

November 27, 2018

To: Dylan Rodriguez
Riverside Division Academic Senate

From: Daniel Jeske, Chair
Committee on Faculty Welfare



Re: Provost's Taskforce for Hybrid and Online Education Final Report

The Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC) met on 11/13/2018 to discuss the "Provost's Taskforce for Hybrid and Online Education Final Report." FWC is supportive of the idea of developing online and hybrid courses but has reservations about several practical aspects of the implementation of this initiative. A main concern is that the proposed growth plan might be unrealistically ambitious, but there are also concerns about potential impingement of academic freedom. Detailed comments are as follows:

1. FWC expresses concerns that the proposal to create 250 new online courses over the next five years might be overly ambitious and wonders if the estimated resources (Appendix A) will be sufficient. It was noted that UCR has a history of underestimating the cost of new initiatives, and it was also reported by one committee member that the instructional design team at ASU (one of the comparison Universities) is at least three times larger than the size of the current team at UCR.
2. FWC has concerns that most of the comparison Universities discussed in the report are not of the same caliber as UCR; most are comprehensive teaching universities and only one (UCI) is a research university ranked higher than UCR.
3. FWC is glad that the task force firmly stated that resources for online development are the obligation of the campus and not the faculty. However, FWC is concerned that the proposal underestimates the amount of time and preparation faculty will need to develop, deliver and train (themselves and their TAs) for online courses.
4. FWC is concerned that new faculty (especially untenured) may be naively coerced into developing new online courses as part of departmental effort to comply with the growth plan.

5. FWC emphasizes the need for pedagogical suitability with respect to individual instructors as a key component to deciding what should be offered online.
6. FWC has concerns about how the drive for more online teaching might impact academic freedom. This could arise relative to decision on what courses are mandated to be online and also if certain technologies or formats for online teaching are imposed on faculty. The practical aspects and logistics of online classes may also force instructors to give exams which are adapted to some online grading system as opposed to asking students open-ended questions or asking them to write essays.
7. FWC is glad to see the firm statement from the task force about protecting faculty rights to IP, but is concerned that pursuing the "iOPM" model offered by Noodle Partners or another for-profit company may run counter to that principle. Partnering with a for-profit company to manage online courses raises issues about shared governance, data privacy, academic freedom, quality and sustainability of the effort.
8. FWC underlines the importance of the established senate committee on online education and hopes it will be an effective faculty voice while the online revolution unfolds at UCR. Issues the committee could weigh-in on include a review of best online teaching practices and a review of current software/hardware technologies that could work well for online teaching. FWC notes the composition of the committee should be evaluated to ensure adequate representation from departments with large service courses and that non-senate faculty on the campus with extensive experience with online teaching should also be members of this committee.
9. Concerns about exams in online classes were discussed. Space becomes an issue for classes where students have the option to physically come to the campus. In other cases, online proctoring is costly, intrusive and can be fooled.
10. FWC believes there is a need to protect the faculty involved in online teaching from the potential risk of negative teaching evaluations associated with pedagogical experiments. The training mentioned in the report is certainly helpful, but it is unrealistic to expect it to be some sort of panacea. Besides, such training often results in the faculty trying new approaches they would not even think about trying before, and the outcome can be rather unpredictable.