




May 26, 2020

To: Dylan Rodríguez, Chair  
Riverside Division

From: Randolph C. Head, Chair   
Committee on Courses

Re: Proposal to Extend COVID-19 Remote Instruction at UCR

The Committee on Courses reviewed the proposal to extend COVID-19 remote instruction at UCR at their May 21, 2020 meeting. The Committee recognizes the priority of public health and safety, and understands that key decisions about responses to the COVID-19 situation are exogenous to the University. In consequence, any policy proposed as the University moves forward faces difficult trade-offs and a great deal of uncertainty.

In general, the Committee found that the current proposal, while addressing some important issues, was not sufficiently detailed and lacked clear criteria, timelines, and pathways that would allow the campus to respond in a flexible but still predictable way to the changing exogenous factors involved. Under these circumstances, the Committee recommends that a more detailed proposal be developed, one that addresses various concerns more directly, and that provides clear operational guidance for various possible scenarios in the 2020-2021 academic year.

In addition to this general concern, a number of specific issues were articulated during the Committee's discussion. We understand the current proposal as suggesting that (at least for Fall 2020) a large majority of courses will take place in a remote-only mode, and that the administration anticipates approving primarily graduate courses and possibly some undergraduate courses with less than 30 students for the proposed mixed mode ("online option") that offers in-person teaching for some students while allowing others to participate remotely. However, as conditions change in the Winter and Spring of 2021, the plan should be ready to accommodate further opening, but also re-closing, as the circumstances dictate.

Specific concerns:

1. Committee members expressed some concern about pre-emptively committing to offering all courses with an online option for the entire 2020-21 academic year. Committee members suggest that the administration consider a plan that offers different pathways, especially for Winter and Spring 2021 – in a phased way with clear criteria and timelines, quarter by quarter – for decisions about campus opening, housing accessibility, and teaching choices. Such a plan would position the campus better for

the uncertainty ahead. Further, the Committee recommends that a statement of principle should be added to reflect that the campus will return to in-person teaching, following a predictable timeline, once public health judgments allow this step, to accommodate student housing choices and planning.

2. Many Committee members have heard from students that the campus is important not only for classes, but as a space where students can carry out their academic role more effectively than at home. The libraries in particular offer not only access to resources, but workspace, connectivity, computers, and guidance. For graduate students who are TAs and for undergraduates with financial limitations, the campus also provides high-quality internet access and other resources. The Committee suggests that a comprehensive plan for moving forward should address not only how classes can be offered, but also how campus spaces such as the library, study facilities, and labs will become available when public health guidance supports their opening.

3. The Committee recommends that the proposal be expanded to include a more detailed discussion of how UCR will support students who are dependent on campus housing for various reasons. We recognize that housing has stayed open for students who need it in Spring 2020, much to UCR's credit. For the Fall, and beyond, criteria and timelines for making housing available for students with various needs should be part of a comprehensive staged plan that integrates classes, campus access, and housing, since these are all connected.

4. The Committee recommends that the proposal be expanded to discuss in greater detail the methods that may be employed, as the campus begins to open, to protect students, staff and faculty who have compromised immune systems or are more vulnerable to COVID-19. Such a proposal should include discussion of how social-distancing, sanitation, and other relevant policies will be determined and changed (dependent on public health guidance), and who will be responsible for various elements that may be necessary (e.g., ensuring compliance with mask rules.)

5. The Committee has strong concerns about how 'online-option' courses would work, and some members feel they are entirely unworkable. The Committee recommends careful study by both administration and Senate, which also holds responsibility for instruction and curriculum, before this pathway is chosen as the default for courses in 2020-21 as the campus begins to reopen. If the 'online option' applies only to a small number of graduate courses or lab/field/studio courses, the challenges may be manageable. However, if exogenous conditions allow for an increase in in-person teaching, but the online option is still required for all courses, we anticipate serious challenges in terms of teaching quality, and in terms of student and TA equity.

Teaching with remote methods and teaching in person require profoundly different course designs. Approaches such as the HyFlex model also require major investments in technology, course design, and additional labor for implementation. Any proposal to mandate an 'online-option' must therefore discuss the human and technical resources

that will be available to support this option – particularly at a time of extreme financial stringency.

We also fear that the most economically and socially vulnerable students would be most likely to have to use the ‘online-option’ for courses also offered in person, and that their experience would be significantly inferior. While we recognize that the online option may be effective in a small number of cases, we strongly recommend serious exploration of alternatives to the online option as the opening of campus proceeds.

6. The Committee recommends that the administration expand the proposal to provide clearer policy about how students will manage their in-person and remote instruction. For instance, will students need to state at the time of registration which mode they will use in a given course? Will they be able to change modes, on a one-time basis or day-by-day? The size of classrooms necessary to maintain social distance will depend on the maximum number of students who will potentially attend at least one class in person. Therefore, the Committee requests that the administration address the policies and adjustments that will need to be made to Banner to adjust to instruction and attendance decisions, and provide appropriate stages and mechanisms as part of a more detailed plan.

7. Some Committee members pointed out that remote instruction, especially when not carefully designed and implemented, raises challenges regarding testing and grading integrity. Considerable anecdotal evidence and research suggest that student violations of integrity are more likely during remote teaching. At the same time, many of our best students resent the intrusive surveillance involved in certain proctoring systems. A complete proposal should therefore include a commitment both to provide expertise in assessment design and to support high-quality proctoring resources, all with the goal of ensuring assessment integrity while respecting our students.

8. When faculty members and departments propose “in-person with online-option courses” as the proposal suggests, the Committee feels that the approval pathway for such proposals should include appropriate Senate review. Not only does the Senate have jurisdiction over teaching and curriculum, but the Committee on Courses has specific expertise in reviewing both the formal and substantive elements in course proposals. The current proposal names only deans as approvers; recent discussions have also suggested the EHS and campus counsel might review proposals. However, the proposal makes no mention of Senate oversight over such “in-person with online-option” course proposals – proposals which would normally require Senate Courses Committee review under current Senate Regulations.

The Committee appreciates the chance to provide this detailed feedback, and supports flexible and collaborative discussions to create a detailed and flexible proposal for teaching in 2020 that will offer predictability about options with reasonable timetables in a very difficult environment.