

July 31, 2020

TO: Dylan Rodriguez, Chair
Academic Senate

FROM: Philip Brisk, Chair
BCOE Executive Committee



RE: Proposed Transition of VPAR Role

Dear Dylan,

On July 23rd, the BCOE Executive Committee reviewed the proposed transition of the VPAR role, as outlined by the Provost's memo dated June 30th 2020. The BCOE Executive Committee felt that the memo did not clearly articulate the rationale for this proposed transition and left important key details out. The BCOE Executive Committee requests that an updated memo be provided with additional information that can provide clarification on several key issues.

Our first concern is that the rationale for the proposed transition is unclear. Section 1 of the memo ("Problem to be Solved") provides historical background about the VPAR position, but does not clearly articulate problems or shortcomings of the present administrative organization. Without going through the section line-by-line, there appear to be three interrelated factors, which I will enumerate, and attempt to address, here:

(1) UCR is the only UC Campus to have a VPAR: this alone is not necessarily a problem. The relevant question is whether the VPAR position, as presently constituted, and in the context of the current administrative structure, is a net positive for UCR. Being different is not necessarily a negative.

(2) Limited interaction between the VPAR and VPAP: According to the memo, the only interaction between the VPAR and the VPAP under the present administrative organization occurs when the VPAP inquires about disciplinary issues when considering faculty candidates for administrative appointments on campus. This is presented as a statement of fact, which is not in dispute. Given the title of Section 1 of the memo, it appears that this is a problem/weakness to be corrected, but that goes unstated and without qualification. The memo could benefit from clarification about how or why this is a problem that needs to be corrected; examples, either real (with appropriate anonymization) or hypothetical of problems that arise from this situation would be helpful. It is also somewhat unclear if this communication protocol is limited by regulation or policy, or if it is simply how the positions have worked in practice.

Borrowing from Figure 1, a big part of the issue appears to be the firewall between the VPAR and VPAP. If that is in fact the case, then it may make sense to focus on policy vis-à-vis the firewall, rather than fundamentally altering the administrative structure. In general, more information here is needed.

(3) The transition of the current VPAR (Daniel Jeske) to the VPAP position: Given the various policies surrounding Administrative Resolution and Academic Personnel, this transition should be handled carefully, and the memo does a good job of outlining the way that the transition will be handled, especially involving in-progress resolution cases. We appreciate the UCR administration's willingness to consult with the Senate and College Executive Committees on that matter; however, this is a one-time transition (future VPAPs may not be transitioning from the VPAR position) and does not constitute a problem that needs to be solved through administrative reorganization; updates of appropriate policies and regulations may be warranted if this unique transition exposes previously unforeseen loopholes or contradictions, but that is a hypothetical situation outside the scope of this particular issue.

Our second concern, which is in many respects the most important issue that we want to raise, is that the reporting structure and administrative organization that would result from the proposed transition is not shown anywhere. To which position will the VPAR report? This is particularly important, as the position to whom the VPAP reports will clearly know what is going on with Administrative Resolution cases; if the VPAR will directly report to the VPAP under the proposed transition, then the firewall will become illusory. One specific concern is that the VPAP may become aware of investigations that occur concurrently with merit and promotion cases; investigations should not impact merit and promotions until they have been resolved. We request clarification on this issue.

Somewhat more generally, the proposal seems likely to lower the firewall between the VPAR and the VPAP. This is not necessarily a good or a bad thing, but the objectives of doing so are unclear, as are anticipated outcomes. For example, if the objective is to improve campus climate, then the memo should clearly state that this is the case. Moreover, how would improvements be measured? Given the importance and sensitivity of the merit and promotion process, the proposed transition could benefit from mechanisms to assess success, with the option to revert to the current administrative organization in the event that unexpected externalities manifest.

Our third and final concern involves workload issues. The problem statement notes that the first two VPARs had 50% appointments, while the current VPAR is a 100% appointment. Given UCR's growth during that period, this change seems reasonable; however, what is proposed here is to reduce the VPAR to a 50% appointment. This decision needs to be based on a sound assessment of the current workload of the VPAR and expected adjustments of the workload due to the proposed reorganization. While it appears that the VPAP may absorb some of this workload, it is unclear if the VPAP has the capacity to do so. We recognize that the VPAR is a challenging position that can be emotionally taxing in many situations, and we think it is important that the appointment percentage reflect the reality of the workload; otherwise, a VPAR with a 50% academic appointment may suffer adverse impact on research and teaching.

To conclude, the BCOE Executive Committee would like clarification on these important issues; we do not feel that we have sufficient information to make a recommendation either for or against the proposed transition at present.

