ATLAS Response to the "draft final Academic Futures report"

The draft Academic Futures report ("Draft Report") released September 4, 2018 contains references to, and suggestions about, the ATLAS Institute. ATLAS faculty were not consulted prior to the release of draft report, and we therefore appreciate the opportunity to respond prior to the publication of the final report. This letter has the support of (the undersigned), who believe the Draft Report reflects an incomplete understanding of the history of ATLAS, its current growth trajectory, and its contributions to students and faculty of the Boulder campus.

The Draft Report states, "... the committee recommends that the provost establish an ATLAS Education Council, comprised of *[sic]* ATLAS leadership, as well as representatives from CMCI, A&S, Music and CEAS, that will be charged with the governance of the ATLAS certificate and degree programs" (p.51). To our knowledge, it would be unprecedented—except for the case of a unit in receivership—for a campus-wide committee to oversee an academic program delivered by a College (in our case, CEAS). If such an approach is to be applied to ATLAS, why not also English, Physics, or Advertising? This recommendation seems particularly unwarranted given the ATLAS/TAM history outlined below, and the efforts of the Provost and Deans to improve the campus landscape in related fields.

History
ATLAS was founded in 1997 and established as an Institute in 2003. It introduced academic programs, beginning with a certificate in Technology, Arts and Media (TAM) in 1999, a PhD in Technology, Media and Society in 2006, a TAM minor in 2010, a professional masters program in 2010, and a TAM major in 2015. Formerly under the aegis of the Provost and subsequently the Graduate School, the Provost moved all ATLAS academic programs under the College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS) in 2013. Although Engineering now administers these programs, ATLAS retains a campus-wide reach in a variety of ways, including our TAM minor and certificate, the Center for Media Arts & Performance, the Blow Things Up Lab, and our Distinguished Speaker Series.

The TAM program
The TAM major is a Bachelor of Science degree in the College of Engineering and Applied Science and its students take a rigorous mathematics and science core. Launched in fall 2015, the TAM major has been among the fastest growing on the Boulder campus, increasing from 19 students in 2015 to the 240 that are enrolled today. The TAM minor & certificate programs serve students in majors from every College that offers undergraduate degrees. In addition to a core curriculum taught by the ATLAS faculty, TAM students may take electives to satisfy program requirements in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Music, CMCI, the Schools of Education and Law, and the Environmental Design program. At last count (Spring 2018), a total of 955 students from 55 majors enrolled in the TAM minor and certificate programs. These programs are attractive and have enjoyed strong growth—from 600 students five years ago. Recently the minor has become more popular, increasing from 100 to 450 over the past five years. ATLAS has managed growth in the TAM minor and certificate programs without funding from colleges other than CEAS.

The TAM minor and certificate programs are remarkably successful, if student satisfaction and success is any measure. A survey in 2015 of the (then) 1500 graduates of these programs revealed the very high net promoter score of 76 on a scale from -100 to +100 ("would you recommend this program to family and friends"). Typical among respondents' remarks were the following:

"TAM was an amazing cross-functional education program, that was hugely beneficial in my career."
"It literally changed my life. Being exposed to programming (without being a CS major) in college in this way led me (in a roundabout way) to being a software developer. Without these basic skills and exposure I probably wouldn't have even known I had interest in this field."
"I love it, it's the only reason I considered graduate school. It takes technical fields that are classically boring curriculum but makes it creative and expressive."
"TAM is a fantastic supplement to any degree. It teaches people how to take data, storytelling and ideas and express them in new ways, utilizing art and technology. "
"Hands down the best classes and experience of my time at CU."

ATLAS Today and Tomorrow
ATLAS will not stand still. In its earliest days ATLAS offered the first classes on web design, mobile apps, and computer music. Today ATLAS offers classes on physical computing, game design and development, and the chemistry of color. We continue to serve students from across the CU Boulder campus. We've added to our team of outstanding instructors an equally stellar group of tenure-track faculty members, with students from all levels participating in the research and creative work of all

our faculty members. ATLAS values our Faculty Advisory Board, which provides input on ATLAS directions and has representation from each college and school on campus.

In general, ATLAS enjoys the collaborative, supportive atmosphere of the Boulder campus. We are thrilled to work with colleagues in disciplines as diverse as Education, Law, Music, Art & Art History, Theater & Dance, Information Science, Engineering and Critical Media Practices to name just a few. These collaborations have yielded exciting opportunities in the form of sponsored research, collaborative teaching approaches, and student projects. We prefer to focus on these positive experiences as examples of a rising tide that raises all boats, rather than squabbling with our campus neighbors.

Arts Media and Technology Inventory
After the launch of CMCI, we noticed a number of new courses listed on CMCI's web site that were similar to courses that had long been taught in the ATLAS TAM program (for example designing mobile apps, fundamentals of digital media, animation). After these CMCI courses were created, CMCI began to express concern about duplicative offerings on campus. In Spring 2018, with support from the Deans of CMCI, CEAS, A&S, and Music, the Provost commissioned a report containing the results of an exploration and inventory regarding faculty, programs, and initiatives at the intersection of the arts, media, and technology at the University of Colorado Boulder. In addition to the inventory, this report (due to the Provost in Fall 2018) will give an overview of the development of this inventory project, a synopsis of campus-wide conversations including current challenges, and recommendations for moving forward. We value our relationships with many members of the CMCI faculty and look forward to additional collaboration among units.

Conclusion
The recommendation regarding ATLAS in the draft Academic Futures report is a gross overreach of the Committee's charter and appears to be misinformed by lack of cross-campus representation on the Committee itself. A recently completed (ARPAC) External Review concluded that ATLAS has been strongly successful. In addition, the campus is presently moving forward with an Arts, Media, and Technology Inventory process. We ask that the final report include only the following text regarding ATLAS:

> One powerful way in which ATLAS contributes to campus as a whole is through the development of innovative research and teaching programs that transcend existing disciplinary and programmatic boundaries. The Academic Futures Committee recommends that the Provost move to affirm ATLAS as an asset on campus and support its evolution. ATLAS promotes risk-taking, converging existing disciplines and helping to create new disciplines.

Respectfully,

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