

May 28, 2020

To: Dylan Rodriguez
Riverside Division Academic Senate

From: Abhijit Ghosh, Chair
Committee on Faculty Welfare

Re: [Campus Review] Proposal: Proposal to Extend COVID-19 Remote Instruction at UCR

The Committee of Faculty Welfare (CFW) met remotely on May 22, 2020 and discussed the proposal to extend COVID-19 remote instructions. It recognizes that it is a challenging task, and there is likely no perfect solution. CFW, however, unanimously agree that health of the campus and community should be the first priority while making decisions on campus reopening and instructional continuity. In the same vein, CFW also agrees that these decisions should be guided by relevant current state-of-the-art science, guidelines by the relevant government agencies at different levels, adequate test data, and pedagogy. Below are the remarks of the CFW on the four major aspects of the proposal in question:

1. Teaching one class simultaneously in two formats (in-person and remote)

Teaching a class in both formats (in-person and remote) simultaneously is impractical and problematic. For some classes, especially involving labs, specimens, studio and fieldwork, two formats are inconsistent and provide very different learning experiences resulting in different learning outcomes and requiring different assessment strategies. In other words, two different formats are equivalent to two different classes, and unsustainable as proposed. In addition, teaching a class in two formats simultaneously involves significant increase in workload and time commitment for faculty and teaching assistants. This adds to more stress to already stressful conditions faculty and students face as they currently try to maintain their excellence in research, teaching and service. This proposal puts the majority of the burden of instructional continuity to the faculty. We foresee that it will force faculty to teach their classes remote-only even though it may be pedagogically compromising for many courses.

2. Choice of remote class

The CFW appreciates the fact that faculty and students can choose NOT to be physically present in the classroom during a course in the present proposal. This is especially important for faculty and students with underlying health concerns.

3. Choice of in-person class

This is a critical choice for individuals and community health. A decision on this can only be taken after careful consideration of current scientific findings at that point in time, health guidelines from relevant government agencies at different levels, extent of testing,

availability of treatment/ vaccine, risk assessments, comfort level of instructor etc. An individual faculty, administrator or student may not be well-equipped to make an informed decision on this. For example, what if an instructor and students agree to be physically present in a class inadvertently causing a COVID-19 outbreak. Whose responsibility would that be? Moreover, faculty, especially assistant professors, may feel pressured to teach in-person classes as Department chairs are soliciting and coordinating plans for instructions. We emphasize that this is NOT a support for remote teaching for as long as possible. In fact, the CFW supports resumption of in-person classes as soon as it is safe. We suggest an objective, transparent, and consultative decision-making process based on science, evidence, and evolving health guidelines.

4. Timing

The situation related to COVID-19 is dynamic and rapidly evolving. We do not have enough information to make decisions for the entire next academic year. The CFW understands that some lead time is important to start a quarter, and it is necessary to make a decision for the Fall 2020 soon. But the Winter and Spring 2021 are far enough away that we can wait and watch to make an informed decision as the quarters approach, and still provide campus and students enough time to prepare. This would maximize our chance of giving students the pedagogically highest level of instructions as safely as possible. The CFW recommends a step-by-step approach – making decisions before each quarter as opposed to the entire academic year. This will allow the campus to keep its options open as long as reasonably possible, and gradually move towards normal safely and at our own pace guided by the science. This may also avoid forcing faculty to offer remote versions of all classes for the entire next academic year even when it may not be an ideal option.

Finally, the CFW understands the importance of strong enrollment for the upcoming academic year and classes. But we must find a balance between enrollment numbers, quality of incoming students, quality of instructions, and workload of faculty and teaching assistants. We are proud that our undergraduate student quality has increased over the past years, there is a fear that we will greatly lower the general quality if we reach too deeply into the waitlist pool. In terms of class size, instructors should have the last word with respect to considering any increase in enrollment of remote-only classes.