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MICHAEL DRAKE, PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Re: Academic Council Response to Calls for Universal Hybrid Instruction

Dear President Drake:

At its February 2022 meeting, the Academic Council discussed the recent call from UCLA students, led by the Disabled Students Union (DSU), to mandate universal and permanent dual modality (sometimes referred to as hybrid) instruction, in which faculty teach students in the classroom and online simultaneously or recorded for asynchronous viewing.

The Council agreed that a systemwide response to these calls would be appropriate given that similar demands or requests are likely to emerge on other campuses, and that student-led efforts to expand instructional modalities as the University standard for all courses affects all campuses. These calls are of immense importance to faculty as they affect faculty academic freedom, expertise, prerogative, effort, ability, resources, and autonomy. They propose a fundamental transformation of instruction on our campuses, at a time when we are and should be considering the long-term implications of the pandemic for the future of instruction.

First, we understand that students with disabilities face serious challenges. Faculty are open to dialogue with students and campus administrators on how to better accommodate the needs of disabled students, to work more effectively with campus disability offices, to advocate for better instructional support and disability services, and to encourage and disseminate best practices in teaching that support disabled student learning.

At the same time, the Council is aware that many student requests for remote learning accommodation are likely related more to a desire for greater choice of learning engagement or to pressing issues such as housing availability and costs and concerns about health and safety than to a disability. While it is understandable that students may want the flexibility of remote instruction, they have not shown how it will benefit their learning. Indeed, data are beginning to show, and many UC faculty report, that remote instruction is not a particularly effective pedagogical modality for many of the key pedagogical outcomes that faculty build their courses to achieve. Many faculty who taught remotely during the pandemic testify that learning outcomes were largely much worse than with in-person instruction. While some of this might be attributed to the effects of a pandemic and all the upheaval it has caused, it is still the case that

emergency remote instruction and planned-for online instruction share many common properties, and that teaching *well* in dual modalities is far more pedagogically demanding than either one alone.

The current market-oriented discourse around education focuses on students as consumers and faculty as needing to tailor course modality to meet consumer demands. This approach neglects the authority of the faculty as experts in pedagogy and their prerogative as teachers who understand the benefits of in-person instruction. Faculty know that instruction is not simply a transmission of information over a wire, but a matter of interaction and participation. They know that the value of a UC degree derives from the student's experience on a UC campus learning with faculty and other students in classrooms, labs, performance spaces, and other campus research settings. Faculty are committed to their students' success. They define educational quality; and they know how students learn, and learn most effectively.

Many students want more individualized approaches, and they may not be aware how much extra work it is to teach well in dual modality. Faculty who have taught in hybrid mode attest that it is more than double the work of teaching a course in a single modality: the issues are not simply technological but rather involve fundamental course design, assessment, equity across modalities, participation, interactive teaching and learning, and more. Some faculty are open to discussions about moving toward greater accommodation for course recording and teaching modality. However, quality remote instruction is expensive and this cannot happen without a serious commitment of resources from campus administrations. Without additional investment in resources and more faculty hiring to provide this 'individualization' mode of instruction, the University is diverting a faculty hired to conduct research, teach, and provide service to a very time-consuming effort in instruction alone. This is not consistent with the comprehensive needs of an R1 University system.

Council understands that the issue of accessible instruction is broader than student disability and touches all students, and the post-pandemic period can be an opportunity to consider the future of education in a way that helps students as a whole, including disabled students. This takes time and concerted effort well suited to shared governance. It requires data and deliberation. Emergency pandemic response is one thing, but now we have the responsibility to establish principles and planning for the future of instruction. Academic Senate processes are not impediments to such an important effort, but rather are powerful mechanisms to harness faculty knowledge and authority toward shared goals.

The University's approach to the post-pandemic world should also acknowledge the threats to the social contract between students, faculty, and staff, each of whom is proposing largely individualized solutions that could undermine the integrity of UC as we know it. We need to reestablish mutual obligations and commitments to reconstitute the UC as an intellectual community. We hope this letter (and our recommendations to Senate divisions on the mandated recording of classes¹) will help serve as a basis for a dialogue on these issues among faculty, students, and administrators on campuses.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

¹ https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/reports/rh-divisions-recommendations-on-mandated-recording-of-classes.pdf



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Academic Council

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