best described as a group of loosely confederated independent contractors that are out for their own personal best interests. And that they share a common vision, but they're out to maximize what they're doing as researchers and as individuals.

And that the best thing that you can do to let them do something great, is get out of their way and let them do what they need to do. So they partner with people in the box they're in. They partner with the next box over. They partner with another university whether it's in a state, in a college, excuse me, the state, the country, or the world.

We all do that. I think most of my colleagues here have collaborators across the whole academic spectrum of institutions. Sometimes it's in exactly the same discipline. Sometimes it's in different disciplines.

I think the key is to not put barriers up, as Jeff [Wright] said. I think minimizing restraints on what faculty can do is what makes an institution great. There are resource challenges, but one can, one can make virtually any structural model work if one has the desire to see it succeed. So, again, I've come back--we are in theory all very intelligent people. We find answers to problems. We just have to get out of each others' ways and let ourselves do it. And then it tends to work. So I realize that's kind of, maybe a superfluous answer, but it's what I've

always done. And at least for me, it's worked out pretty well. So let's stay flexible! That's the bottom line.

**CONKLIN**

Thank you, Sam. [*applause*]